

# **PRIESTLY** **VOCATIONS**

## **A Reader**

LEARNING BEST PRACTICES

Why are Priestly Vocations booming  
in some American and Australian dioceses?

What is the distinguishing feature of vocations-rich dioceses?

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## Foreword

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In April 2006 the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) at Rosebank Catholic Church in Johannesburg launched its *Priests for Tomorrow* project. Prompted *inter alia* by the increasingly frequent indisposition of the pastor (owing to advancing age and declining health), the PPC appointed a lay-only ‘Working Group’ to examine the causes of the priestly vocations shortage and, if possible, to propose solutions. The aim was to produce a set of proposals to the hierarchy.

In July 2006 the PPC held a meeting in the parish church. Parishioners were invited to hear a presentation on the proposals of the PPC Working Group. About 120 people (of 1500 registered parishioners) attended the meeting (it is assumed all were parishioners). Though no advance notice was given that there would be a vote, the PPC asked those present to vote on the proposals, and, despite outspoken objections to the unannounced vote, all motions endorsing the PPC’s Vocations Committee proposals were carried by a large majority of those present. The PPC chairman also asked the meeting to vote on an *ad hoc* motion in support for women priests, and that, too, was overwhelmingly carried, again despite objections.

The Working Group’s *Priests for Tomorrow* ‘discussion document’ of July 2006 makes four proposals (details are on the parish website at [www.catholic.co.za/parishes/rosebank](http://www.catholic.co.za/parishes/rosebank)); a fifth was mooted and passed at the meeting (though not included in the ‘discussion document’):

1. Support for Traditional Vocations. The document’s first sentence qualifies this as ‘celibate priesthood’, ie in the Working Group’s understanding, the distinctive feature of ‘traditional priesthood’ is celibacy.
2. Optional Celibacy. Drawing from the [marriedpriests.org](http://marriedpriests.org) activist website, this proposal simply says that celibacy should be optional for priests of the Roman Rite. No attempt is made to reconcile this with Proposal 1 above, which it renders redundant (since in a voluntary celibacy regime, no-one would be compelled to marry, one assumes).
3. Ordained Community Leaders. Ordination of *virī probati*, such as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and other ‘community leaders’ (Rosebank Parish has nearly a dozen Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion).
4. Recall of Priests Who Have Left to Marry. Priests who had left the priesthood over the past thirty-or-so years in order to get married should be invited back to active sacerdotal parish ministry.
5. Support for priestesses. After a strong motivation by a professed religious sister, this *ad hoc* proposal in favour of women’s ordinations was voted on and carried by a majority of those present at the July meeting.

The fourth proposal was dropped from the document after discussions with the local ordinary in December 2006. It is not known whether the fifth proposal was raised with the bishop, but it does not appear in the latest version of the document – the meeting chairman ruled that it would not form part of the current discussion document though it would be considered in the future.

That there is a vocations crisis is of course common cause. However, there are different views on the *reasons* for the crisis, and thus also the *proposed solutions* that follow from such an analysis. There are a number of parishioners, the present writer among them, who believe the Working Group did an inadequate job of describing, framing, and analysing the nature of the vocations problem, and hence the committee's proposed solutions are questionable.

Put another way: if we are wrong about the causes of a problem, then how can our proposed solutions be right?

The Rosebank PPC Working Group *ab initio* and implicitly believes that the Latin Rite's celibacy rule is the *main and most important cause* of the vocations crisis, and it therefore proposes its abolition. This is a very conventional view, universally arrived at also by the secular culture without any reference to theological and anthropological categories informed by the long Christian experience in the Spirit.

The Proposals themselves are nothing short of revolutionary, since they overthrow well nigh twenty centuries of practice and a millennium of CIC discipline (not in itself a bad thing, depending on the issue). It is true that Proposal One, taken alone, affirms the traditional celibate priesthood. However, read with the other three proposals, its effect is entirely vitiated (leading one to wonder whether its inclusion is mere tokenism or perhaps even a red herring sop, since one assumes the authors of the document are rational).

But is the celibacy rule really to blame? Is its abolition the solution? There are many who are not convinced that the rule has anything whatsoever to do with the dearth of priestly and religious vocations.

The purpose of this Reader is to present a different analysis, and thus to indicate a different solution, a more truly radical (as in going to the *root*) solution to the vocations crisis. Sadly, the views presented herein are seldom heard, even from pastors. Though of varying quality, every article is worth reading.

You will be astonished and encouraged to learn of an incipient boom in vocations, not in the Third World, but in modern urban dioceses in America, Australia and elsewhere. Read about the direct and recent experiences of pastors, vocations directors and formators, who tell you where vocations are booming, and why. Surely, if we want to foster vocations, we should take a look at what is proven to work. Surely it is prudent to investigate, adapt and adopt proven success formulas? This issue is of vital importance to the Church's future. That is why I urge you to read the articles in this reader – they present a case that is seldom if ever heard, and yet it is worth hearing because it just might be true, because we want to go forward (not backward) to implement the vision of the Council Fathers at Vatican II.

The articles herein are noteworthy and relevant for Rosebank (and other urban First World parishes in SA) precisely because they describe the experience in almost identical cultural and social milieux in the USA and Australia. The bottom line is: in dioceses where pastors are noted for their lack of fidelity to church teaching and tradition, vocations dry up; in dioceses and parishes where pastors are noted for their fidelity to the magisterium, vocations flourish. These are established and verifiable experiences in large modern urban Anglophone dioceses in Australia and America, in the heart of an aggressively secular and materialist culture just like ours. Any 'vocations project', if it is to be effective, must seriously consider the case put by these authors (and many others of similar frame). The successes they describe and champion, mostly from personal experience, make their analyses especially noteworthy.

I offer this *Reader* in fraternal charity and always in obedience to Our Lord Jesus Christ in His Holy Catholic Church.

Arthur Williamson  
July 2007 (update)

## The Life and Death of Religious Life

— by Fr Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R.

It was a truism—universally accepted until the last decades of the twentieth century—that, wherever the Catholic Church was present, there would be representatives of the religious life: communities of vowed men and women living a frugal common life, praying and working together in Christian service, and offering a witness to the kingdom of God. They belonged to congregations that explicitly took on the responsibility of answering the gospel’s call to leave family, lands, and ownership to follow Jesus Christ.

Similar religious communities existed in smaller numbers in the Orthodox churches. Even today, many older people were taught, guided, and cared for by an impressive army of religious sisters, brothers, and priests. They numbered at least three hundred thousand in the United States on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, and their ranks were swelling. From Trappists to Jesuits, from cloistered Carmelites to Sisters of Charity, the religious could be found everywhere, celebrating the liturgy and common prayer, and frequently serving those with personal needs, especially the poor and the sick.

Most of these communities are now in a state of collapse, with the average age of members in the upper seventies, and no recruits in sight. My own experience offers a sad example. In 1951 I entered the Capuchin province of Detroit, which had almost seven hundred friars. The Capuchins were the fourth-largest religious order of men in the Church. They had produced such examples of sanctity in our time as Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, now declared a saint, and the Venerable Solanus Casey, who may soon be beatified. There were almost 150 friars in formation in the Detroit province when I joined. Today the province has fewer than a dozen men in formation.

Against that decline, one has to set the number of new communities that have appeared in recent years—made up of deeply dedicated men and women who are part of what has come to be known as the John Paul II generation. I belong now to a reform movement, founded by eight Capuchins and known as the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. We currently have 115 friars and some twenty-five sisters. Because I was the first servant, or superior, of our community, many people ask me, “What are you doing to thrive in a wasteland?” Occasionally someone inquires, “What can we do to see religious life return?” I have thought much about these questions.

I had been a friar for two decades when I came across some work in psychological anthropology that

made me suspect that religious life was beginning to go in the wrong direction. Serious cracks were already appearing in the structures and attitudes of many religious communities, even the largest and most respected. When I studied the book *The Ritual Process*, by the eminent psychological anthropologist Victor Turner, I was mesmerized by some of the anthropological components of religious life, which seem to have gone unrecognized in the endless discussion on how to make orders more relevant. I discovered, for instance, that religious life is older and wider than Christianity. Buddhist and Hindu forms of this life, with the basic disciplines of poverty, chastity, and obedience, had existed for hundreds of years before the first Christian bands of anchorites and cenobites went into the desert during the early centuries of persecution.

Following the example of such saints as Anthony of Egypt, Paul the Hermit, and Pachomius, an ex-soldier of the Roman legions, men and women took up the pursuit of the vowed life. An important but frequently overlooked variable of that life is a quality known as liminality—the state of being an outsider to the establishment of any society, even one with strong religious characteristics and values.

Liminality derives from the Latin *limen* (which means threshold or edge) and refers in this case to people who live beyond the accepted norms of the establishment. Obviously chastity, poverty, and obedience to a spiritual master or superior take a person out of any establishment where family life and inheritance are the norm. Such people as St. Benedict, St. Francis, and, in our time, Mother Teresa of Calcutta are obvious examples of liminal personalities. In fact, Turner spends much time on the study of liminality in the early days of the Franciscan Order.

Liminal people stand in sharp contrast even to virtuous members of the establishment. This dichotomy is not a bad thing, although there must always be a degree of liminality in any follower of Christ. We see this in the saintly members of royal families: St. Louis IX of France and St. Elizabeth of Hungary, for example, who wore the Franciscan habit beneath their royal finery and served the poor with zeal and joy. Anyone familiar with religious life at the time of its collapse knows that liminality was almost entirely lost—and remains lost, except for the new communities and a few older ones that have remarkably held the line.

If we ask, “What could have gone so wrong and caused such a decline in religious life?” we realize that this is a dull tale extending over a period of more than forty years. Yet it comes as no surprise to anyone who knows church history and understands anthropology. You cannot go against the laws of

human nature reflected in psychological anthropology—even laws such as liminality that apply only to a select few—without disastrous results. The current tampering with family life and marriage is another example of foolish intervention into the laws of anthropology. Such endeavors are like trying to grow figs from thistles.

The collapse of the large religious orders of men and women in the Church can be attributed to a variety of factors that coalesced at the same time. The disaster has been well described by the well-known anthropologist Fr. Gerald Arbuckle, S.M., in two important books: *Strategies for Growth in Religious Life* and *Out of Chaos: Reforming Religious Congregations*. Religious life, Arbuckle argues, was drawn into the same cultural revolution that undermined family life and higher education in the late 1960s. Unfortunately, the Catholic religious, who had been taught not to think for themselves, followed like sheep. Many of the most strident voices, which demanded the removal of the foundations of religious life, departed after eviscerating the life and constitutions of their communities. Those who sincerely attempted to lead a spiritual life found themselves with little effective leadership.

I once heard a well-meaning and well-educated sister of a respected teaching order tearfully observe at a seminar, “We did what we were told to do.” The obvious question “Who told you?” must be asked. Christian religious are called without exception to lead a gospel life and follow the Scriptures and the traditions of the Fathers, the Church, and the saints. These sources, which were always there, were almost completely ignored. Instead, many shaky theories of psychology, most of them now gone over the waterfall of time, were substituted for the gospel and sacred teaching. Alien and awkward things were introduced into the spiritual life, some of them borrowed from totally misunderstood Asian traditions. We have only to look at the offerings of retreat houses run by some religious congregations to discover how silly people intending to be serious can sometimes become.

Along with this came the impact of psychotherapy, which as a result of the discoveries of Sigmund Freud focused almost entirely on undoing what were seen as repressive mechanisms in the personality. Contemporary positive psychology has rejected the general intellectual and emotional bankruptcy of this position. Although some people did get to feel better, they did not necessarily do better or come closer to their eternal goal. As one founder of positive psychology, Aaron Beck, has pointed out, there was an almost complete lack of common sense in psychotherapy from the 1940s to the 1980s.

The necessity of grace for the spiritual life was also ignored. Semipelagianism, or even full-blown pelagianism, practically denying the necessity of grace, was observable on all sides. Thus, for example, the widespread popularity of the therapy and pelagian assumptions of Carl Rogers, one of the creators of client-centered therapy, practically wiped out a large and respected congregation in California in a single summer.

On top of this, the two major underpinnings of Catholic religious life were seriously weakened in their presentation. The first was the credibility of Sacred Scripture. The rules of many religious orders say explicitly that they are founded on the gospel. As a result of skeptical and rationalistic criticism of the New Testament, the scriptural foundation of religious life was undercut. The rule of life of the Franciscan order, for example, is to observe the gospel—but if the popular scholars are telling us that Jesus didn’t do this, didn’t say that, didn’t mean the other thing, what are we to do?

There was also what Pope Benedict XVI has referred to as the “collapse” of liturgical life. The intellectually and spiritually impressive liturgical movement that was growing in the United States after the Second World War—a movement founded on insights cultivated in the Benedictine abbeys—gave way to a misunderstanding of the liturgy as primarily entertainment. The goal was to get everybody involved, but the question remains: Involved in what? In religious communities and parishes across America, liturgical committees were suddenly filled with people who had never studied anything of substance about the Church’s liturgy. Eminent liturgical writers such as Romano Guardini and Louis Bouyer deplored this popular and often well-intentioned debasing of the liturgy.

In addition, a general theological confusion prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s, undisciplined and unrestrained in nature, which deeply penetrated religious communities and seminaries. I am well aware of it because I was thrown out of four seminaries during those years for the offense of being a Catholic, even though I was only teaching pastoral counseling. This period of theological confusion has largely come to an end and is roundly rejected by today’s young candidates for religious life or the priesthood.

Finally, strange as it may seem, the ideas of Marxism, a philosophy that did untold damage to the lives of hundreds of millions of people, suddenly began to appear in religious communities during this era. I spoke to someone a few years ago who had attended the more avant-garde meetings of religious sisters. I asked what the main topic of conversation was. I was flabbergasted when I was told that it was

the teachings of Friedrich Engels. (Poor Engels never thought that the last people to take him seriously would be Catholic nuns who had gone off the rails.)

Religious life will either reform or disappear. There remain, of course, a few stalwart communities that clung to their identity and purpose through the dark times. They are easily identified now because they have novices and postulants, and some of them are thriving.

The more interesting phenomenon is the creation of new communities largely out of the ruins of older ones—more interesting, because it means that an entirely new approach to religious life is not necessary or even desirable. Instead, new communities can be built on the foundations of older ones by taking rejected traditions and bringing them back to life. It also means that a return to the ideals of an order's founder and embracing the charism that had been granted through that founder (rather than dubious late-twentieth-century interpretations) can prove the difference between survival and extinction. One example of a thriving new community that is both original and traditional is Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. Most others, like my own, grow out of the past.

Is there any hope for the older communities that are now in a state of collapse? There are so many of these that a statistical probability suggests that a few will regain their purpose and experience new life. But, so far, there is no obvious example of a community that, having gone into severe decline, later underwent a reform allowing it to regain its vitality. The few thriving older communities never lost their identity. It is wonderful to hope that out of the chaos and debris some voices may be raised that will preserve some of the older communities. My own community experienced considerable resistance when we first attempted to reform within the jurisdiction of the Capuchin Order. There seems to be more openness now to possible reform.

In particular, the new communities must be careful not to make the same mistakes as the older ones. They must teach and encourage people to think for themselves without being disobedient. They must try to discuss and find a consensus within the community concerning what they do. Otherwise there will be a return of the widespread resentment that characterized religious both on the eve of Vatican II and later, when changes were forced on them. There must be an authentic and prayerful return to and respect for the following of the gospel. Finally, the anthropological signs of religious life identified by Turner and Arbuckle must be maintained: Common life, frugality, identifiable uniform dress of a religious nature (a habit), and a common apostolic work shared by all members of the community are

things one must look for. Otherwise, there is no hope of a community's revival.

A surprising and welcome development at the present time is the emergence of a whole wave of young men and women interested in authentic religious life. They provide proof of the ongoing presence of God's grace—as well as the validity of the anthropological theory of liminality. These young people surprise us by their willingness to join even communities beset by obvious theological confusion and little observance of their traditional rule. If they manage to survive for twenty years, the appearance of the sinking communities may change. In some communities there is an absurd phenomenon similar to a theological sandwich: The youngest and the oldest, who are in agreement, are like slices of bread. The age group in the middle reminds us of mayonnaise.

Something in human nature has been calling people to religious life for thousands of years—and gospel teaching and church tradition have aimed this human hunger at a strong form of Christian dedication. We should have learned by the disastrous experience of the twentieth century that we cannot afford the luxury of frivolous attempts at silly spirituality and self-seeking. We cannot continue to be misled by untested and unscientific sociological and psychological theories.

There hardly seems a mistake that religious orders did not make. *Corruptio optimi pessimum*, the old Latin proverb runs: Corruption of the best becomes the worst. We have seen it for forty years. The generation formed since John Paul II became pope is clamoring for something better.

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## The Collapse of Religious and Priestly Vocations

— Rev Paul Marx, OSB

The collapse of priestly and religious vocations in the Western world is truly disastrous. When I was ordained in 1947, when the Catholic and general population of the United States was much smaller than it is today, there were in round numbers 187,000 nuns, 32,000 priests, 12,000 Brothers and 48,000 major seminarians. Today there are 94,022 nuns (one-third of whom are incapacitated), 50,209 priests (with a median age of 59), 6,260 Brothers and between 6,000-7,000 major seminarians! In the years 1966-69, 932 priests were ordained in the U.S.; in 1990-94, only 289 (cf. Schoenher and Young, Full Pews and Empty Altars).

Since 1962 some 23,000 priests and many more nuns in the U.S. have left their commitment to Christ, to the scandal of many. Worldwide more than 111,000 priests have abandoned their vocation. Today I know parents who are reluctant to have their sons aspire to the priesthood for fear of the kind of seminary he might enter, or further, fear as a priest he may leave later, to their embarrassment.

It is interesting to note that the beginning of the collapse of vocations came shortly after the introduction of the Pill in 1960, which some say inaugurated the disastrous sexual revolution. Others say the now discredited Kinsey Report of 1948 was the starting-point of the modern sexual upheaval. Today the average American family has about two children, thanks to surgical abortion, abortifacients, contraception and sterilization. Keep in mind many of these children are born in immigrant families. According to the U.S. Census, some 58% of married couples at ages 44-45 have resorted to the barnyard approach to birth control, having neutered themselves. It is safe to say that up to 85% of fertile Catholic couples are involved in sinful birth prevention, mostly by sterilization and abortifacients.

What is the impact of this on young people? I suggest it is enormous. Young people are not stupid; by absolutizing sexual pleasure and by splitting off the procreative from the unitive in the marriage act with the rejection of *Humanae Vitae*, parents have left the impression, magnified by the press and electronic media, that sex is for fun, is for everyone - thus distorting any healthy concept of truly sacrificial, loving, generous, chaste parenthood. And I must add: how many future priests and nuns have abortionists killed?

The great Jesuit youth leader, Father Daniel Lord

once wrote, "More boys become priests and more girls become nuns because they know happy priests and happy nuns than any other reason I know." The Pope echoed this thought when he told the seminarians of Dunwoodie Seminary, "The Church needs joyful priests, capable of bringing true joy to God's people, which is the Good News in all its truth and transforming power." Surely the radical, feminist nuns are a sorry lot and anything but inspiringly happy - and that is many of our Sisters. The too many priests who say they are too tired from the weekend to offer Mass for the parish on Monday or who hide behind telephone answering machines would hardly inspire young lads to happily follow them into the Lord's vineyard.

Then there is the sad problem of the demoralized and discouraged papist priest, orthodox and loyal to the Pope and magisterium, farmed into the hinterlands. Such a discouraged priest would find it hard to encourage vocations. We constantly meet fine young men who know the situation and who have many misgivings about joining a diocese or a religious order because of the chaos in the Catholic Church.

Nor will contracepting, sterilized teachers in "Catholic" schools and CCD classes inspire the young into religious life. Inadequate religious instruction - often heretical - and the enormous theological confusion stemming from seminaries and "Catholic" colleges and universities where dissenting theologians flourish while bishops do nothing, stifles any yen to enter God's cause as religious or priest. We need to remind ourselves, too, that among the 40 million babies surgically aborted since 1973 were future priests and religious - 5,000 priests calculates shrewd observer Michael Engler.

Today's soft living - the curse of affluence - is likewise a deterrent. It is astonishing that by the time a young Catholic graduates from high school he has spent 16,000 hours in the classroom but has seen 18,000 hours of TV. I put great hope in sacrificing, one-income, home-schooling families to produce young people more ready to offer their lives to God in religion. There are one million home-schooled in such families; the number is growing fast, as are independent private Catholic schools controlled by parents.

One sad fact about increasing mixed marriages is that such produce very few vocations. And surely the all too many Catholics who live the alternative lifestyle we used to call "shacking up" will be no source of young Catholics eager to serve the Lord more fully. As Pope Pius XII told parents of large families in Italy in 1951, the large, truly Catholic family is "the seedbed of vocations." Some orthodox religious congregations still fully Catholic are

flourishing with recruits. Their vocation directors tell me that their novices come mostly from right-to-life families and Marian groups. And most surely, the very many fallen-away Catholics are no help here. As more and more Catholic hospitals close down or join with secular organizations or give up Catholic teaching in doing sterilization operations, we can be sure that this former source of vocations will also dry up.

Every study of vocations that I have ever seen has shown that most priests and religious come from not the very rich, nor the very poor, but from larger, middle-class families whose parents are deeply religious. Because these parents disciplined themselves, they have a disciplined home. Some years ago eight American bishops were moaning to a cardinal in Rome about the shortage of vocations. The cardinal thereupon asked each bishop individually how many children there were in their family. The average was six! "There you have your answer," remarked the cardinal.

In the last 5-7 years, while traveling the world in my prolife apostolate, I have asked groups of priests, religious and seminarians the size of their families. The average was 5-6, with the lowest in Puerto Rico, where the seminarians came from families of 3-4 children - this still much higher than the average Puerto Rican family.

Undoubtedly it was the scandals of bishops and priests in Ireland that lost the recent referendum on divorce there. In a poll, 57% of Irish adults said that these scandals had seriously tarnished the hierarchy and clergy's credibility. And what has been the impact of such scandals in the U.S., with the bishops having to pay more than \$650 million of the people's hard-earned cash for pedophilia cases? What is the impact of this on vocations, to say nothing of other priestly and episcopal scandals?

Born on a large dairy farm in a German Catholic enclave outside Minneapolis, I was the 15th of 17 children. My mother once told me she prayed that she would have a large family, and as you can see, she was a good pray-er. Three died after childbirth, leaving 14, 11 girls and 3 boys. My brother and I always joked that we became priests to get away from the girls. But then two girls became nuns (you can't win with these women).

But there is another theory about vocations: when people tell me that ours must have been a very pious family to have produced four vocations, I jokingly respond by saying that the Lord calls some into the priesthood and religious life because He doesn't trust them in marriage. Be that as it may, in 1947 I was the 27th priest in a parish of 230 families pastored for 33 years by the saintly, gruff Father Anthony Miks; by 1947 the parish had produced over 100 religious

women. I cannot remember a single priest scandal during my Catholic grade school and high school years.

There was never any doubt in our minds that our parents were saints; I suggest it was saintly people who produced all these vocations. Where are the parents today that pray that at least one of their children enter the priesthood or the religious life? Now that parishes are closing in disturbing numbers because of the shortage of priests; now that ever fewer priests and nuns are working for the spiritual welfare of the laity; now that more and more laymen are taking over parishes and conducting prayer services on Sunday as a substitute for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the crisis of vocations will escalate. Meanwhile, the Catholic population continues to grow, and takes on ever more immigrants who often have the Faith in their bones, even if not in their minds and souls, and so understand it very little. Unfortunately often many of these immigrants are very neglected, given the shortage of religious and clergy. Why is it that the Philippines and countries in Africa and some in Latin America and some dioceses in the U.S. have a goodly number of vocations? It lies in the quality of their family life, their Catholic culture and the devotion of their priests and religious.

Why is it that in this country dioceses like Peoria, IL, Arlington, VA, and Lincoln, NE, have an abundance of seminarians and priests? Arlington with 250,000 Catholics has some 50 major seminarians; Lincoln with only 80,000, has 44 major seminarians. I have noted in both dioceses good parishes with Catholic schools. Lincoln, for example, has eight parishes in the city, all with Catholic schools and a surprising number of nuns teaching. In addition, the Lincoln diocese has a parish on the campus of the football-famous University of Nebraska, which under the direction of Rev. Msgr. Leonard Kalin, its chaplain, has produced many vocations for years. I offered Mass twice there late in the night; I was surprised by the number and fervor of students participating. Now under the great leadership of Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz, Lincoln has a bright future. So it can be done! It has to be done!

There is another aspect to consider in thinking about vocations, the growth of the world's religions. Before the year 2000, the Catholic Church will no longer have the largest number of adherents. Taking that position will be Islam, the followers of Allah and his prophet Mohammed. Before the year 2000, there will be 100 million more Moslems than those who still call themselves Catholics. Here is the relentless, naked reality of statistics: while the annual growth rate of the Christian population is about 1.5 percent (a percentage smaller than the annual percentage

increase of the world's population as a whole), Islam is advancing at the astounding rate of 16 percent annually, followed closely by the great religions of the East: Hinduism (13 percent) and Buddhism (10 percent). In Asia the percentage of Catholics has been steady for some time at somewhat more than 2% of the population. China is still off-limits for missionaries with, however, an estimated 12-15 million struggling, persecuted Catholics.

In the light of the vocation disaster, the work of Human Life International in promoting life and the family; preparation for marriage; natural family planning; home schooling; chastity in the young and in the married; the publication of literature in several languages to foster these ends; conducting national and international seminars and symposia - all of this worldwide apostolate - would seem to indicate that what we do is the most important work in the world, as this Pope remarked to me on 17 November 1979. The evils in modern society - the loss of faith, contraception, sterilization, value-free sex education, abortion and the threatening euthanasia - are not only anti-life but are destroyers of families in multiple ways. What destroys families, destroys the Church. Let us pray that the Lord of the only harvest that really counts will inspire the young to serve Him exclusively. And may ever more courageous parents welcome a generous number of children in their homes in this anti-life/anti-family world.

- Rev. Paul Marx, O.S.B. is the Chairman and Founder of Human Life International.

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## Priestly Vocations in America: A Look At the Numbers

— Jeff Ziegler

(This article originally appeared in the July 2005 issue of *Catholic World Report*.)

The universal Church has enjoyed spectacular growth in the number of seminarians since 1978. When John Paul II became Pope, there were 63,882 diocesan and religious seminarians studying philosophy and theology. Twenty-four consecutive years of growth brought the number to 112,643. The number fell back slightly to 112,373 in 2003, the last year for which full statistics are available. But that figure is still a 76 percent increase over the number for 1978.

In the midst of this worldwide vocation boom,

however, the Church in the United States has suffered a vocation collapse. According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, the total number of American diocesan and religious seminarians in college and theology seminary programs decreased from 9,021 in 1978 to 4,790 in 2003—a decline of nearly 47 percent.

America's vocation crisis has been attributed to the culture's materialism, unchastity, and small family sizes. In a seminal 1995 newspaper column, Omaha Archbishop Elden Curtiss cited additional ecclesial factors that have contributed to the collapse:

I am personally aware of certain vocation directors, vocation teams, and evaluation boards that turn away candidates who do not support the possibility of ordaining women or who defend the Church's teaching about artificial birth control, or who exhibit a strong piety toward certain devotions, such as the Rosary. When there is a determined effort to discourage orthodox candidates from priesthood and religious life, then the vocation shortage which results is caused not by a lack of vocations but by deliberate attitudes and policies which deter certain viable candidates.

In earlier issues of CWR, Leslie Payne ("Salt for Their Wounds," February 1997) and Michael S. Rose ("A Self-Imposed Shortage," February 2001) confirmed the truth of Archbishop Curtiss's observations.

Rather than provide additional confirmation, this article offers a more mundane statistical look at the state of priestly vocations by examining the ratio of diocesan seminarians to Catholics in the 176 Latin-rite dioceses of the United States (excluding the Archdiocese for the Military Services). Which American dioceses are taking part in the worldwide vocation boom, and which are not? Which dioceses are enjoying dramatic increases in the number of seminarians, and which are suffering from sudden declines? How do bishops, vocation directors, and other diocesan officials account for their dioceses' success or failure to attract priestly vocations?

### Vocation-rich dioceses

The dozen dioceses with the highest ratio of seminarians to Catholics, according to statistics published in the 2004 edition of *The Official Catholic Directory*, are Lincoln, Nebraska; Yakima Washington; Savannah, Georgia; Cheyenne, Wyoming; Rapid City, South Dakota; Wichita, Kansas; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Alexandria, Louisiana; Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida; Steubenville, Ohio; Spokane, Washington; and Bismarck, North Dakota.

Officials of the nation's most vocation-rich dioceses most frequently attribute their success to divine grace given in response to prayer. "Of course we know that it is the work of the Holy Spirit!" writes Bishop Paul Zipfel of Bismarck. Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln credits "first and foremost the atmosphere of prayer for vocations and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the patroness of the diocese." Cheyenne Bishop David Ricken ascribes "most of the vocational awareness to the Eucharistic adoration that has been happening in the diocese for quite a few years. This contributes, I believe, to the awareness of the call." Tulsa vocation promotion and recruitment director Wayne Rziha credits weekly Eucharistic adoration by Serra Club members. Rapid City vocation director Father Brian Christensen recalls that Bishop Harold Dimmerling, who died in 1987, composed a prayer for vocations that has been recited weekly in every parish since the 1980s.

The holy witness and active interest of diocesan priests in promoting vocations also play a crucial role in the success of vocation-rich dioceses. "A good number of our priests see themselves as associate vocation directors," says Yakima Bishop Carlos Sevilla, SJ. "There is no better vocations awareness 'program,'" according to Father Christensen, "than the witness of faithful, dedicated, and joyful men serving Christ and His Church as a committed priest. We are blessed to have many such men serving the people of western South Dakota."

Tulsa's Wayne Rziha has relied upon "the dedication and commitment of a few vocation-minded priests." He adds: "Priests who build personal relationships with their people and then actively call and invite them to consider a vocation to the priesthood are the pillars of good vocation programs." Bishop Bruskewitz adds that "in the Diocese of Lincoln, as in most other dioceses, there are priests assigned to do vocational work, but for many years, all of the priests of the Lincoln diocese have been required to consider themselves 'vocation directors' and to promote the discovery and encouragement of those young people called by God." "If priests are not supportive of vocation promotion, the work of a vocation director is very difficult," cautions Father Darrin Connall, Spokane vocation director and rector of Bishop White Seminary. "Most of our priests are supportive of vocations and willing to invite young men to consider priesthood."

In some vocation-rich dioceses, priestly ministry at high schools and colleges has proved to be of decisive importance. "Young, effective priest-teachers in Catholic high schools are the most impacting and influential factor in priestly

vocations," says Bismarck vocation director Father Thomas Richter. Bishop Bruskewitz believes that "the extremely fine pastoral work of the priests of the diocese, particularly in Catholic education and at the campus of the local state university, brings tangible vocational results."

### Smaller and more successful

The nation's 13 most vocation-rich dioceses all have fewer than 200,000 Catholics. The most vocation-rich larger dioceses are Denver (14th), Omaha (30th), Chicago (41st), Atlanta (43rd), and La Crosse, Wisconsin (44th). The most vocation-rich dioceses with more than 500,000 Catholics are Chicago, Washington (63rd), St. Paul and Minneapolis (64th), and Cincinnati (77th). Of dioceses with over 1,000,000 Catholics, only Chicago and Newark (80th) have vocation rates above the national median.

One reason smaller dioceses may be more vocation-rich is that their size allows for greater interaction between bishops and seminarians. Father Wilmar Zabala, ordained for the Diocese of Yakima in 2003, relates:

[Bishop Sevilla] takes time to visit our seminarians, most especially at the seminarian's year-end evaluation, when there's a big celebration in the seminary, or simply when he's in the vicinity of the seminary. He phones the seminarian on his birthday, wishes him a happy birthday, assures him of his continued prayers, and, most importantly, thanks him for studying for the priesthood in the diocese. He always reminds the seminarians that they should not hesitate to call him if they need anything.

Father Steve Angell, ordained for Savannah in 2004, recalls:

At Christmas, Bishop [J. Kevin] Boland sends each of his seminarians a Christmas present, an orthodox book on some aspect of Catholic faith or spirituality. ... Whereas some seminarians from other dioceses have never met their bishop, the seminarians of the Diocese of Savannah know their bishop, and Bishop Boland knows them, long before the day that he places his hands upon their heads.

The vocation directors of vocation-rich dioceses tend to be optimistic and go out of their way to invite young men to consider the priesthood. "Young people today are ready for a challenge and looking for a worthy cause to give their life for," notes Savannah vocation director Father Timothy McKeown. "The vocation to the priesthood meets

these needs."

Spokane's Father Connall says, "My basic approach to recruiting flows from a fundamental belief that God continues to call men to the priesthood in adequate numbers. My job, therefore, is to assist young men to discern that call and to support them once they have responded. The 'vocation shortage' has nothing to do with God's failure to call."

"When a seminarian comes from another country," recounts Father Zabala, "[vocation director] Msgr. John Ecker accompanies him to go shopping for some decent clothes to be used in the seminary. ... Msgr. Ecker constantly invites kids, high school students, and young adults to consider the priesthood." Bishop Zipfel remarks,

We have an attractive (physically and spiritually) young priest who is assigned full time to our vocation work. His plan for the last year is to visit each parish and mission and to preside at all the Sunday Masses and speak about vocations to the priesthood. He has completed about 65 percent of the parishes.

The Dioceses of Yakima and Spokane are particularly successful in attracting Hispanic vocations; nearly half of their seminarians were born in Mexico. Officials of other vocation-rich dioceses say that the vast majority of their seminarians are homegrown. All of Rapid City's seminarians come from the local area; only one Bismarck seminarian, three Pensacola-Tallahassee seminarians, three Tulsa seminarians, and three or four Cheyenne seminarians come from other dioceses or countries.

Surprisingly, three of the 12 most vocation-rich dioceses do not have the typical full-time priest vocation director that most dioceses employ. Yakima's Msgr. Ecker is also vicar general and rector of the cathedral; Steubenville's vocation director is also vicar general, moderator of the curia, finance officer, annual financial campaign director, judicial vicar, and pastor of two parishes. Tulsa's Rziha is a married layman.

Fidelity to the magisterium and traditional spirituality are strikingly manifest in several vocation-rich dioceses. Bishop Bruskewitz observes that "the orthodoxy, conservatism, and enthusiasm of the clergy, both young and old, bear witness to the splendor of the Catholic priesthood in southern Nebraska. The cheerful conformity of the priests to the magisterial teachings of the Church, to liturgical correctness, and to traditional Church discipline also plays an important part in the diocesan vocation picture." The web site maintained by the Savannah vocation office seeks prospective seminarians who "believe in the truths taught by the Catholic Church,"

"sometimes attend daily Mass or make visits to the Blessed Sacrament," and "frequently make use of the Sacrament of Confession." (Prospective Savannah seminarians are also expected to "have a normal sexual attraction for adult females.") The Pensacola-Tallahassee vocation director, Msgr. C. Slade Crawford emphasizes, among other factors, "fidelity to the magisterium... and the Catholic classics in faith, spirituality, and prayer; a serious and disciplined dedication to the practice of prayer; true devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the Eucharistic Lord; clarity considering the truth of human sexuality; [and] formation in the virtues of chastity, modesty, and the celibate way of life."

At the same time, vocation-rich dioceses may be led by bishops who have not taken "conservative" positions on controversial ecclesial issues. Bishop Skylstad of Spokane, now president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, opposed denying Holy Communion to pro-abortion politicians; "I strongly oppose using the Eucharist as a weapon," as he put it. Pensacola-Tallahassee Bishop John Ricard, SSJ, likewise wrote, "It is my position not to encourage or support in any way confrontations in the Communion line before God's altar with the Sacred Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus. I have a significant concern for the sacred nature of the Holy Eucharist and do not support calling upon ministers of Communion to make judgments about the worthiness of those in the Communion line."

Two weeks before the presidential election, Bishop Joseph Adamec wrote that since both abortion and war entail indiscriminate killing, voting for either candidate would bring "desirable and undesirable consequences" from a pro-life perspective. Bishop Donald Trautman, now chairman of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, has been the American hierarchy's most vocal critic of the Congregation for Divine Worship's 2001 document *Liturgiam authenticam*. Bishops Adamec and Trautman lead the Dioceses of Altoona-Johnstown (47th) and Erie (53rd), by far the most vocation-rich dioceses in the northeastern US.

### **Vocation-poor dioceses**

The nation's dioceses with the lowest ratio of seminarians to Catholics (starting with the bottom-ranked diocese) are Honolulu, Hawaii; San Diego, California; El Paso, Texas; Rockville Centre, New York; Hartford, Connecticut; Santa Rosa, California; Las Vegas, Nevada; Paterson, New Jersey; San Bernardino, California; Dallas, Texas; Brooklyn, New York; and Rochester, New York.

Officials of several of these dioceses do not

believe that their dioceses are particularly vocation-poor. Personally I believe that we are doing well with vocations," says Father Bede Wevita, director of information, communications, and media for the Diocese of Las Vegas. Paterson vocation director Father Paul Manning comments, "I would agree that we have faced challenges in attracting seminarians; I am not sure that our challenges have been greater or lesser than other comparable dioceses." Father John Stowe, OFM Conv, El Paso vicar general and moderator of the curia, concurs: "I doubt that our difficulties are very different from those in other parts of the country."

Father Stowe adds, "El Paso has always been a missionary diocese, and the ratio of religious to diocesan clergy is almost one to one; some of the vocation prospects go to religious orders. Also the diocese covers ten counties of Texas, nine of which are very sparsely populated and some do not see priests very often." (In fact, El Paso has 80 diocesan priests, 36 religious priests, eight diocesan seminarians, and 24 religious seminarians, according to the 2004 *Official Catholic Directory*.)

Not every mission diocese, however, faces challenges in attracting diocesan seminarians. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops classifies the vocation-rich dioceses of Yakima, Savannah, Cheyenne, Rapid City, Tulsa, Alexandria, Pensacola-Tallahassee, Steubenville, and Spokane as mission dioceses.

Officials of some vocation-poor dioceses say that their proportionally lower numbers are caused by their greater selectivity in accepting applicants. Father Matthew Spahr, priestly formation director for the Diocese of San Diego, attributes his diocese's numbers to "our increasing vigilance to screen applicants for our priestly formation program, particularly with regard to their human formation. We believe that, though we are accepting fewer men than in past years, our seminarians are of higher quality and more likely to persevere through formation to ordination and in their priestly ministry."

"Our diocese instituted a vocation board after the first wave of scandals in the early 1990s and has been particularly selective over the last decade," says Paterson's Father Manning. "Since 1999, we have accepted only about a quarter of those who have requested to apply. Of those accepted, about 60 percent persevered in formation."

Selectivity also plays a part in the success of vocation-rich dioceses, however. "Good quality seminarians are also important tools in promoting vocations," according to Spokane's Father Carroll. "I would guess that I have turned down nearly 50 percent of the total number of men who have asked to

apply to our diocese. Happy and healthy young men who are in love with Christ and His Church inspire others to consider this way of life."

### **The effects of urban growth**

Rapid population increases have made it challenging to recruit diocesan seminarians, says Las Vegas's Father Wevita. "Most of the people who live in Las Vegas are new to Las Vegas. Each month we receive 2,000 new Catholics in the Las Vegas diocese. This has been the case for last ten years. It takes a few years to settle and call Las Vegas their home." San Bernardino vocation director Sister Sarah Shrewsbury, OSC, observes that the number of Catholics in her diocese has quadrupled to one million in the past 25 years.

The presence of rapidly growing cities within a diocese and the lack of rootedness to which Father Wevita refers may indeed contribute to difficulties in attracting priestly vocations. Of the ten cities with 200,000 or more people that grew most rapidly between 1990 and 2002, only one is located in a diocese with an above-average vocation rate (Raleigh, 79th). The other most rapidly growing cities are located in the Dioceses of Fresno (133rd), Phoenix (137th), Dallas (167th), and Las Vegas.

Some officials of vocation-poor dioceses attribute their track record to the clerical abuse scandal. "Because of scandals in the diocese, the priests have been hurt in spirit and have found it difficult to attract men to the priesthood," says Santa Rosa vocation director Father Thomas Diaz, whose diocese suffered a particularly sordid scandal involving former Bishop G. Patrick Ziemann. "I can say that we have faced lower numbers since the clergy abuse scandal, but that seems to be turning around," adds Father Manning of the Diocese of Paterson, whose \$5-million settlement with 26 men has exceeded that of any other New Jersey diocese in the past three years. With rare exceptions, other dioceses particularly affected by the clerical abuse scandal tend to be vocation-poor; these dioceses include Lexington, Kentucky (24th), Cincinnati (77th), Portland, Oregon (102nd), Palm Beach (103rd), Tucson (140th), Manchester, New Hampshire (144th), Springfield, Massachusetts (145th), Louisville (150th), Milwaukee (151st), Orange, California (154th), Boston (161st), and Los Angeles (163rd).

Vocation-rich Spokane's Father Carroll, whose diocese faces bankruptcy, expresses similar concerns about the future:

The Diocese of Spokane accepted only one new seminarian last year, which I attribute in large part to the negative publicity surrounding the lawsuits and declaration of bankruptcy we are facing.

These are definitely dark days for our local Church. It will be very interesting to see what the nationwide impact is going to be on vocation recruiting. I suspect that, at least in the short term, it is not going to be good.

Two vocation directors predict that the recent appointment of new bishops to their dioceses may presage a local springtime for priestly vocations. Recently appointed Brooklyn vocation director Father Kevin Sweeney says, "Our previous Bishop (Thomas Daily) turned 75 and submitted his resignation in the fall of 2002. Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio was named as bishop of Brooklyn in the summer of 2003, but was not installed until October. Bishop DiMarzio has truly made vocations a priority in the diocese, and I have seen many hopeful signs over the past few months." Father Manning of the Diocese of Paterson, whose previous ordinary (Bishop Frank Rodimer) retired last year, concurs: "Our new bishop [Arthur Serratelli] is very vocal about vocations and is proactive about inviting people to think about priesthood and religious life. I think his direct approach has encouraged our priests, and I expect to see numbers continue to grow."

Las Vegas vocation director Father Tony Vercellone observes that many "parents are not supportive of their children entering the seminary or religious life." One vocation director candidly admits that many local priests, too, have not been supportive of new priestly vocations. San Bernardino's Sister Shrewsbury recounts:

One reason I think we have had a challenge attracting seminarians in the past is that most people (not all)—that is, priests, sisters and lay people—stopped promoting vocations about 18-20 years ago for various reasons, as is true across the United States. We have spent the last ten years trying to change attitudes among these groups to begin and continue to plant the seeds of a vocation to priesthood, religious life, and diaconate at a young age and to keep watering the seeds that are planted. It seems that these efforts are beginning to work.

The Diocese of San Bernardino has recently experienced dramatic growth in the number of seminarians; it now, according to Sister Shrewsbury, has 26 diocesan seminarians, up from 11 in 2003 and 16 in 2004. (Sister Shrewsbury insists that these latter numbers, which were published in *The Official Catholic Directory*, are low; others in the diocese, she says, submitted inaccurate data to the Directory's publisher.)

### **Distinctive cultures**

A few vocation-poor dioceses have adopted restrictive policies for accepting seminarians from other geographical areas. San Diego's Father Spahr says, "As a rule we do not accept men into our formation program from other areas of the country unless they have lived in the diocese for a period of five years prior to making application to our program." "We do not take candidates from outside the US," reports Las Vegas's Father Vercellone. On the other hand, one quarter of Brooklyn's seminarians are foreign (from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Poland, and the Philippines), and one half of San Bernardino's seminarians are foreign born, though they "lived in the diocese for several years before going into the seminary," says Sister Shrewsbury.

Distinctive traits of local cultures can also play a role in a diocese's failure to attract seminarians, notes Bishop Francis DiLorenzo, formerly of Honolulu (1994-2004), now of Richmond (which ranks 118th). Bishop DiLorenzo attributes Honolulu's challenges to the emphasis that Asian and Pacific Island cultures place upon marriage and family life, to the "social and economic aspirations of Asian people for their children, which excludes priesthood," and to the clash between "seminaries and their predominantly European and Western culture" on the one hand and Asian and Pacific Island cultures on the other.

Although these cultural traits may account for Hawaii's low number of seminarians, some Pacific Island dioceses have proved to be fruitful soil for priestly vocations. While Honolulu's nearly 235,000 Catholics had only one seminarian in 2004, the Archdiocese of Agana (Guam) had one diocesan seminarian for every 8,214 Catholics. The Diocese of the Caroline Islands, which comprises two nations that gained independence from the US in the 1980s, has one seminarian for every 14,588 Catholics. American Samoa's Diocese of Samoa-Pago Pago is more vocation-rich than Lincoln: it boasts an extraordinary ratio of one seminarian to every 1,819 Catholics.

Cultural and geographical factors do play a large part in the national vocation picture. Every diocese in California, New England, and New York has a rate of seminarians below the median, as does every diocese along the Mexican border except for San Angelo. Every diocese along the western two-thirds of the Canadian border (except for Seattle), on the other hand, has an above-average vocation rate, as do all the dioceses of the Dakotas, Minnesota, Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. These factors transcend American political divisions: while the pro-Bush "red states," in general, tend to be more vocation-rich than

the pro-Kerry blue states, some "red" dioceses are vocation-poor, and the most pro-Kerry area in Minnesota is located in the Diocese of Duluth, the state's most vocation-rich diocese (16th).

Geographical and cultural factors alone, however, cannot account for the wide disparities in the vocation rates of neighboring dioceses:

- Shreveport, Louisiana, (120th) borders Alexandria (8th), whose longtime ordinary (Bishop Sam Jacobs) was recently transferred to vocation-poor Houma-Thibodaux (147th).
- Yakima (2nd) adjoins Seattle (111th).
- Denver (14th) borders Colorado Springs (108th) and Pueblo (114th). Colorado Springs jumped from 156th to 108th in the year following the appointment of Bishop Michael Sheridan, who issued a pastoral letter on the obligation of Catholics to vote for pro-life candidates.
- Wichita, Kansas, (6th) is next to Dodge City (164th).
- Chicago (41st) borders Milwaukee (151st), and Chicago and Peoria (19th) border Joliet (136th).
- In Pennsylvania, Erie (53rd) borders Pittsburgh (143rd), and Altoona-Johnstown (47th) borders Greensburg (160th), whose longtime Bishop Anthony Bosco (1987-2004) retired recently.
- Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia, (17th), Lexington (24th), and Charlotte, North Carolina, (27th) border Richmond (118th).
- Lexington (24th), Nashville (36th), Knoxville (37th), and Covington (49th) adjoin Louisville (150th).

### **Dramatic declines**

While 71 dioceses experienced a decline in the number of seminarians between 2003 and 2004, only five dioceses lost ten or more seminarians, according to statistics published in the 2003 and 2004 editions of *The Official Catholic Directory*. Chicago lost 21 seminarians (and now ranks 41st in the nation); St. Louis (now 93rd) lost 16. The number of Newark (80th) seminarians declined by 11, while Baltimore (115th) and Fargo (32nd) each lost ten.

Because Chicago (with 336 seminarians) and Newark (with 102) have more seminarians than other dioceses in the nation, their declines are relatively insignificant. Even after these declines, Chicago and Newark remain among the nation's most vocation-rich major urban archdioceses; Philadelphia, Detroit, Boston, New York, and Los Angeles, for example, rank 142nd, 156th, 161st, 162nd, and 163rd respectively.

Newark's decline in seminarians between 2003 and 2004 has proved to be temporary. According to vocation director Father Brian Plate, Newark has

gained 14 seminarians since last year. Asked which factors have helped make Newark more successful in attracting vocations than other major urban archdioceses, Father Pate replied, "Newark's success to me seems to be leadership, orthodoxy, and vocations as a priority. We've been blessed with two back-to-back strong, unabashed Catholic archbishops, for whom vocations and priesthood are extremely important." Indeed, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Newark's archbishop from 1986 to 2001, ordained more men than any other bishop in the nation during that time period, according to several articles; that track record of success has continued under Archbishop John Myers.

The declines suffered by the Archdioceses of St. Louis and Baltimore and the Diocese of Fargo are more statistically significant. In a single year, Baltimore lost 27 percent of its seminarians, St. Louis lost 30 percent, and Fargo lost over 45 percent. The decline in the number of seminarians in all three of these dioceses cannot be explained by a change in bishop or vocation director during 2003. (Subsequent to the 2004 statistics, Archbishop Raymond Burke was installed in St. Louis, and former Fargo vocation director Father Robert Smith, Jr. was replaced.)

In the 1990s, the Diocese of Fargo (under Bishop James Sullivan) was frequently cited, along with Lincoln (under Bishop Bruskewitz), Peoria (under then-Bishop John Myers), and Arlington (under the late Bishop John Keating), among Americans leading powerhouses of priestly vocations. In 2001, the year Bishop Sullivan (who suffers from Alzheimer's disease) received a coadjutor, Fargo had 42 seminarians and a ratio of one seminarian to 2,356 Catholics—a rate higher than Lincoln's is today. By 2003, the diocese had 22 seminarians; the number fell to 12 in 2004, a 71 percent decline over three years. With a ratio that now ranks 32nd in the nation, Fargo remains vocation-rich. In 2001, Bishop Samuel Aquila, former seminary rector in the vocation-rich Archdiocese of Denver, was named Fargo coadjutor bishop. Like Bishop Sullivan, Bishop Aquila has boldly proclaimed Catholic teaching on controversial issues of the day and has been praised for his leadership in confronting pro-abortion politicians and mandating orthodox catechetical materials for parish programs.

A dramatic decline in the number of seminarians in reputed vocation powerhouses is not unprecedented. After Archbishop Myers's 1986 appointment as coadjutor bishop of Peoria, the number of Peoria seminarians surged to 64 in 1990. By 2000—Archbishop Myers's last full year in Peoria—that number had fallen to 33. At the time, then-vocation director Father Joseph Donton attributed Peoria's steep decline to "the increasing

vocations efforts in other dioceses," which reduced the need for non-Peoria natives to seek ordination in Peoria. (The number of Peoria seminarians has risen slightly under Archbishop Myers's successor, Bishop Daniel Jenky, CSC; its ratio of Catholics to seminarians now stands at 19th in the nation.)

Likewise, the Diocese of Arlington had 42 seminarians in 1995. By 1998—the year Bishop John Keating died—that number had fallen to 32, with a ratio of one seminarian to 10,200 Catholics (a ratio that would rank 62nd today). The number of Arlington seminarians has continued to fall under Bishop Keating's successor, Bishop Paul Loverde, and now stands at 23, for a 107th-place ranking.

When Fargo's current vocation director was asked which factors, in his judgment, have contributed both to Fargo's success in attracting priestly vocations over the years and to the recent numerical decline, diocesan director of communications Tanya Watterud replied on his behalf: "Neither he nor I feel comfortable with him having to answer interview questions about statistics from previous years." The following day, Msgr. Gregory Schlesselmann, diocesan vicar general and rector of Cardinal Muench Seminary, issued the following statement:

Given the many factors that affect a young man's decision to pursue a priestly vocation, it is very difficult to identify as a trend fluctuations that occur over a short period of time. The action of the Holy Spirit cannot be reduced to statistical measurement.

### **Sudden surges**

Of the 69 dioceses that gained seminarians between 2003 and 2004, seven gained six or more seminarians. New York gained ten (and now ranks 162nd); Wheeling-Charleston (17th), Boise (29th), and St. Paul and Minneapolis (64th) each gained seven; and Washington (63rd), Toledo (88th), and Cleveland (100th) each gained six. In no case did the sudden increase in the number of seminarians coincide with the appointment of a new vocation director; in only one instance (Toledo) did it coincide with the appointment of a new bishop.

Not surprisingly, the factors that have contributed to the success of vocation-rich dioceses have also proved to be a factor in dioceses whose numbers have surged recently. Washington vocation director Father Robert Panke gives primary credit to prayer; the archdiocese, he says, has mandated intercession for vocations at every Mass and has recently founded a society dedicated solely to praying for vocations. Toledo vocation director Father David Nuss composed a prayer for vocations; 80,000 bookmarks

on which the prayer is written have been distributed.

Episcopal leadership and the cooperation of other priests have also played an important part in the increase in vocations. "To say Cardinal McCarrick is a strong promoter of vocations would be an understatement," says Father Panke. "Everywhere he goes he speaks on the importance of opening one's heart to the call to religious life." Toledo's Father Nuss says:

I work especially closely with a group of roughly 40 priests. The message is clear: they are starting pitchers, and I am now a closing pitcher! I can only work with the viable candidates they send my way... Therefore, I have turned to priests who are men of prayer, generous servants, faithful to their calling and happy and who give real cause for men to consider priestly life and ministry.

Cleveland vocation director Father Robert Stec concurs: he credits Cleveland's rising number in part to the ministry of young priests, who "are more engaged in vocations [work] than what we have seen in quite some time."

Along with these common factors, dioceses with rising numbers of seminarians can also point to distinctive reasons for their success. Toledo's rising vocation rate is partly attributable to an expanded media presence and a "discover the priesthood" campaign launched by recently appointed Bishop Leonard Blair. Washington, like Denver and Newark, has established a seminary for Neocatechumenal Way seminarians who will be ordained for the archdiocese. Cleveland's Father Stec believes his diocese's rising numbers are the fruit of his strong emphasis on discussing the priesthood with junior high and high school students.

### **The Boise model**

The number of Hispanics in the US is expected to increase from 35.3 million in 2000 to 80.2 million in 2040. As Latino culture increasingly influences the Church in the United States, one diocese that has experienced a dramatic surge in seminarians may prove to be a model for other dioceses.

The Diocese of Boise had 14 seminarians in 2003 and 21 seminarians in 2004 (for a ranking of 29th); it now has 29 seminarians, according to vocation director Father Jairo Restrepo, who recounts the factors that have led to his diocese's vocation surge:

- "When Bishop Michael Driscoll came to our diocese a few years ago, he demanded that all parishes have adoration before the Holy Sacrament asking for vocations."
- "Four years ago, we opened a house of discernment and formation in Boise. In it live men who are

considering priesthood but are not ready for seminary formation, and men from other countries who need English and an environment where they can continue growing in their vocation."

- "The encouragement from our pastors has motivated men and especially Hispanics to respond to the call."
- "Two years ago, in the midst of the shortage of priests in our diocese, the diocese was willing to sacrifice a priest from parish ministry to take over full time the work of vocations."
- "Having a bilingual vocation director has helped tremendously to bridge and reach out to Hispanics."

Father Restrepo continues:

Something remarkable that is happening in our diocese is the number of Hispanics that were living in Idaho already, but working in the fields, and now are joining us. Most of them were before in seminaries back in their countries of origin, but for economic reasons had to leave school and come to the US looking for money to help their families. Once here, they got connected with parishes and after two to six years of working in the fields and of commitment in their parishes, they have desired to continue with their education and respond to the needs in Idaho... The Lord God is blessing us in Idaho, and I do believe it is due to the prayers of God's people before the Holy Sacrament and a bishop who is open to the work of vocations.

Prayers before the Blessed Sacrament, a zealous vocation director who seeks out Hispanic vocations "in the fields," priests who assist the vocation director in recruiting seminarians, and "a bishop that is open to the work of vocations"—these may well be the most important ingredients of the successful vocation programs of the future.

Source:  
[www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2005/ziegler\\_seminarians1\\_aug05.asp](http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2005/ziegler_seminarians1_aug05.asp)

## Crisis in Vocations? What Crisis?

### The Formula That Works Is Based on Fidelity to the Church's Magisterium

— Archbishop Elden Curtiss, Omaha

There is much media hype these days about the present and projected shortage of priests and its effect on the sacramental life of the Church. It is time to pay close attention to the dioceses and religious communities reporting increasing numbers of candidates. There have to be reasons for these increases that bear objective analysis from which some conclusions can be drawn.

I personally think the vocation "crisis" in this country is more artificial and contrived than many people realize. When dioceses and religious communities are unambiguous about ordained priesthood and vowed religious life as the Church defines these calls; when there is strong support for vocations, and a minimum of dissent about the male celibate priesthood and religious life loyal to the magisterium; when bishop, priests, Religious and lay people are united in vocation ministry—then there are documented increases in the numbers of candidates who respond to the call.

It seems to me that the vocation "crisis" is precipitated and continued by people who want to change the Church's agenda, by people who do not support orthodox candidates loyal to the magisterial teaching of the Pope and bishops, and by people who actually discourage viable candidates from seeking priesthood and vowed religious life as the Church defines the ministries.

I am personally aware of certain vocation directors, vocation teams and evaluation boards who turn away candidates who do not support the possibility of ordaining women or who defend the Church's teaching about artificial birth control, or who exhibit a strong piety toward certain devotions, such as the Rosary.

When there is a determined effort to discourage orthodox candidates from priesthood and religious life, then the vocation shortage which results is caused not by a lack of vocations but by deliberate attitudes and policies that deter certain viable candidates.

And the same people who precipitate a decline in vocations by their negative actions call for the ordination of married men and women to replace the vocations they have discouraged. They have a death wish for ordained priesthood and vowed religious life as the Church defines them. They undermine the vocation ministry they are supposed to champion.

An article in the *Catholic World Report* (May 1995), by Michael Flach, analyzes the remarkable increase in vocations to priesthood in the Arlington, Va., diocese.

Father James Gould, diocesan vocation director, explains the reasons for their success: unswerving allegiance to the Pope and magisterial teaching; perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in parishes, with an emphasis on praying for vocations; and the strong effort by a significant number of diocesan priests who extend themselves to help young men and women remain open to the Lord's will in their lives.

I see this formula for success in vocation ministry in our neighbouring Diocese of Lincoln, Neb., which has 45 seminarians preparing for the priesthood and a significant number of young priests at work in a largely rural diocese with 84,000 Catholics.

In the Archdiocese of Omaha, I am encouraged by the dynamic thrust for vocations to the priesthood and religious life that is present. We will have at least 36 seminarians next fall, 28 in pre-theology and theology, with clear indications of increases in the coming years.

Our vocation strategy is drawn from successful ones in other dioceses: a strong orthodox base that promotes loyalty to the Pope and bishop; a vocation director and team who clearly support a male, celibate priesthood and religious communities loyal to magisterial teaching; a presbyterate that takes personal ownership of vocation ministry in the archdiocese; two large Serra clubs in Omaha that constantly program outreach efforts to touch potential candidates; more and more parents who encourage their children to consider a vocation to priesthood and religious life; eucharistic devotion in parishes with an emphasis on prayer for vocations, and vocation committees in most of our parishes that focus on personally inviting and nourishing vocations.

### **Positive response**

I find young people everywhere in the archdiocese who want to be Church with Pope John Paul. They want to know what the Church teaches through its magisterium. They want to be part of the unity of the Church and not caught up in dissent and disunity. They are willing to listen to the call to the priesthood, religious life and lay ministry in the Church, and they want to be supported by people in their response to that call.

A recent work in the sociology of religion by Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy*, makes the point that the more a

religious organization compromises with society and the world, blurring its identity and modifying its teaching and ethics, the more it will decline.

"Religious organizations are stronger to the degree that they impose significant costs in terms of sacrifice and even stigma upon their members", it was found. If these findings are true for religion in general, they are certainly true for vocations to the priesthood and religious life in particular.

I am convinced that shortages of vocations in any part of the country can be reversed by people who share enthusiastically in the agenda of the Church. We have to learn from the dioceses and communities who are experiencing an increase in vocations.

If we are not willing to recognize and accept the reasons for their success and incorporate them into our own local efforts, then we allow ourselves to become supporters of a self-fulfilling prophecy about the shortage of vocations because we fail to take advantage of the opportunities that we have for increasing the number of candidates for the priesthood and vowed religious life.

Young people do not want to commit themselves to dioceses or communities that permit or simply ignore dissent from Church doctrine. They do not want to be associated with people who are angry at the Church's leadership or reject magisterial teaching. They do not want to be battered by agendas that are not the Church's, and radical movements that disparage their desire to be priests, Religious or loyal lay leaders in the Church.

### **Basic orthodoxy**

The dioceses and religious communities that promote orthodoxy and loyalty to the Church; the ones that mobilize priests and people to call young men to the ordained priesthood despite the opposition of those who rail against a male, celibate priesthood; the ones that want their members to be real churchmen and churchwomen that are committed to prayer and holiness as a primary requisite—these are the dioceses and communities that will enjoy increasing numbers of candidates and will disprove the forecasts of decline in vocations everywhere in the Church because of their successes locally.

The need today is for strong leadership in vocation ministry: bishops willing and able to confront dissent that weakens support for vocations; vocation directors and teams loyal to the magisterial teaching of the Church regarding ordained priesthood and vowed religious life; presbyterates and religious communities willing to call forth candidates who share their loyalty to the Pope and bishops and the agenda of the Church; faithful lay people willing to constantly pray for vocations and support them at

every turn.

When this formula, based on total fidelity to Church teaching, is followed in dioceses and religious communities, then vocations will increase. Present statistics support this premise. This is the reason there will be dioceses and religious communities that will have adequate numbers of priests and Religious in the future.

Vocations are out there for those who will collaborate together to personally invite candidates for the right reasons and with unabashed fidelity to the magisterial teaching of the Church.

Source: [www.ewtn.com/library/BISHOPS/WHATCRIS.HTM](http://www.ewtn.com/library/BISHOPS/WHATCRIS.HTM)

*The right choice of diocese and seminary is crucial for any heterosexual and orthodox man who feels called to the priesthood.*

## Vocation crisis: The self-inflicted wound

— Dr John P. Fraunces

How difficult is it to become a priest in the United States today? If one were to judge from the cries and lamentations about the desperate need to fill priestless parishes, it would seem that most dioceses and seminaries would be willing to accept almost any qualified person who applies. However, the problem of maintaining the minimum number of priests to run a diocese is more complicated than the simple equation of supply and demand. One large diocese on the east coast will ordain only eight men in 1997 and two more in 1998, a number far too small to replace those priests who are sick, die or retire in the next two years. Why is this happening? If one were to ask the typical parish priest the reason for the decline in vocations, he would probably point out that Catholic parents, caught up in a materialistic society, no longer encourage their sons to enter the seminary. These parents often depreciate the priesthood by dissenting from the Church's teachings on contraception, abortion and the ordination of women.

The laity's failure to follow *Humanae Vitae* and to fulfill the duties of their state in life is no doubt the fundamental scandal in the American Church and the root cause of its vocational crisis. The radical downsizing of the Catholic family has left our seminaries empty, and the selfishness of contracepting parents has been passed on to their children. Most Catholics no longer believe that a man's highest calling is to serve Christ in the sacramental priesthood because it requires the self-giving lifestyle of celibacy. Only when the married

laity abandon their false god of sexual autonomy and open their conjugal love to the transmission of life will the Church begin to find a comprehensive and permanent solution to the vocation crisis.

In addition to the indifference of the laity, the American Church has continued to struggle with various paradigms about the role of the priest in the modern Church and how he is expected to interact with his peers and his parishioners. For example, one seminarian with four years of study was dismissed from his diocese because he had a serious personality conflict with his pastor during a summer assignment, and he was accused of not socializing enough with his peers. The year before, however, this same man had received a glowing recommendation from another pastor who praised his priest-like qualities and his service to the people.

Later, when he applied to another diocese in Pennsylvania, he was interviewed and investigated by the vocational director for six months. During this time, the vocational director became convinced that this man would make an excellent priest, and he wrote a congratulatory letter to him saying that his Priest Perceiver Interview (PPI) indicated that he had ". . . some very fine talents." Attached to the letter were the results of the PPI which described this man as having ". . . A tremendous capacity for building positive, personal relationships . . . [for being] a real gift to the people whom your life touches . . . [For] an unusual awareness of God's presence in your own life and in the lives of others . . . [for] the courage it takes to be a leader, that is the capacity for asking others for commitments . . . [and for a] dedication to the Catholic Church." But when the diocesan psychologist wrote that he did not think that this man could get along with others, the vocational director changed his opinion without a moment's hesitation. Despite the fact that two other psychologists on separate occasions had given this man favorable recommendations, he was rejected without being permitted to see the results of the psychological evaluation or the right to a second opinion.

This not uncommon practice of giving deference to the professional opinions of a diocesan psychologist should raise concerns about the impact of psychology on the process of priestly formation. Perhaps it is time to ask whether the bishops of the United States want to place that kind of veto power in the hands of an inexact science which does not believe in God, Christ, or his Church. Nonetheless, many believe that psychological evaluations are necessary to weed out sexual deviants and others who will one day cause great scandal and expense to their diocese. Unfortunately, psychology does not have the methods available to accurately predict those who will become involved in sexual misconduct. Instead, psychologists

too often use their influence to eliminate those men who do not share the ideals of the post-conciliar modernists, radical feminists, and militant homosexuals. Those men who are orthodox in faith and chaste in spirit are cavalierly discarded with “scientific infallibility” because of their “doctrinal rigidity and sexual immaturity.”

In defense of the two dioceses involved in these cases, it can be argued that personality conflicts are inevitable in every human organization, and the human part of Christ’s Church is no exception. Furthermore, vocation directors must rely on professional expertise (physicians and psychologists) to disqualify those who are physically and mentally unable to perform the duties of a priest. This is true, but in many cases psychologists attempt to impose the values of their science on their selection of seminarians and act as “social change agents” for the Church, especially in matters of sexual morality. One man wrote and said that when he defended himself against the charge of being “homophobic” by referring to the Church’s teaching on homosexuality, the seminary’s psychologist became upset and retorted that the distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior is “laughable.” A short time later the man was dropped in his seventh year of studies because of his “immature, unintegrated sexuality.” What makes this case more unfortunate is that he has been labeled as “damaged goods” and cannot find another diocese to sponsor him, even though the facts of this case are well known and documented in published reports.

What role do feminists and homosexuals have in the selection of seminarians and the choice of seminaries where these men will study? One orthodox seminarian was told by a prominent female member of his parish that “as a male, he was the enemy of all the women because of the Church’s prohibition against woman’s ordination.” One dismissed seminarian who applied to an east coast diocese that has an acute shortage of priests was told by the bishop that he would not ordain any man who did not believe in the ordination of women. At the New Ways Ministry Conference held in Pittsburgh March 7-9, 1997, Detroit auxiliary bishop, Thomas Gumbleton, told his audience that they should “come out” as homosexual priests . . . from the pulpits of their churches. This call by a bishop shocked and offended many Catholics, and made Bishop Gumbleton an unofficial spokesman for the gay and lesbian groups in the American Church. His speech was not only for a “coming out” about the sexual orientation of these men, but a challenge for them to openly defy the Church’s teaching on homosexuality by their behavior. Speeches like this are widely reported in the secular press and should be of concern

to bishops and vocation directors. If the married laity believe that homosexual conduct by priests is being ignored by the bishops, then it is likely that they will actively discourage their sons from entering the seminary, and they may even withdraw their financial support from the Church.

Even in the seminary, the irrational process of eliminating men from ordination continues. One seminarian was sent by his diocese to a psychologist because he was having academic problems. However, since he had come from a very dysfunctional family, the vocations director also wanted to know if the stress associated with his family relationships was adversely affecting his academic performance. The psychologist met with the seminarian, completed the evaluation and recommended a plan of action to help the man deal with the stress generated by his family and enhance his desire to do academic work. The seminarian was satisfied and the vocation director was relieved because a plan had been made to help this man reach ordination. However, the formation committee chairman was not pleased. Without the knowledge or consent of the vocation director, he telephoned the psychologist to express his surprise and disappointment that the evaluation did not deal with the sexual activity of this man when he was in the military some years before, and that the psychologist did not recommend that he “tell all” to the formation committee. The psychologist was puzzled and told the chairman that the diocese had not informed him that this man’s past sexual activities were a matter of concern.

The psychologist asked if the seminarian had attempted to act out in a sexual way with anyone and if he adhered to the teachings of the Church regarding sexual morality. The chairman affirmed that the seminarian was orthodox in his behavior and his beliefs, but that one of his peers suspected that he was a homosexual because of what he had said in a homiletic class. The formation committee used the suspicion of another seminarian to launch a full-fledged investigation into the past sex life of this man with the intention of dismissing him if he did not fully cooperate. Fortunately for this man, the vocations director did not concur with the formation committee chairman, and this vocation was not put in jeopardy.

After Vatican II in a desire to raise the professional standards of the clergy, the American Church adopted the academic model that placed a heavy emphasis on the secular education of seminary faculty and the awarding of civil degrees to its graduates. This made Catholic seminaries subject to the same criteria that govern the undergraduate and graduate programs of other colleges and universities in the United States. However, there seems to have

been little thought given to the consequences of using this model.

The purpose of graduate schools is to maintain and perpetuate the rights and privileges of its graduates by restricting the number of people who are deemed worthy. This is especially true in the professions where the system restricts the supply of qualified individuals in order to increase the prestige and earning power of the few that graduate. Unfortunately, the seminary system in the United States seems to be operated in the same manner. The vocations committee, the formation committee, the faculty, the dean and the rector all can act as a series of interpersonal obstacles to the ordination of a seminarian. The present academic model for seminaries has been very effective in upgrading the academic credentials of its graduates but has failed to provide the laborers needed to work in the Lord's vineyard. In fact, an argument could be made that the academic model now embraced by the American Church has so restricted the number of active priests that it has become a significant factor in the decline of the number of practicing Catholics over the past thirty years.

There are of course other secular obstacles that many times must be overcome by the seminarian before he is recommended for ordination. In too many dioceses, an applicant for the seminary must show proper respect and even deference to those in the Church who do not always agree with the Church. Too often seminarians are told that even the dissenters who in previous times would have been called heretics are to be loved and respected for their efforts to "lead the Church into the modern age." If the man is so naive as to protest that the dissenters are promoting contraception, abortion and euthanasia, married priests, and the ordination of women and homosexuals, he will be eliminated because he is "sexually repressed and doctrinally rigid." If, however, he appears to be unsure of his Catholic convictions, he will be referred to the diocesan's consulting psychologist for "growth counseling." But, if one or two years of psychological counseling on a fee for service basis is not successful in alienating the man from his faith in the Church, he is given a negative recommendation from the psychologist which usually means another dismissal and another lost vocation. One psychologist told a seminarian that his distinction between the goodness of the homosexual person and the sinfulness of homosexual behavior was proof of his homophobia.

For those men who are exclusively heterosexual in orientation and devoutly orthodox in faith, the difficulty of becoming a priest at the present time must be faced in an objective and dispassionate manner. The most crucial factor in getting ordained is

to avoid being dismissed from a seminary or diocese in the first place. Once a man has become rejected or dismissed from a diocese or seminary, he becomes "damaged goods," and very few dioceses will give him another chance because they don't want to be seen as taking inferior candidates. This is true even if they know and believe that the dismissal was unjust. Image is very important! Contrary to what most American Catholics may think, seminarians have no rights under Canon law or under the Constitution of the United States. The rationale for this is simple: seminarians have no rights under Canon law because no one has a right to ordination, and the civil courts have not intervened because of the doctrine of the "separation of Church and state."

This may seem patently unfair to Americans who are used to a government of checks and balances to provide an equilibrium of power and a right to appeal unjust governmental actions, but fortunately the Catholic Church is not like the government of the United States. Even in its human dimension, the Church is antithetical to democratic institutions, and this is necessary because her authority comes from Christ, not from men. Prospective seminarians should not lose heart on account of the hierarchical organization of the Church. Instead, they should take advantage of the great diversity that exists among the various dioceses in the United States. In this age of turmoil and rebellion within the Church, men who feel called to follow Christ as "alteri Christi" should seek out and find one of the many holy and orthodox bishops who are acting as faithful successors to the Apostles, who are seeking men to ordain for their people. Those who feel called to ordination must begin to think of their vocations in terms of the Universal Church and not merely their own diocese.

Bishops who want to ordain orthodox, heterosexual and celibate men should say so explicitly in the public forum, not only in their own dioceses but in the regional advertising media. Many young men who have read the "sex scandals" about a few priests are turned off. What they mistakenly see is a tolerance for sexual misconduct. Others have known priests more worldly than the average layman, and this seems to be a greater "turn off" than the statistically miniscule number of "scandals."

These bishops must not only proclaim publicly that they want these kinds of men as priests, they must make every effort to insure that their vocations director is completely orthodox, heterosexual and celibate. They must know that the seminaries where their men are trained do not tolerate the homosexual or feminist agendas in their classrooms or in their dormitories. It will take the personal attention of each bishop to protect the vocations that God has seen fit to send him, and in those cases where a man is truly

mentally and emotionally incapable of performing the duties of a priest, he should be dismissed with the greatest of charity and encouraged to follow Christ as a layman.

However, prospective seminarians should realize that the demands placed on bishops often make it impossible for them to personally supervise every important aspect of the selection and training of his future priests. Therefore, it is incumbent upon that man to investigate the performance of the diocese where he wants to serve and the seminary where he will be sent for formation. The more thorough his investigation, the less likely he will face dismissal, and the more likely he will reach ordination. There is an old adage in business that says, “nothing succeeds like success.” If a diocese has been ordaining an adequate number of men to the priesthood, it is a good indication that the bishop has made this a high priority and that he has appointed competent priests to help him. On the other hand, if a diocese is not ordaining an adequate number of men based on its need and population, it may indicate that there is an internal struggle within the clergy regarding their expectations of what a seminarian/priest should be. The same is true of the seminary where the diocese sends their men to be trained. A prospective seminarian should ask his vocation director where he would be sent for his priestly formation and request permission to visit the seminary to see if the seminary is orthodox in its academic and spiritual formation, and if it adheres to the Magisterium. The right choice of diocese and seminary is crucial for any heterosexual and orthodox man who feels called to the priesthood.

A former seminarian wrote about the pain and anguish he experienced in his efforts to become a priest. This man, now 33 years old wrote: “In my journeys, I have looked upon the faces of kind and loving priests, deacons and bishops . . . because the Lord is present and His glory radiates from their hearts. I have seen compassion no less shown than Jesus Himself as He raised Jairus’ daughter or the son of the widow in Naim. But worst of all things; crueler than death itself, I have seen the corrupt souls and hope-emptied hearts of clergy whose sloth and mediocrity sicken the Spirit of God Himself within the flock they are given to care for, so that the joy of the Lord’s presence has left them as in the days of old when the Presence left a defiled temple. How sad, how truly dead among the dead have these people become. . . . I feel worn from the battle, discarded and emptied out. My faith and life alone belong to Him Who spoke creation into being—and to Him alone do I cry out. But then the Spirit comes to me and lifts my head upward to behold Truth; Truth itself nailed to a cross which now hangs on my

wall—dominating my room and looming over my life—the promise of Resurrection hidden well in the lifeless corpse.”

As the Church approaches her third millennium, there is an air of optimism and renewal that is wonderfully infectious, a new springtime for Christianity. This renewal will certainly involve the entire Church, but especially the priests and bishops who sustain God’s people by Word and Sacrament. They are the lifeblood of the Church. Unfortunately in the past, many who have felt called by God to follow Christ in this special way have too often been under attack by dissidents, feminists, and homosexuals that were aided and abetted by psychologists who saw themselves as “change agents” of the Catholic Church. The renewal of priestly formation should start with this simple question: Could Jesus of Nazareth be ordained a priest for my diocese? •

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## A Self-Imposed Shortage

*The alleged "crisis" in priestly vocations cannot be separated from persistent complaints about the plight of the orthodox seminarian*

—Michael S. Rose

One enduring subject in the landscape of Catholic America is popularly known as the "vocations crisis." Many will be familiar with this tale: Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church in the United States has seen fewer and fewer young men devoting themselves to the sacrificial life of the priesthood. Various reasons are given: materialism, practical and philosophical atheism, skepticism, subjectivism, individualism, hedonism, social injustice; parents who don't want their children to be priests; and the "unrealistic expectation" of life-long celibacy.

While many of these factors have surely contributed to the dwindling number of Catholic priests in our now overwhelmingly secular society, these explanations may obscure the heart of the alleged vocations crisis. Parents, society, celibacy, and materialism are inconclusive explanations for the declining number of priestly vocations.

In 1995 Archbishop Elden Curtiss—a former

seminary rector and vocations director--penned an editorial for Omaha's diocesan newspaper, offering a refreshingly candid look at the vocations crisis:

It seems to me that the vocation "crisis" is precipitated and continued by people who want to change the Church's agenda, by people who do not support orthodox candidates loyal to the magisterial teaching of the Pope and bishops, and by people who actually discourage viable candidates from seeking priesthood and vowed religious life as the Church defines these ministries.

Archbishop Curtiss made a second, equally interesting observation in his editorial:

I am personally aware of certain vocations directors, vocations teams, and evaluation boards who turn away candidates who do not support the possibility of ordaining women or who defend the Church's teaching about artificial birth control, or who exhibit a strong piety toward certain devotions, such as the rosary.

If there is a determined effort to discourage these sorts of candidates from the priesthood, the shortage of priests that results is caused not by a lack of vocations but by deliberate attitudes and policies which effectively thwart true vocations.

### **Obstacles for the orthodox**

The words of Archbishop Curtiss have been confirmed by others time and again. In the course of researching a book that seeks to substantiate the archbishop's observations, this writer devoted a better part of the Jubilee year to interviewing dozens of seminarians, former seminarians, and recently ordained priests, representing 40 dioceses and 19 seminaries. In the four years before beginning that systematic research, I had spoken informally to numerous friends and acquaintances who had experience in seminaries. Each interviewee described himself as more or less representative of the "orthodox seminarian" to whom Archbishop Curtiss had alluded. These are men who are loyal to the teachings of the Church, look to the Pope as their spiritual father and leader, pray the rosary, and embrace the male, celibate priesthood.

It certainly must be acknowledged at the outset that not every candidate who enters a seminary has a genuine vocation to the priesthood. The seminary is a place designed to help a man to discern this vocation. Many eventually leave their studies because they have determined that a priestly vocation is not theirs. Others are rightly dismissed from the institutions due to irregularities that would indicate a particular man

is not suited for the priesthood: sexual perversions, addictions, mental or emotional problems, incompetence, unwillingness to accept Church teaching, or lack of social or personal skills.

Insurmountable evidence, however, reveals that various other obstacles--man-made or "orchestrated," if you will--undermine authentic priestly vocations, leading to the orthodox seminarian's early dismissal or his voluntary departure (assuming he is admitted to a seminary program in the first place). Many of these circumstances owe their genesis to the seminary environment itself. So many orthodox seminarians, ex-seminarians and recently ordained priests have such remarkably similar stories to relate, the tales are difficult to dismiss as mere anecdotes.

Based on interviews I have conducted with 75 men and several seminary faculty members thus far, these stories, often accompanied by documented evidence, consistently reveal the same obstacles placed in the path of the orthodox candidate. These most commonly include the application screening process; psychological counseling; faculty members and spiritual directors who focus on detecting signs of orthodoxy among seminarians; a practical moral life of some students and faculty that is not compatible with the Christian standard; acceptance of homosexual practices and ideology; promotion of ideas and teachings which undermine Catholic belief in the most fundamental doctrines of the Church; disregard for proper liturgy and traditional devotions; and spiritual and psychological manipulation and abuse.

It appears that many of those in positions of authority at our seminaries are singularly motivated by a desire to redefine Catholic theology, the priesthood, and Church ministry according to their own "progressive" model. That model includes women priests, lay-run parishes, secularized worship, and a "soft" approach to Church doctrine; in other words, an emasculated, politically correct Church.

This "determined effort" (in the words of Archbishop Curtiss) to discourage priestly vocations among orthodox Catholics often involves a very similar pattern: the same characters, the same manipulative techniques, and the same injustices. Yet few bishops and priests have shown any willingness to heed the many complaints they have received about the process of priestly formation.

The disaffected orthodox seminarian is rarely supported in his grievances; he is often labeled as a troublemaker or a reactionary zealot, unfit for the priesthood. Once dismissed from one seminary he is blackballed from others, effectively lumped in with those who are potential sex offenders. Thus, once dismissed, it is difficult (though not always impossible) to be accepted into another seminary,

diocese, or religious order.

The network of seminary rectors, psychologists, and priest-makers is a small and tight one. Communications are rapid and effective in purging the orthodox man from the seminary system. When the orthodox seminarian applies to transfer to another diocese, he is invariably asked whether he has ever been in seminary before. If the answer is affirmative, a call is immediately placed to the previous seminary, and a negative evaluation (from rector, psychologist, or spiritual director) is received. This applies not only to the seminarian who was formally expelled, but also to the one who left on his own initiative out of frustration or disgust.

The fact is that, for better or worse, a handful of people have extraordinary power to make or break many, many priestly vocations.

### **The Gatekeeper Phenomenon**

For some men, the road to ordination is cut short before it really begins. Even before a young man is ready to apply to a seminary, there are numerous forces that work against any possible priestly vocation he may be discerning. The feminization of the liturgy, poor catechesis, the example set by unmanly priests, and the many sexual scandals involving the clergy are four main deterrents for the discerning young man.

Once the young man has discerned that he would like to test his vocation in seminary, he applies to a diocese or religious order, naturally expecting that the institution will support his interest in the priesthood--especially in light of the ballyhooed "priest shortage." Many dioceses and religious orders, however, set up obstacles--although they may not acknowledge them as such--that deter the orthodox applicant from continuing to follow his call to the priesthood.

For instance, applicants must often pass a litmus test on the subject of "what the Church should be." Often this means that the applicant must not let on that he accepts Church teaching on issues of authority and sexual morality, lest he be discarded as "rigid" or "dysfunctional." One of the most critical questions posed to potential seminarians, as Archbishop Curtiss indicated, is whether or not the applicant approves of priestly ordination for women. This question puts the orthodox seminarian in a difficult position. If he reveals that he agrees with the magisterium that the Church does not have the ability to ordain women, he is liable to be dismissed from further consideration. If he lies and says he is "open" to the idea, then he is no better than... well, a liar.

Although often it is the diocesan Vocations Director (usually a priest) who conducts the initial

interview, it is also common that an assistant, usually a woman religious, serves as the inquisitor. One scenario--which would seem incredible, except that I heard similar stories from numerous seminarians--is that during an interview with the nun in the vocations office, the phone rings or there is a knock at the door. Sister answers and begins to engage in an animated conversation, in the course of which she states enthusiastically that she fully expects to be ordained to the priesthood in a matter of years, or otherwise makes it clear that she is a proponent of women's ordination. I personally have heard this sort of account (from various corners of the nation, and with a little variation in details) too many times to believe that the nuns were carrying on authentic conversations. This was a type of staged intimidation, which applicants to the more liberal dioceses were forced to endure if they hoped to proceed to the priesthood. The nun was obviously trying to gauge the applicant's reaction. Many would-be seminarians elected to say, "No thanks," and end the process right there at the beginning, believing that the nun's actions were a reflection of the reigning attitudes in the diocese they were seeking to serve.

Other inquisitors are not quite so dramatic in their questioning techniques, yet the results are essentially the same. It is a psychological game that often proves discouraging to vocations. And that is exactly the point.

In similar instances applicants are asked how they might respond to a hypothetical pastoral situation. For instance: If you were assigned to a parish in which the pastor was contravening Church law in the administration of his parish, what would you do? Or, if a man confessed to you that he and his wife have been using artificial contraception, but that they will continue to do so, would you give him absolution? Another popular hypothesis is framed this way: What would you do if you were celebrating Mass at your new parish and a laywoman came up to concelebrate with you before the Eucharistic prayer?

Aside from the peculiarity of the questioning, such probing again puts the orthodox applicant at risk. How can he respond honestly without offending a vocations director who obviously wants to establish the applicant's "flexibility" or "open-mindedness" at the expense of Church teaching and discipline?

But this initial interview is only the beginning of a battery of evaluations and tests that are designed to weed out applicants who will not be suitable for a particular formation program. In many cases this process is an honest one. Proper screening of applicants for the priesthood is obviously of grave importance to the local Church. Unfortunately, this process is too often abused, and those who are sent away are those faithful to the teachings of the

Church--especially those who properly accept the traditional role of the priest, including the commitment to lifelong celibacy. This is what I call the "gatekeeper phenomenon."

At the same time, despite the rigorous scrutiny applicants must pass through in order to enroll in a seminary program, all too many sexual deviates easily advance. There is no need to rehash the evidence on this issue in these pages. But one wonders: if the screening process is not catching the deviates, is the process really designed to weed them out, or is it designed merely to prune the orthodox from the seminary vine?

The psychological evaluation that is mandatory for each seminarian is also worthy of mention. A psychologist--who may not be Catholic or even Christian--probes the sexual and emotional history of a young man, often getting into a line of questioning that seems a tad perverted from the perspective of the average young man. It is not uncommon, for instance, for the psychologist to inquire about the applicant's beliefs on issues of homosexuality. Whereas one might understand this line of questioning if it were undertaken with an eye to root out those inclined to homosexuality or those who are involved in the gay lifestyle, the intent is more often a search to discover if the applicant is prepared to accept the practice of homosexuality. If the psychologist is not looking for an approbation of immoral acts, he at least would like to discover that the applicant is "open" in this regard.

And what happens if the young man is not ready to accept homosexuality? The orthodox applicant may well state Church teaching on homosexuality, saying that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and contrary to the natural law. But if he does, the psychologist is liable to report that the applicant has an "unhealthy sexuality," is "sexually immature," or has "sexual hang-ups." The applicant who is "open-minded," on the other hand, is deemed healthy and mature, with an "integrated sexuality."

### **The Gay Subculture**

If the applicant is accepted into a seminary program, he is liable to encounter homosexual issues many more times throughout his seminary career, sometimes in very direct ways. For years we have been hearing stories about sexual improprieties in our nation's seminaries, and these stories have effectively deterred many Catholic parents from encouraging a priestly vocation among their sons. The stories have, to be sure, dissuaded many young men from testing their vocations in certain dioceses. One book that is currently popular among priests and religious who have been advocating the elimination of mandatory clerical celibacy acknowledges the "gay subculture"

in many of our seminaries. Written by Father Donald B. Cozzens, rector of St. Mary's Seminary in Cleveland, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* warns of a growing public concern that the priesthood is becoming a "gay profession." The author spends considerable time addressing the issue from his perspective inside the seminary.

Father Cozzens states that "straight men in a predominantly or significantly gay environment commonly experience chronic destabilization, a common symptom of which is self-doubt." Compounding the challenge of studying, praying, and living alongside gay seminarians, he adds, "are seminary faculties which include a disproportionate number of homosexually oriented persons." In other words, this gay subculture, comprised of both students and faculty at certain seminaries, deters the healthy heterosexual man from continuing to study and prepare for the priesthood.

This is putting the issue mildly. How can any orthodox seminarian expect to be properly formed and prepared for the Catholic priesthood when he is constantly subjected to attitudes and behavior that are clearly contrary to Church teaching and discipline? How many heterosexual seminarians, whether orthodox or not, have decided to leave the seminary and abandon their vocations because of the gay subculture they were forced to confront-- because they had been propositioned, harassed, or even molested? (One East Coast seminary is even nicknamed "The Pink Palace" because of its open acceptance of the gay subculture.)

And what becomes of those seminarians who stay? Seminary life can be made difficult for the "dissenting" seminarian: the one who does not condone sexual deviancy. I have heard many stories of seminarians being propositioned or harassed by fellow students and of faculty members who do not take their protests seriously. Last year, for instance, one seminarian was forced to procure a restraining order against a fellow student when his rector summarily dismissed his complaints that he was being sexually harassed by an "out-of-the-closet" gay classmate. The young man finally left that seminary, while the gay seminarian who had been harassing him advanced in good standing.

Seminarians who accept the Church's teaching on sexual morality have also been threatened by classmates and faculty who have warned them that if they did not submit to homosexuality--at least to defend the normalcy of homosexual acts, if not actively to take part in them--their priestly careers would be in jeopardy. One seminary professor related to me how she was harassed by both students and fellow faculty members because of her overt acceptance of Church teaching on homosexuality.

She became the focus of bitter condemnations even though her courses did not address the topic directly; one faculty colleague actually spat on her.

The orthodox seminarian is presented with another predicament in this regard: If there is something deviant or immoral going on at the seminary and he brings it to the attention of his superiors, he is likely risking expulsion. The members of seminary faculties usually do not appreciate students who go to their superiors with complaints, especially about sexual foibles. One priest remarked of his seminary experience: "Many of my fellow students reminded me of the three monkeys: one with his hands over his eyes; one with his hands over his ears, and the other with his hands over his mouth." The maxim, "See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil," seems to be a standard survival tactic in seminaries. That type of formation does not exactly prepare a seminarian to be a bold preacher of the Gospel. Nevertheless, that is the environment in which many priests are being formed today.

### **Doctrinal and Liturgical Abuses**

Beyond issues of personal immorality, the seminary environment presents a number of other problems for the orthodox seminarian. The most obvious and perhaps the most insidious is heterodoxy. Many faculty members have a terribly difficult time teaching what the Church teaches, and some even find it difficult to hide their disdain for Catholicism.

All too often seminary faculty members assign textbooks written by noted dissenters from Catholic teaching--such as Richard McBrien, Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng, or Charles Curran--and parrot the dogmas of Catholic dissent. Those seminary students hear their instructors tell them that the Bible is "culture-bound," that one religion is as good as the next, that the Pope is not infallible, that the magisterium is abusive, that the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is just a pre-Vatican II myth, that Christ was not really divine, that God is feminine, that the Mass is simply a communal meal, that women should be ordained priests in the name of equality, that homosexuality is normal, and that contraception is morally acceptable. This has been standard fare in many courses taught to our future priests over the past three decades or more. One former seminarian remarked on the content of the courses offered at his seminary: "The faculty followed everything from Pascendi Dominici Gregis down to the last detail." (He was referring to the encyclical in which Pope Pius X catalogued the errors of modernism.)

Yet many of the ideas being taught in seminaries today go well beyond the scope of even these familiar

tenets of modernist ideology. Aggressive feminist theories are often put forth by religious sisters on the faculties. The widespread devotion to liberation theology and to various forms of Jungian psychology makes it clear that some of the teachers who are entrusted with the formation of future priests do not support the Catholic priesthood as the Church defines it. In fact, they do not support the Church, her hierarchy, her Eucharist, or her liturgy.

When the orthodox seminarian objects to false teachings, he is mocked and ridiculed for his "old-fashioned" views, called immature or infantile, and singled out for particularly harsh treatment. The desire for a "plurality of opinions"--a goal much espoused in seminaries today--stops short of a willingness to hear out the complaints of orthodox students.

Liturgical piety is used as another reason for discrimination against the orthodox seminarian. The powers-that-be in many seminaries have been perplexed over the past few years by the increasing demand by students for traditional devotions such as Eucharistic adoration, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, public rosary, and novenas. In response to this resurgence in traditional piety, the orthodox seminarians are often denied the opportunity for Eucharistic adoration, or forbidden to pray the rosary anywhere outside their own rooms. During Mass it is not uncommon for the celebrants, especially those who consider themselves "liturgists," to take great liberties with the liturgical rubrics. It is common, too, for seminarians to be forbidden to kneel at the proper parts of the Mass, such as during the Eucharistic prayer.

One priest said of his seminary days: "It seems like they wanted to break us of any 'romantic notions' we may have had of how Mass ought to be celebrated." And he observed that this process continued even after his ordination--when, it seems, young orthodox priests were placed in parishes with liberal pastors who still fancied 1970s-style liturgical experimentation.

But liturgical abuses have effects far beyond offending the seminarian's sensibilities. They speak to the heart of the orthodox man studying for the priesthood. They speak of a crisis of authority and obedience, which all too often leads the seminarian to frustration and even contempt for his superiors. Unfortunately, this gets expressed in ways that are seen as ""rigid" and "uncharitable."

### **Playing the Game**

The orthodox seminarian will naturally object to what he recognizes as false teachings or liturgical abuses, but once he does he has set himself up against the

system, and it becomes increasingly difficult for him to advance toward ordination. Some young men are able to make it through the program--although they do not emerge unscathed--by writing on tests and answering in class what the professors want to hear. This tactic, to be sure, does not make for positive formation of courageous priests. First the students receive false teaching and observe illicit practices. Then they fall into the habit of saying what people want to hear, rather than what is true.

The seminarians who learn to "play the game" in this cynical way may actually emerge from the seminary worse equipped for their priestly ministry than their "open-minded" classmates. Although they may consider themselves orthodox, they have been programmed to accept a host of errors--if only by their silence. Nor can they be said to be well formed intellectually, no matter what they did outside the seminary to counteract the steady diet of dissident theology, secular ideology, and liturgical fads during their student career. Even if they do recognize some blatant errors in what they are taught, they may not ever learn the full truth.

Some seminarians are counseled to "play the game" just until they are ordained, so that then they can burst forth to defend the Church, the Pope, and the magisterium. But rarely does this actually happen. Those who are ordained under such circumstances generally continue to "play the game" indefinitely--just as the politician who lies, cheats, and steals in order to gain office does not become an honest man once he takes the oath. After

Source: [www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=20530](http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=20530)  
Seminary numbers up in orthodox US dioceses

## Seminary numbers up in orthodox US dioceses

*From AD2000.com.au, an Australian webzine, March 2001:*

Those US dioceses which have consistently promoted orthodoxy both in their parishes and in their seminaries have been affected little, if at all, by any "vocations crisis" or shortage of priests. Nor are the bishops of such dioceses issuing pastoral letters introducing parish "clusters" or giving instructions on how to celebrate the liturgy in the absence of a priest.

Dioceses such as Wichita, Lincoln, Arlington, Fargo and Peoria have consistently been ordaining as many or more men each year than liberal dioceses

five to ten times their size.

In the Rockford, Illinois, diocese, Bishop Thomas Doran ordained eight priests last year, the highest number of ordinations there in 41 years. In Virginia, the Diocese of Arlington ordained 55 men to the priesthood in the years 1991-98. And the Diocese of Peoria, with a Catholic population of just 232,000, ordained 72 priests in the years 1991-98, an average of nine each year.

In comparison, nearby Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with a Catholic population three times that of Peoria, ordained just two priests in 1998, while Detroit, with a Catholic population of 1.5 million (almost seven times that of Peoria) ordained an average of eight men each year from 1991-98.

Archbishop Curtiss' Omaha archdiocese, considered one of the most conservative in the Midwest, ordained an average of seven men in the years from 1991-98 for a population of just 215,000 Catholics. Compare that to the Diocese of Madison, Wisconsin (with a slightly larger Catholic population), which ordained a total of four men during the entire period of 1991-98.

Other dioceses, such as Denver and Atlanta, have turned their vocation programs around by actively supporting orthodox vocations and promoting fidelity to Church teaching, while emphasising the traditional role of the priest as defined by the Church. Atlanta now has 61 seminarians, up from just nine in 1985. Denver boasted 68 seminarians in 1999, up from 26 in 1991.

The Archdiocese of Denver has taken a unique approach to the issue of reforming its seminary. Several years ago then-Archbishop Francis Stafford bought St Thomas Seminary after the Vincentian institution closed due to a dwindling student body. The problems, moral and pedagogical, were well known and documented.

### New evangelization

Last year Archbishop Charles Chaput (*ed: a native-American*) re-opened the Denver seminary under a new name and with a new faculty.

St John Vianney Theological Seminary is decidedly rooted in the theology of Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger. Its faculty and students are overtly and joyfully supportive of the Catholic priesthood. Its mission is clearly to form holy and healthy priests for the "new evangelisation." Rather than reading texts penned by dissidents who rose to notoriety in the 1960s, the Vianney curriculum emphasises the philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas.

In August 1998, Saint Gregory the Great College Seminary opened in the Diocese of Lincoln, making it the first free-standing diocesan seminary to

be opened in the United States for many decades.

This year the 60-student seminary of the US branch of the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter moved to the Diocese of Lincoln, which has always been considered one of the most conservative spots in the country. (In 1998, Lincoln boasted an amazing 44 seminarians for a diocese of just 85,000; the comparably sized Diocese of Covington, Kentucky, claimed only seven seminarians that year.)

His analysis may sound simplistic, but Archbishop Curtiss has outlined the solution to the problems that have beset our Catholic seminaries and vocations offices for the past four decades. He first recognises that "orthodoxy breeds vocations." Then he candidly suggests that it is time to pay close attention to the dioceses which have been unaffected by the priest shortage or vocations crisis. If we are unwilling to recognise the reasons for their success, he says, "then we allow ourselves to become supporters of a self-fulfilling prophecy about the shortage of vocations."

The archbishop identifies the successful dioceses and religious orders as those that promote orthodoxy and loyalty to the Church, are unambiguous about the ordained priesthood as the Church defines that ministry, have bishops who are willing and able to confront dissent, and are willing to call forth candidates who share their loyalty to the Pope.

"When this formula, based on total fidelity to Church teaching, is followed in dioceses and religious communities," he writes, "then vocations will increase."

Bishops would do well to take the advice of Archbishop Curtiss and look at successful dioceses and seminary programs to see what they are doing. They would do well to look to the dioceses which are not presently experiencing either a vocations crisis or a priest shortage. Reform of the nation's seminaries and vocations offices is a key. If that reform is not undertaken, the self-imposed priest shortage will occupy Catholic resources which would be better spent on evangelisation, spiritual formation, and performing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy

Source: [www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2001/mar2001p6\\_149.html](http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2001/mar2001p6_149.html)

## Sydney seminary growth based on orthodoxy, fidelity

— Fr Julian Porteous

*Fr Porteous is Rector of the Seminary of the Good Shepherd, Strathfield, Sydney, which trains future priests for the Sydney Archdiocese and other Sydney and NSW dioceses. Since his appointment to Sydney, Archbishop George Pell has given the seminary top priority and his full support. Numbers there have been steadily increasing since 2001, with around 40 likely to be in the seminary for 2003.*

**At the US Cardinals' meeting with the Pope on 22-23 April 2002, it was proposed that the Holy See undertake an apostolic visitation of US seminaries. This visitation (an inspection by bishops) was an expression of the concern felt in the Vatican about certain issues related to priestly formation, following the allegations of sexual abuse by priests.**

Some recently published books have raised questions regarding the suitable preparation of men for priestly ministry. Michael Rose's *Goodbye, Good Men* has made some bold accusations about vocations committees' and seminary formation staffs' attitude towards encouraging the vocations of men committed to the Church's teaching. As well, the question of the presence of a gay subculture in some seminaries was raised.

Donald Cozzens' book, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*, also raised a number of issues confronting both priests and seminarians in the contemporary North American Church. He mentions the "vocation crisis", the "gay crisis" and the "authority crisis" among others and paints a rather pessimistic picture of the state of the priesthood.

### Scrutiny of seminaries

The year 2002 has been a very difficult year for priests and for the confidence and trust of the Catholic people in their priests. While the vast majority of priests faithfully serve the Church and their people, the constant media scrutiny, the accusations of serious sexual impropriety and the steady stream of negative comments cannot but undermine the morale of both clergy and laity.

In this environment, the quality of seminary formation has come under close scrutiny. The Pope has requested an investigation. Most priests have a natural concern as to what sort of clergy seminaries are preparing for the future; equally, they wonder what approaches are being taken to these critical issues in seminary programs. Many lay Catholics are vitally interested in these matters and are asking

significant questions.

George Weigel, in his 2002 book, *The Courage to be Catholic*, addresses some searching questions about seminary formation. His questions range from recruitment and screening, to the character of the education for chastity, and to questions about the approach taken to the issue of homosexuality. He also raises questions concerning the maintenance of theological orthodoxy.

The Catholic people have a right to ask these questions. They have a right to be answered and be reassured that the seminary formation programs are on the right track - forming priests sound in their faith, sexuality and dedication to the priestly life.

### Observations

With these opening comments I would like to offer some observations on the Good Shepherd Seminary in Sydney. These are made by one who was a parish priest in 2001 and has just completed one year in a new and challenging environment of being rector of a seminary.

Coming to something new from another experience provides immediate impressions and can facilitate fresh insights that may be useful. At the same time, I am conscious that these initial impressions and insights have come in the midst of the turbulence and controversy mentioned at the beginning of this article.

One immediate impression was what appeared to be a new type of seminarian, compared with this writer's memories of his class in the late 1960s. Seminarians of that era generally came to the seminary directly after completing high school and vocations were often fostered in Catholic families where there were a greater number of children.

Today's seminarians enter at a later age, often the mid-20s and beyond (a number are in their 40s). They come from smaller family units, and one detects a reluctance among some families for their sons to pursue their vocations. Some young men never enter because of adverse family responses.

A number of these vocations appear not so much to emerge from a general solid Catholic culture fostered in home, parish and school, but rather out of a personal conviction of faith akin to conversion. These are a "post-postmodern" generation, who have embraced a Catholicism that provides a solid grounding and focus for their lives in the midst of a relativised ethical and social culture experienced in the world around them. They look particularly to Pope John Paul II, the only pope they have ever known, as representing what they seek from the Church - strong and courageous ideals, a countercultural ethical position, and a strongly

transcendental vision of faith.

### Hope for future

*The New Faithful*, a book by Colleen Carroll, documents this phenomenon and the emergence of a generation of young Catholics with an idealism and a hope for the future of Catholicism. She has subtitled her book, "Why young adults are embracing Christian Orthodoxy". An article by the Academic Dean of Mount Saint Mary's Seminary of the West, Richard Marzheuser, titled "A new generation is on the rise in seminaries", also reflects on this phenomenon. He comments on their spirit - "they are motivated, they are energetic and full of ideals and I do not expect their zeal for the Faith or the Church to die out any time soon".

Theirs is a faith that wants the assurance of the clarity of teaching found in the Catholic Catechism. Theirs is a love of the liturgy as an act of worship of Almighty God. They want to be unashamedly Catholic and are willing and prepared to declare this to the world.

One other aspect of today's seminarians is that many have emerged from the multicultural character of the Church in Australia. Increasingly the face of the Church in a city like Sydney is becoming Asian. For instance, the Archdiocese now has a number of Vietnamese priests, some of whom were seminarians in their own country and, forced to flee following the fall of Saigon, have completed their formation in Australia. Others are now emerging from the vibrant Vietnamese community. From these ordinations of recent years we now have a number of parish priests around Sydney.

These men come to the seminary with a faith nurtured in their own ethnic environment. Some come with language difficulties. Many future parish priests will speak with an accent. These priests from ethnic backgrounds will bring to their ministry a contribution to the Church in Australia from their experience of Catholic life lived in their ethnic communities. What is important here is that the issue is not the building of an Australian Catholic Church, but of the Catholic Church in Australia reflecting that it is simply being what it is by name, Catholic. In this regard, being Catholic is more important than being Australian!

### Formation

In 1992, in his longest Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* ("I will Give you Shepherds"), Pope John Paul II highlighted the importance of human formation in preparing seminarians for priestly ministry. The priest is a human being first

and remains a human being, though transformed by grace. The priest is a "living image" of Jesus, and so the human perfection which shines forth in the Lord should be evident in the priest as well. Furthermore, the priest's ministry is directed to his fellow human beings, and he will be effective only to the degree that his own humanity serves as a bridge between God and human beings. The priest must be "humanly as credible and acceptable as possible", says the Holy Father and he goes on to add, "the whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked suitable human formation" (PDV 43).

Seminaries have responded in a variety of ways to this emphasis. One approach has been to engage the services of psychologists or counsellors as part of the seminary staff. An approach being developed at Good Shepherd Seminary is to focus on the formation of Christian character by drawing on classical Catholic teaching on the virtues.

As part of the seminary program students study and seek to grow in the key Christian virtues, especially those virtues that are particularly priestly. Special emphasis is given to the charism of celibacy whereby the seminarian willingly gives over his whole self to "the Lord's service" (cf I Cor 7). Seminary life provides many opportunities to develop a full and rounded Christian character.

The Pope speaks of future priests being "balanced people, strong and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities. They need to be educated to love the truth, to be loyal, to respect every person, to have a sense of justice, to be true to their word, to be genuinely compassionate, to be men of integrity and, especially, to be balanced in judgment and behaviour." (PDV 43).

Preparation for pastoral ministry has always been integral to priestly formation. In keeping with developing educational theories and practices which demand accountability, seminary programs have become more demanding, comprehensive and better supervised in recent years. While these are important developments, they should not detract from an emerging concern - the question of priestly identity.

The Congregation for the Clergy recently released a document (August 2002) that spoke of the role of the priest as pastor and leader in the parish community. First, in its discussion of the "Central Elements of the Ministry and Life of Priests", is priestly identity. It seeks to clarify the distinction between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood, as one "not only in grade but also in essence" (§6). It speaks of the need to overcome what is now being identified as "the clericalising of the laity and the secularising of the clergy" (§7).

Thomas McGovern's book, *Priestly Identity*, presents a theology of priesthood centred on this question of identity. It is an important consideration in the current climate where, since the Second Vatican Council, so much emphasis has been placed on the role of the lay person in the Church.

In the light on this issue of priestly identity, formation for what has been called "priestcraft" needs better definition. "Priestcraft", in this context, refers to the practical dimensions of priestly ministry in its sacramental and pastoral expression.

While the theological institute that the students attend, The Catholic Institute of Sydney, offers teaching in the theology of priestly ministry and in the theology of the sacraments, the seminary formation teaches the students the practical expression of this theology, for instance, basic sacramental praxis. Priests with pastoral experience and an understanding of the Church's mind with regard to the liturgy and the sacraments teach the students, bringing a strong priestly character to the instruction.

### **New evangelization**

One area for consideration in the formation of priests for the future is that of the constant call of the Holy Father for the Church to engage in the "new evangelisation". Priests must not only be competent pastoral men, but must have the hearts of evangelists. Priests for the new millennium must set themselves and their parishes on a missionary footing

The Year 2002 has been a year of crisis for the priesthood. George Weigel, in *The Courage To Be Catholic*, sees the crisis as an opportunity for reform. The reform he identifies centres on what he calls, "the great adventure of orthodoxy". Weigel says, "Rediscovering the courage to be Catholic is the way in which all people of the Church - bishops, priests and laity - will transform scandal into reform, crisis into opportunity" (p.231).

Seminaries need to embrace this challenge. Sound formation of future priests is vital to the future health and well-being of the Church.

Source: [www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2003/feb2003p3\\_1233.html](http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2003/feb2003p3_1233.html)  
(February 2003)

## Sydney seminary's growth continues

— Michael Gilchrist

*The number of students at the Seminary of the Good Shepherd in Sydney has continued to increase this year with 44 seminarians enrolled along with another three studying in Rome. This is double the number of five years ago when Archbishop Pell was transferred from Melbourne to Sydney. A similar increase had earlier occurred in Melbourne following Archbishop Pell's reforms at the Corpus Christi Seminary.*

In Sydney, there are also 18 students at the recently established Redemptoris Mater Seminary run by the Neocatechumenate.

Of those at the Good Shepherd Seminary, three are from Adelaide, two each from Lismore and Canberra-Goulburn, and one each from Wollongong and Broome. There are also three training for dioceses in Burma and two for Uganda. The remainder, numbering 30, are for the Sydney Archdiocese, plus those in Rome and at the Redemptoris Mater Seminary.

### Other seminaries

The seminary situation elsewhere is also promising.

In Perth, the St Charles Seminary had 20 students for 2006, following eight ordinations for the Archdiocese in December 2005. Of the 20 students, fifteen were for Perth, four for Geraldton and one for Bunbury. The Neocatechumenate's Redemptoris Mater Seminary had 20 students for 2006. Since 1997 a total of 20 priests have been ordained from this seminary with two more expected during 2006.

In Melbourne, numbers have also increased, with ten new seminarians entering in 2005 - all for the Melbourne Archdiocese. Of the total of 35 seminarians at Corpus Christi in 2006, 26 were for the Melbourne Archdiocese, three each for Vietnam and for the Sandhurst Diocese, and one each for Ballarat, Sale and Bathurst (NSW).

Wagga Wagga's Vianney College has twelve students in residence, one for Armidale, and 11 for the Wagga Wagga Diocese. This is a remarkable figure for such a small diocese.

However, Brisbane's Holy Spirit Seminary, which caters for Queensland's five dioceses, had just three students in residence in 2006, plus two others on pastoral placement.

No new students entered in 2004 or in 2005, and only one entered this year for the whole of Queensland.

Within the Sydney metropolitan area the Diocese of Parramatta makes its own arrangements for

training seminarians, with none attending the Good Shepherd Seminary, despite its close proximity. The Broken Bay Diocese normally sends students to the seminary, but there were none there in 2006.

Sydney's success at attracting more students for the priesthood can be attributed in part to Cardinal Pell's high profile leadership as well as a successful vocations program run by auxiliary Bishop Anthony Fisher.

This program includes two seminarians visiting a parish each weekend and giving testimony at the end of each Mass. On Good Shepherd Sunday, 7 May, all seminarians were involved, speaking at 91 Masses across the archdiocese. As a follow-up for those considering the priesthood, a Vocations (live-in) Retreat Weekend took place at the seminary from the 19-21 May.

Bishop Julian Porteous, Rector of the Good Shepherd Seminary, told me that today's young men are "really interested in a solid Catholic faith and spirituality" and "strongly attracted to clear expressions of Catholic identity".

He explained further, "I am concerned with the state of society. It has changed much since I was in the seminary. The ravages of secularism are great indeed. We face a crisis of truth and a crisis of faith. The crisis of truth - the result of post-modernism - has led to a new generation of young people who desperately seek what is solid and irrefutable. They want to base their lives on rock".

This is reflected in the solid formation provided at the Sydney Seminary, with its daily Rule of Life including celebration of the Divine Office in common in the chapel for morning, evening and night prayers, along with daily Mass. A half hour of meditation is scheduled after morning prayer and is held in the chapel in common.

Three-quarters of an hour of Eucharistic Adoration takes place every night and an hour of Eucharistic Adoration each Sunday afternoon.

An Annual Retreat is held for the whole seminary community and Days of Reflection are set aside during the semester for the community to spend time in prayer or recollection. Seminarians are also expected to make a regular confession.

Silence is required after 10:30pm until after morning Mass the next day and all conversations, phone calls, and TV watching have to stop by 10:30pm.

### Academic formation

Regarding academic formation, which occurs at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, Bishop Porteous makes clear he requires one which "nurtures and inspires the personal faith of the seminarian - faith seeking

understanding" and "presents unambiguously the truth of the Catholic Church captured in the Scriptures and the Tradition".

This, he believes, will produce seminarians "who are soaked in the Word of God as a living word", who have "formed a Catholic mind" and who "have a heightened moral conscience and a firm grasp of Catholic moral teaching".

But the overall goal of the spiritual and academic formation, Bishop Porteous emphasises, is "to produce good and holy priests".

A priest, he says, "stands in the midst of the secular culture of our day as a man set apart. He no longer belongs to the common run of people, even of Christians. He is a priest in their midst. He is a man of God. He belongs not to this world, but to the reign of God.

"As a priest he will be a sign of contradiction, and at times a subject of persecution or rejection. He will be a mystery to many. He will be a reminder of the Divine to others preoccupied with the present".

In these difficult times for the Church in Australia, a major source of hope for the future is the new generation of priests emerging from the country's seminaries

Source: [www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2006/jun2006p6\\_2262.html](http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2006/jun2006p6_2262.html)

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## Orthodoxy = Vocations

— Editor of *Christain Order (England)*

OK - I'll come clean: in middle secondary school I once did score "0" out of 100 for a Maths test (seriously... though you'd reckon they might have found one lousy mark for effort!). And for a full eighteen months I *did* sit in Chemistry classes grimacing like a lunatic at blackboards smothered with impenetrable hieroglyphics (until a bemused Christian Brother announced, rather pathetically: "You don't have a clue what we're talking about, do you son?" - and packed me off to Geography). So, no, figures and formulas are not my thing. And yet, even a mind as 'algebraically challenged' as mine can understand the inexorable logic of the above equation. That orthodoxy breeds vocations is hardly rocket science. Only smug, ignorant, faithless clerics with a death-wish for the priesthood and Religious life could possibly disregard such a simple Catholic truism and the plentiful contemporary evidence available to confirm it. Which leads us to the British episcopates.

As noted in last month's edition, the push for priestless parishes currently tops the episcopal agenda throughout the United Kingdom. It is concerted, relentless and unfolds something like this: by suppressing orthodoxy in general and discriminating against orthodox vocations to the priesthood in particular, the Modernists create a shortage of priests; they then present the shortage as a *fait accompli* requiring the introduction of strategies designed to laicize the clergy and democratize the Church. These strategies are pursued under the skimpiest cover of schemes like "formation and training," "collaborative ministry," "parish amalgamations," "one parish towns," "cluster parishes" and so on, all of which share two striking characteristics: they concentrate on reducing the number of parishes served rather than increasing the number of priests, while studiously ignoring the 1997 Vatican Instruction on the division of sacramental and pastoral roles proper to priests and laity.

In the January number we noted the zealous complicity of the recently appointed Bishops of Nottingham and Arundel & Brighton in this unholy agenda, while Father Martin Edwards forecast the impending dissolution of the priesthood in the Portsmouth diocese, following Bishop Hollis' acceptance of a clerical "formation" programme touted by one of his radical feminist employees. Clerical deconstruction also continues apace in the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle diocese, which, under notorious dissident Bishop Ambrose Griffiths, boasted not a single vocation in 2000. A 20 page discussion document from the Deanery of St Aidan proposes "one parish in each town with one parish priest assisted by other priests and one administrative centre" for Jarrow (currently 4 churches), Hebburn (2 churches) and South Shields (5 churches). Saturated with risible Modernist verbiage - "our people empowered by the Spirit are becoming increasingly disillusioned with a hierarchical model of church;" "shared decision making is beginning to impact on our celebrations as they become more thoroughly community-planned and celebrated;" "issues to do with social justice, ecumenism and community priorities appear increasingly on agendas;" "obstacles that block or hinder collaboration from being experienced will have to be addressed through adult formation if the church in our area is to move forward" - the document is a classic fascist diktat in which faithless liberal clergy feign interest in "collaboration," "openness" and "creativity" while engineering ever greater centralisation and control for the gnostic few. It is a recipe for wiping out a goodly portion of the remaining Mass-goers in each town (still numbering 1,703 faithful in Jarrow's 4 extant parishes), and offers nothing for the massive number

of lapsed Catholics (4,708 in Jarrow) - all of whom need priests of God to offer the Holy Sacrifice, lay on the Body and Blood of Christ and turn on the tap of Eternal Life for them, not cliques of naval-gazing pseudo-clerics running day-care centres and preaching heresy to congregations small enough to circle dance in a broom cupboard.

These unconscionable attitudes and actions are merely representative of the shocking refusal on the part of all the bishops of Scotland and England & Wales even to acknowledge successful vocations policies pursued abroad, let alone adopt them. As usual, the worst of all is Archbishop O'Brien of St Andrews and Edinburgh, beloved patron of some of the most heinous dissidents in this or any other nation, whose Pastoral Letter and accompanying Guidelines of 25 November 2001 on the future of his archdiocese constitute a veritable caricature of all Modernist blueprints for laicising the Church: derisory lip-service being paid to priestly and Religious vocations (two-and-half lines in 9 pages!), while promoting every conceivable initiative to cater for priestless parishes and lay ministries (lay-led funerals, Eucharistic Services, pastoral and administrative assistants etc. etc.). How significant, too, that in cases where a priest is not available for Mass but "where other parishes or Mass centres are near," the Archbishop merely suggests that "parishioners should consider travelling" to them. So much for the Sunday Mass obligation, which the present liberal hegemony is rendering as *passee* as Communion on the tongue.

Cardinal Winning, of course, also oversaw a spectacular decline in vocations during his tenure, preferring endemic disobedience and dissent in his archdiocese to the unpopular orthodox reforms required to replicate dramatic increases in Australia and the US. And like the rest, His Eminence preferred to blame anyone and everything except himself for the priest shortage, commenting typically in his Gonzaga Lecture of 3 April 2001 just before his death: "The many factors which go to make the priest shortage and the lack of any stable pattern of vocations to the priesthood are not going to go away unless there is a radical shift in society's attitudes... we are going to have to get used to the idea that we are unlikely to have a community of priests in many parishes." For good measure, the Cardinal followed up this diabolic *fait accompli* with facile rationalisations about parish closures ("Did we ever really need all the church buildings we presently have?") and the decline in vocations to Religious life ("In the past the number of people entering the religious life was higher than today because the needs were greater"), while promoting the lay agenda on cue ("The laity need to be offered the space to

exercise their charisms in the Church... more effectively and with greater urgency").

The same corrosive party line is duly trotted out at every opportunity by ecclesiastical functionaries - like one Paul Chitnis, Chief Executive of the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund [SCIAF], who pontificated in *The Scotsman* of 23 October 2001: "The old model of Church is changing from an over-concentration on clergy and buildings to a church where the laity are having to recognise it's their church. They are not just guests at this party - it's their party. There is now a huge opportunity for the laity to get involved. If they want to keep parishes open they will have to say 'now it's down to us.' I feel very positive about the future." Why such perverse optimism in the face of vocational meltdown? Because vocations are superfluous to the Modernist equation. As *The Scotsman* further reported: "The Jubilee 2000 campaign to encourage debt cancellation for the Third World was a tremendous success, and *donations to SCIAF continue to rise despite falling numbers of practising Catholics.*" In other words, once Modernism holds sway in any local Church - exemplified by Cardinal Winning's pernicious declaration that "*Dogma is not the least bit important to the ordinary person*" [*The Bush*, Sept. 1978] - naught is left but the humanistic formula of the Social Gospel: money + philanthropy = smug bishops and bureaucrats.

Meanwhile, we read that the posturing Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster believes a simple "dose of 'joy and hope' will solve the Church's big worries, such as falling Mass attendance and the lack of priests in training. He says: 'The answer is not a big campaign to recruit priests. There needs to be a renewal of the whole Catholic community'." We can safely assume, however, that the Cardinal's trite formula precludes the only "renewal" that matters i.e. a Pauline conversion of episcopal hearts and minds to Catholic obedience and orthodoxy. And as for advertising campaigns, well might the Cardinal opine that they are not the answer. The episcopate's May 2000 promotion, involving 30,000 brochures entitled *The Challenge of a Lifetime*, merely re-trumpeted the hierarchy's loss of Catholic faith, capitulation to the world and comically *passee* notions. Intended to attract 18-25 year old men and women, the glossy brochure promises "*a career which has all the job satisfactions of most professions*" and, as the *Times* reported, "emphasises the priesthood and religious life as professions of a glamorous, exciting and stimulating nature, featuring photographs of young priests and nuns with mobile phones, playing field sports, doing medical work and trekking with rucksacks." Groovy baby!

The contrast in faith and praxis between the above

and what follows in this edition could not be starker. The alternative equations are transparent. Orthodoxy = vocations : Modernism = liquidation. An elementary choice between spiritual life and death. How wicked (and terminal) is a local Church where not a solitary Shepherd prefers *life*?

Source:  
[www.christianorder.com/editorials/editorials\\_2002/editorials\\_feb02.html](http://www.christianorder.com/editorials/editorials_2002/editorials_feb02.html)

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## Frequently Asked Questions about the Shortage of Priests

— [www.catholicdoors.com/faq/qu25.htm](http://www.catholicdoors.com/faq/qu25.htm)

### Q. 1. Is there a priest shortage?

A. Based on what is heard through the media, it appears that there is a shortage of priests and vocations. At the same time, it is necessary to consider the comments of those in authority who have investigated the alleged crisis within the Catholic Church.

In 1995, commenting in the editorial of the Omaha Diocesan newspaper on the subject of the vocation crisis, Archbishop Elden Curtis, a former seminary rector and vocations director, made two interesting observations:

"It seems to me that the vocation 'crisis' is precipitated and continued by people who want to change the Church's agenda, by people who do not support orthodox candidates loyal to the magisterial teaching of the pope and bishops, and by people who actually discourage viable candidates from seeking priesthood and vowed religious life as the Church defines these ministries."

"I am personally aware of certain vocations directors, vocations teams and evaluation boards who turn away candidates who do not support the possibility of ordaining women or who defend the Church's teaching about artificial birth control, or who exhibit strong piety toward certain devotions, such as the rosary."

Based on the observations of Abp Elden Curtis, it appears that there is no shortage of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. If a shortage is occurring in some dioceses as claimed, it must be concluded that those shortages are man-made, resulting from deliberate attitudes and policies that are intended to discourage true vocations.

### Q. 2. Can the above be supported by other sources?

**Answer.** Father David P. Talley, the vocations director of the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta, GA, stated that when he arrived 11 years ago, the Diocese only had 7 men studying for the priesthood. Today, they have 58. Over and above that, they have 80 married men preparing to be ordained as permanent deacons.

Father Tim Hephurn who works with Fr. Talley states, "wherever I have seen the Gospel preached clearly, I have seen vocations."

If we consider the Diocese of Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz in Lincoln, NE, while he only shepherds 80,000 Catholics, he presently has 31 men studying for the priesthood. Why do some Dioceses have vocations while others do not?

Michael Rose, the editor of the *St. Catherine Review*, has done an extensive study of the shortage of priests and vocations. He concluded that where "progressive" theologies prevailed, nobody wanted to become a priest. Michael is quick to point out that in the Diocese of Detroit which has 1.4 million Catholics, this being one of the largest Dioceses in the United States, because of its "progressive" theologies, it will only ordain 2 men as priests this year.

When considering the Order of the Franciscan Friars of Renewal that was founded only 14 years ago by Father Benedict Groeschel in New York, the world's capital of secularization, it is noted that they already have 70 priests and brothers from all over the world. Why are they flourishing? It is because they adhere strictly to the traditional vows of poverty, chastity and obedience while working in the Bronx with the poorest people.

### Q. 3. Are you saying Dioceses that are orthodox in their teachings are the ones that flourish in vocations?

**Answer.** Michael Rose interviewed dozens of seminarians, former seminarians and recently ordained priests from 40 dioceses and 19 seminaries. He quickly discovered that dioceses that flourish are those where the men are loyal to the teachings of the Church, look to the Pope as their spiritual father and leader, pray the rosary, and embrace the male, celibate priesthood.

He also points out, "It appears that many of those in position of authority at our seminaries are singularly motivated by a desire to redefine Catholic theology, the priesthood, and Church ministry according to their own "progressive" model. That model includes women priests, lay-run parishes, secularized worship, and a "soft" approach to Church doctrine; in other words, an emasculated, politically

correct Church."

Providing statistics to support his research, he states that dioceses such as Wichita, Lincoln, Arlington, Fargo and Peora have consistently been ordaining as many or more men each year than "liberal" dioceses 5 to 10 times their size. In the diocese of Rockford, IL, Bishop Thomas Doran ordained 8 priests last year, the highest number of ordinations in 41 years. In the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia, 55 men were ordained between 1991 and 1998. In the Diocese of Peoria, with a population of only 232,000 Catholics, 72 priests were ordained between 1991 to 1998, that being 9 each year.

In comparison, nearby Milwaukee, with a Catholic population three times greater than Peoria, it ordained 2 priests in 1998. Detroit, with a Catholic population of 1.5 million, ordained an average of 8 men each year from 1991-8, Yet, Detroit is seven times larger than Peoria!

Examples:

- Peoria, 232,000 population, 9 priests annually.
- Milwaukee (home of "liberal" doyen Weakland), 696,000+ population, 2 priests in 1998.
- Detroit, 1,500,000 population, 8 priests annually.

Archbishop Curtis of the Omaha archdiocese, considered one of the most conservative in Midwest, ordained an average of 7 men from 1991 to 1998 for a population of 215,000. The Diocese of Madison, slightly larger than Omaha, ordained 4 men for the entire period of 1991-8, or 1 every 2 years.

Based on the above statistics that speak for themselves, it is apparent that the blessings of the Lord Jesus favour orthodox dioceses. He provides vocations to the priesthood (and religious life) in the dioceses that are faithful to the magisterium through their orthodox teachings. While men (or women) can determine who they want to minister in their dioceses through a self-imposed shortage of priests and vocations, it is those who are called by Jesus who will faithfully persevere in their vocations.

**Q. 4. What about all the retired priests? I am sure that some of them can still administer the Sacraments of the Church.**

**Answer.** Yes, some of them can continue to administer the Sacraments after the age of 65. You have to realize that many of these priests, if they would be allowed to do so, would continue to serve the Lord Jesus until the age of 70 or even 75, health permitting.

If these Diocesan priests were allowed to continue to administer the Sacraments beyond the age of 65 as is required of the priests in most religious Orders, in some Dioceses, the presently claimed shortage of

priests would disappear overnight. In other Dioceses, the shortage would be delayed a few years. This would provide those Dioceses with additional time to recruit vocations to the priesthood.

At the same time, by providing the priests who turn 65 with an early retirement, this provides an opportunity within the Diocese to remove those priests who are conservative in their views, therefore making room for those who are more liberal. The first and temporary step of the liberal movement consists of implementing a lay ministry as a substitute to the Holy Orders.

The second step, the "very critical" point, when the lay ministry is taking over most of the priestly duties, is when the faithful become so desperate for a Parish priest that they are ready to accept anything, be it married priests or women priests.

The question then becomes, is the claimed shortage of priests and vocations deliberately created by those who want to change the Church's agenda? Are these persons who have created the shortage of priests and vocations among those who support married priests or women priests, this being their end goal, to become a married priest or a woman priest?

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## Why some new religious orders are attracting recruits

— Fr John Hogan (Australia)

*Grey friars are not a sight one associates with 21st century America. Yet the followers of St Francis are now a common sight on the streets of New York. In the Bronx, St Crispin's Friary is the headquarters of one of many new religious communities growing in the Church.*

Emerging from the Capuchins, the Congregation of Franciscans of the Renewal, approved in 1986, number more than eighty friars and a dozen sisters. Founded by a group led by Fr Benedict Groeschel, they are attempting to return to the Franciscan ideal of poverty and service, working with the poor and the young, with a particular apostolate towards personal renewal. In September 2004, twelve men, priests included, joined their ranks.

Accustomed to hearing of the decline in religious vocations, and seeing orders diminishing in numbers and apparently set to die in some Western nations, you could be forgiven for thinking that religious life is disappearing in the Church: the truth, however, is somewhat different.

## Revitalisation

Every reform brings with it a wave of renewal which is expressed most strongly in the revitalisation of consecrated life. The 16th century Church provides a good comparison with our times.

A glance at that period reveals not only the difficulties of implementing the reforms of Trent, but also the foundation of numerous religious orders. The Jesuits are well known; as are the Discalced Carmelites and Capuchins as reforms of older orders, but they merely represent many others which sprang from the same renewal. It seems we are also living in such an age.

Vatican II did not want to bring religious life to an end: it sought to renew it. To see Vatican II only as the age of the laity is to miss much of what the Council was doing: it was looking for reform in all areas of Church life to meet the challenges of the modern world with the undiluted teaching of Jesus Christ.

The Council asked the orders and congregations to return to the authentic charism of their founders and recover that spirituality and way of life which had brought them into existence. It was a call heeded, ignored and misunderstood. Some returned, and are still returning, others reinterpreted what their founders intended under various other influences, contemporary psychology and humanism included, and they are now in crisis.

Meanwhile new communities and congregations are being founded in abundance and new forms of religious life are developing: secular institutes, personal prelatures and ecclesial movements; older forms, such as consecrated virgins and hermits, are also re-emerging.

The community of the Beatitudes is one example. Founded in France in 1973 by a group of Protestants who felt called to a more religious life. And, studying Vatican II, they found themselves called into the Catholic Church. Today the community numbers 1,500 priests, deacons, sisters, brothers and consecrated lay people.

Their apostolate is varied but centres on evangelisation, even in novel situations: the Community in Cannes is known to evangelise on the beach. Other new communities include the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity, the Chemin Neuf, Fraternity of Mary Immaculate Queen and the Community of St John.

Of the existing congregations which are renewing, the Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Michigan, are notable. Receiving Pontifical approval for their reform in 1973, they recommitted themselves to the charism of Catherine McAuley, returning to the habit and distinctive Mercy way of life focussing on various

apostolic works while maintaining an intensive program of community prayer which includes daily Eucharistic Adoration. The sisters teach in schools, seminaries and universities, and care for the poor and the sick. They have foundations in the US, Italy and Germany.

What is at the heart of these new religious communities? And why are they, and not the already established and modified congregations, attracting young members? The only problem these communities have with vocations is that there are too many.

In reality they have emerged out of the authentic renewal of Vatican II. Eucharistically centred, the Mass and Adoration are at the heart of their day. Devotion to Our Lady is seen as vital as is respect and loyalty to the Pope and the Magisterium.

They also foster a deep respect for Tradition and a keen awareness of the cultural aspects of Catholicism. Most of the communities also wear a distinctive habit while observing the traditional vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. They are apostolically vibrant and have particular charisms for attracting the young.

## Counter-cultural

And why are the young joining them? Speaking with Fr Glenn Sodano, Community Servant (Superior) of the CFRs, he points out that the young are looking for a way of life which is counter-cultural, a way of life which is both challenging and human and centred on God; an unworldly, but not unearthly way of life: these new communities provide that.

With such renewal in consecrated life, it appears that the Church is beginning to move out of this period of crisis. Vatican II's vision of the renewed Church is becoming a reality and the new springtime for the Gospel has finally arrived. While much work has yet to be done, we can be confident that the new communities will help in this New Evangelisation.

Source: [www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2005/apr2005p9\\_1899.html](http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2005/apr2005p9_1899.html)

## Eleven new priests for Denver, largest ordination class in 40 years

—www.catholicnewsagency.com/myprint/print.php

Denver, May. 09, 2006 (CNA) - Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver will ordain 11 new priests for his diocese May 13, on the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception.

The ceremony will bring the total number of ordinations for Denver this academic year to 14; three men were ordained in December. This is the largest number of ordinations in Denver since the 1960s. There were five ordinations in 2002-03 and seven in 2004-05.

The Archdiocese of Denver ranks third nationwide in ordination class size for 2006. According to the Official Catholic Directory, the Church continues to average between 400 and 450 priestly ordinations each year since 2003. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has cited a trend towards older and better educated ordinands; the average age of whom nationally is 37.

In Denver, their average age is 34 and many have had full-time careers in various fields. For example, Deacon Frank Garcia, 48, taught over 20 years in Colorado's Jefferson County Public Schools before entering the seminary. Deacon Michael Freihofer, 42, was an officer in the U.S. Air Force for 10 years, where he taught calculus and coached the Academy's women's volleyball team.

When asked about their calling to the priesthood, many of the ordinands describe an attraction to the priesthood since childhood, while others experienced their calling in later years, usually during college or foreign missionary work.

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## Why Not Married Priests? The Case for Clerical Celibacy

— George Sim Johnston  
May 2006

Each month, when I face an auditorium full of engaged couples preparing for a Catholic marriage, there is a Q-and-A session. It is the interesting, unrehearsed part of the evening. The couples write their queries on a piece of paper, and the anonymity guarantees at least a few hardball questions about the Church and its practices. "What about Galileo?" is

among my favorites, along with inquisitive notes about Torquemada. But the majority of these "zingers" turn out to be protests about the Church's rule of clerical celibacy. "You've told us how wonderful marriage is, that it's a great good for the human person, that the body has a nuptial meaning, and so forth. Well, then: Why can't priests marry?"

It is a question that comes up among even devout Catholics at coffee hour after Mass and at cocktail parties. A married clergy is seen as the obvious solution to a number of problems that confront the Church, ranging from the shortage of priests to the recent sex scandals. Moreover, both the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Rite Catholic churches allow married clergy. So do Protestants; and, in fact, the rejection of clerical celibacy was a much larger issue for the leaders of the Reformation than the fuss over indulgences. Luther, Zwingli, Carlstadt, Bucer, and many other rebellious priests soon took wives (often former nuns), while Thomas Cranmer already had one hidden in Germany. During the Council of Trent, powerful rulers like the Emperor Ferdinand put enormous pressure on the Church to abolish the law of celibacy, but the popes resolutely declined, and have done so ever since.

The agitation for a married priesthood has sharpened in recent decades. There is a drumbeat in the media, often from ex-priests who write copiously for the op-ed pages. Probably a majority of American Catholics also favor the change. So, it's not surprising that my engaged couples think that Rome should "get with the times" and allow priests to marry. Isn't the rule of celibacy simply another example of a retrograde Church sitting on somebody's rights?

I surprise my audience by first telling them that clerical celibacy is not a Church doctrine. It is a discipline, and so can be changed. The pope could wake up tomorrow and allow priests to marry. Moreover, in the early centuries there were married priests, starting with some of the apostles. We know that Peter was married, because we're told that Jesus cured his mother-in-law. The immediate successors to the apostles were also allowed to marry. Paul writes to Timothy that a bishop should be "married but once." Clearly, by not permitting married clergy, the Church since the early Middle Ages has departed from the more commodious practice of the early hierarchy.

But—a further surprise for my audience—there are, in fact, married priests in the Latin Church today. There aren't many, because a priest may have a wife only in one circumstance: A Lutheran or Episcopalian minister who is already married and wishes to convert to Catholicism is allowed the option of becoming a Catholic priest, on condition

that his wife gives full consent. You don't usually see these married priests, because they're generally not given parish assignments; they teach in seminaries or work in the chancery.

But this one exception to the general rule is the occasion of a story that I tell my audience. It is about a friend of mine who is now a prominent Catholic moral theologian. Years ago, he was an Episcopalian priest who decided to convert to Catholicism. He was married with children and was given the option of becoming a Catholic priest. He agonized over the decision. He was already an ordained minister (although the Church does not recognize the validity of Episcopalian orders) and was deeply attracted to the Catholic priesthood. But at the same time, he recognized that there must be serious reasons why the Church insists on a discipline that is such a sign of contradiction to the modern world.

The debate went on, until finally there came the moment of clarification. He was up all night with one of his children who was seriously ill. Feeling drained and haggard, he went to Mass the next morning, and the priest celebrating Mass came out looking equally drawn. During the brief homily, the priest mentioned in passing that he had been up all night with a parishioner's child who was dying of meningitis. A light bulb went off over my friend's head: You can't do both. If you fully understand the vocations to marriage and to the priesthood—the total availability and self-emptying that each demands—you would not choose to do both. And so he became a lay theologian and, apart from raising a large family, has served the Church in ways that he probably could not have as a member of the clergy.

As my bleary-eyed friend discovered at that early morning Mass, the sacraments of Holy Orders and matrimony are too consuming to allow for both. A married priest can't help giving his first thoughts to his wife and children. To the extent he does so, he may be forgoing his priestly role as "father," and people who call a married priest "father" would rightly get the idea that they are second in line as spiritual children. Paul understood this perfectly well when he wrote to the Corinthians, "For he who is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God. But he that is with a wife, is solicitous for the things of this world, how he may please his wife; and he is divided" (1 Cor 7:32-34).

There are many reasons, both practical and theological, why the Church insists on clerical celibacy. It is a wise practice that was gradually codified in light of centuries of accumulated knowledge and experience. Early on, it became obvious to many bishops that a married priesthood doesn't work and that the Church needs men who are

willing to embrace a higher spiritual state. Starting with the Spanish Council of Elvira in 305, regional churches began to ask of the clergy what many priests had already spontaneously chosen. The early Church Fathers—Tertullian, Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, and Hilary—wrote in favor of clerical celibacy, and at the end of the Dark Ages, great reforming popes like Leo IX and Gregory VII insisted that henceforth the priesthood would be celibate. This decision greatly strengthened the Church and still does so today.

Admittedly, there's no hint in the New Testament of celibacy being mandatory either among the apostles or those they ordained. But we have ample warrant in the words of Christ and the writings of Paul that celibacy is a higher calling than marriage. Christ Himself was celibate, and the Incarnation took place, so to speak, in the context of Mary and Joseph's abstention from sexual relations. Pope Benedict XVI has written eloquently about how Mary's virginity is really a condition of spiritual fruitfulness. At one point, the disciples ask Christ if it is "expedient not to marry?" He replies that "not all can accept this teaching; but those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born so...and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let him accept it who can" (Mt 19:10-12).

As Christopher West points out, Christ's use of the word "eunuch" must have profoundly shocked his Jewish listeners. Under the Old Covenant, priests were enjoined to marry and have children who would become priests. Childlessness was seen as a curse, and the idea of a descendant of Abraham opting to be a "eunuch" was unthinkable. But the celibate lives of Mary and Joseph, who brought the Old Covenant to perfection, speak of a new dimension of self-giving. West writes that their celibacy, in effect, brings about "the most fruitful union in the cosmos—the union of the human and divine natures in the person of Christ. All those who live an authentic celibate vocation participate in some way in this new super-abounding spiritual fruitfulness."

There has always been a deep human intuition that celibacy brings great spiritual gifts, a heightened sensitivity to divine things. Even under the Old Covenant, a married priest had to observe continence while he served in the Temple—in other words, when he was acting as priest. Moses asked that the Jews abstain from conjugal sex while he ascended Mount Sinai, and the prophet Jeremiah was forbidden by God to take a wife in order that he might fulfill his ministry. And although the apostles and their successors had freedom of choice in this matter—at least until the fourth century—a large number of the clergy during this period did choose celibacy. There

is a tradition that after their calling by Christ, those apostles who were married lived as though they were not. St. Jerome speaks of a general custom in the late fourth century when he declares that clerics, “even though they may have wives, cease to be husbands.” This is not so exotic as it sounds; in the 20th century the great French theologian Jacques Maritain and his wife Raissa, a Jewish convert, had a marriage blanc for the sake of their spiritual apostleship.

The exaltation of celibacy does not in any way denigrate marriage. Nobody can outdo Pope John Paul II in praising conjugal love. And yet, as he points out in his famous talks on the theology of the body, marriage “is only a tentative solution to the problem of a union of persons through love.” The final solution lies only in heaven, where, as Christ explained to the Sadducees, there is no marriage. Those who live celibately are, in effect, “skipping” the sacrament in anticipation of the ultimate reality, the “Marriage of the Lamb.” They are an “eschatological sign” for the rest of us; their total gift of self, which includes their sexuality, to God anticipates the eternal union for which we were all created. The celibate vocation, West writes, “is ‘superior’ only in its more direct orientation toward man’s superior heavenly destiny.”

A married clergy would certainly dilute the Catholic priesthood as an eschatological sign. But it would also involve practical problems. One of the great strengths of an unmarried clergy is their availability. During World War I, there were many converts to Catholicism among British soldiers fighting in the trenches. This was because the Catholic priests were right up there in the danger zone, hearing confessions and giving spiritual counsel, while many Anglican ministers held back, understandably thinking about their wives and children at home. Recently, a priest I know expressed delight at being assigned to an impoverished area of New York. “I want to work among the poor,” he told me. Would this be his attitude if he were married with small children? His wife’s probable reaction would be, “I’m not going to raise the kids in that neighborhood.”

Clerical marriages, moreover, are not easy. I am told that the wives of the handful of Catholic clergy who have the dispensation from celibacy are the first to support the Church’s general position. Preachers’ wives and preachers’ kids do not have an easy time. Just read the novels of Trollope or Samuel Butler’s much underrated *The Way of All Flesh*, whose narrator complains about being the son of a clergyman:

I have often thought that the Church of Rome does wisely in not allowing her priests to marry. Certainly it is a matter of common observation in England that

the sons of clergymen are frequently unsatisfactory. The explanation is very simple.... The clergyman is expected to be a kind of human Sunday. He is paid for this business of leading a stricter life than other people. It is his *raison d’être*. If his parishioners feel that he does this, they approve of him, for they look upon him as their own contribution towards what they deem a holy life.... But his home is his castle as much as that of any other Englishman, and with him, as with others, unnatural tension in public is followed by exhaustion when tension is no longer necessary. His children are the most defenseless things he can reach, and it is on them that nine cases out of ten that he will relieve his mind.

Obviously, not all married clergymen are like this, but clerical marriages have their special difficulties, and, unlike 130 years ago, when Butler wrote his novel, there is now the possibility of divorce. This is already a serious problem in the Anglican Church. It is inevitable that after a decade or so of a married Catholic priesthood, there would be a fair number of divorced priests, some clamoring for remarriage. And as for those priests who still chose not to marry: Might there not be a corresponding diminishment of their public image, so that they would tend to be regarded more as pious bachelors than a special sign among us? Their freedom to get romantically involved with female parishioners gives such questions even more point.

Another practical consideration is the financial cost of allowing priests to marry. The average salary of a diocesan priest is \$20,000, and living arrangements in a parish rectory allow for many economies. Married priests would most likely want to live outside the rectory, would need much higher salaries to support a family, and there would be an exponential increase in insurance costs. Where would the money come from? As it is, many parishes can barely pay their bills. Will Catholics in the pews be willing to significantly increase their weekly contributions? The answer is that some will, but many will not, and too many parishes would find themselves in an even deeper financial hole.

The most insistent argument for a married clergy is that it would cure the shortage of priests. The reasons for the decline in the number of clergy are too numerous to go into here. Almost every Catholic shares some of the blame. On the institutional side, there’s the past situation in many seminaries and the refusal of some diocesan vocation directors to present the priesthood in its full spiritual dimension, which includes the challenge of celibacy. If you look around today, it is striking which dioceses (for example, Denver) have plentiful vocations. They raise the bar very high and, taking a page from John Paul II, present celibacy as a great spiritual gift. In contrast,

some dioceses, until recently, held out to seminarians the possibility of a reversal of the rule of celibacy; they certainly did not present celibacy in a positive light. Those dioceses with near-empty seminaries might want to look at those that are doing it right. They will find—among other things—a vibrant orthodoxy and a theologically rich understanding of the call to celibacy.

As for the Catholic laity: Along with the widespread use of the Pill, there has been a corresponding diminution of generosity in family size, which means fewer vocations. (One could make the case, by the way, that natural family planning allows a couple to participate in the spiritual benefits of celibacy; the periodic abstinence is part of the “gift” of themselves to one another and to God.) But the point is that there will be many more vocations if both the clergy and the laity fully live their Christian vocations, which include prayer, sacrifice, and generosity. Although it may be tempting in the short term, the solution is not to define the priesthood down in order to attract men who will only take a lightened version of Holy Orders.

The other argument against celibacy is that the Church’s requirement of continence is a primary cause of the sex scandals. Plying their Freud, “experts” like Richard Sipe argue that a lack of sexual outlets drives priests into pedophilia. But the recent scandals have little to do with pedophilia, a clinical disorder whose incidence among Catholic priests is no greater than among the general population. Rather, the majority of episodes involves homosexual acts with teenagers or young men, and it may be wondered how marriage would solve this particular problem. It is clear that not a few homosexual men have entered the priesthood partly as a “cover” for their condition. Arguably, it would only make matters worse if they had to take on a wife as additional camouflage. In any event, it wouldn’t stop some of them from going after teenage boys, as has been amply demonstrated in other clerical milieus.

It should also be pointed out that Freud was wrong about the nature and effects of “sexual repression”—in other words, abstinence. He considered it the taproot of all neuroses, and the sexual revolution has been driven by his idea that such “repression” is a very bad thing. But we all know celibate priests—and laity, for that matter—who are adjusted and well-balanced. We also meet promiscuous individuals who are not. Freud nonetheless taught that the libido is a pressure that builds relentlessly to the point where it demands release, as in a steam engine; and if you don’t find a sexual outlet, you become neurotic, or even worse.

But, in fact, our sex drives don’t work that way. There is no build-up of pressure in the central

nervous system, and the libido doesn’t plot revenge if for whatever reason one is continent for a period of time. It largely depends on what “messages” one allows to get through to it, which is why the Church has always taught the necessity of guarding one’s eyes and imagination. This is not Puritanism, but self-possession; and all Christians, not just Catholic priests, are called to this heroic struggle. The more likely neurotics are those who separate sex from married love and, in the process, compulsively turn people into objects, into a means to an end. The sexual revolution, which amounted to a willful misreading of human nature, has failed on its own terms, but there are still those who want the Church to buy into it.

In a world that has absolutized sex, a celibate priesthood is a necessary sign of higher things. It’s tough, but then so is Christianity. Those who wish to abolish celibacy generally favor other dilutions of Catholic doctrine and discipline. They are pursuing an essentially bourgeois project. They think that Christianity is fine so long as it makes no demands and, as a corollary, that the Church should turn itself into yet another liberal Protestant denomination. But these leftover modernists are no longer in the ascendancy, if they ever were, and it is not surprising that the recent synod of bishops in Rome overwhelmingly endorsed the Church’s ancient discipline of celibacy.

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## The Roman Catholic Priest: In Persona Christi Capitis

— Romanus Cessario, O.P.

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Pope John Paul II presents to the Church a comprehensive explanation of the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood. The 1990 Synod of Bishops, of which *Pastores Dabo Vobis* is a result, was called in order to reflect on “the problem of priestly formation in present-day circumstances.” In fact, in the Exhortation, the Pope speaks about the “crisis of priestly identity” and the path which must be taken to emerge from this present day crisis. He writes, “a correct and in-depth awareness of the ministerial priesthood is the path which must be taken...in order to emerge from the crisis of priestly identity.” Consequently, what John Paul II puts forward in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* is an orthodox

understanding of who, in essence, the ordained priest is.

The focus of this paper is to explain what it means to say that the ministerial priest stands *In Persona Christi Capitis* (in the Person of Christ the Head). This doctrine is only understandable in light of an orthodox understanding of who the Person of Jesus Christ is. In other words, one can only understand the being of the priest if one has a proper theological understanding of the being of Christ. In order to explain this doctrine four things must be explained: the metaphysics of the Incarnation (Hypostatic Union), the Capital Grace of Christ, the Priesthood of Christ, and the sacramental consecration whereby the priest is configured to Christ.

### **The Metaphysics of the Incarnation**

The first four centuries after Christ were a time of intense Christological debate and controversy. A multiplicity of heresies evolved. Each tried to explain who Christ was: Was he part God and part man? Was he God who just looked like a man (Docetism)? Was he God's greatest creature and not divine (Arianism)? Was he simply a special person upon whom God's Spirit rested (Adoptionism)? All of these were different heresies which were present in the early centuries of the Church, and all of these posed a challenge to the Church's Faith. What was the Church's response to these heresies?

In the third century, at a council held in Antioch the Church affirmed, against Paul of Samosata, "that Jesus Christ is Son of God by *nature* and not by adoption." The first Council of Nicaea (325) reacting against the heresy of Arianism, which stated that Jesus the Son was created and was of a different substance than the Father, said that "the Son of God is 'begotten, not made, of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father.'" The Council of Ephesus (431) arguing against the heresy of Nestorianism, which said that Christ was a human person united to the divine person of God's Son, said " 'that the Word, uniting to himself in his person the flesh animated by a rational soul, became man' (Council of Ephesus). Christ's humanity has no other subject than the divine person of the Son of God, who assumed it and made it his own, from his conception."

The most comprehensive confession of the Person of Christ was made at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The Fathers of Chalcedon were reacting against the heresy of Monophysitism which said "that the human nature had ceased to exist as such in Christ when the divine person of God's Son assumed it." The confession of Chalcedon merits citation:

Following the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach and confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, composed of rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity and consubstantial with us as to his humanity; "like us in all things but sin." He was begotten from the Father before all ages as to his divinity and in these last days, for us and for our salvation, was born as to his humanity of the virgin Mary, the Mother of God.

We confess that one and the same Christ, Lord, and only-begotten Son, is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation. The distinction between natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (*prosopon*) and one hypostasis.

A further step was taken at the Council of Constantinople when the Fathers stated that

" 'there is but one hypostasis [or person], which is our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the

Trinity.' " This they did to argue against those who were making a personal subject of Christ's human nature.

What these Councils did was to give to the Church an orthodox understanding of Jesus Christ. The Councils affirmed that he is true God and true man; that the one and same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the second person of the Trinity and is eternally begotten of the Father, became man at a moment in time. They affirmed that he exists "in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation" (Chalcedon) and that there is but one person in Christ, the divine person of the Trinity (Constantinople). The two natures of Christ share the closest union and are united in the one divine person. The human nature of Christ, which he fully assumed and became like us in all things except sin, is *personalized by the divine person of the Word, the Son of God*.

### **The Capital Grace of Christ**

Having looked at the union of the human and divine natures in Christ, we can now proceed to look at one of the graces he receives from the Father and that he has bestowed upon us in the Incarnation. In question eight of the third part of his *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas writes "Of the Grace of Christ, as He is Head

of the Church." The Capital Grace of Christ and the benefits which we receive from this Grace are understood more fully in light of the Incarnation. The dignity which Christ gave to us by assuming our human nature is unfathomable. Because Christ became man our nature has, in a sense, been divinized. This is because the human nature of Christ is united to the divine person of the Word. Christ's humanity is perfectly holy because of this union. Through grace "creatures are called to share in this very holiness by participation." Even though Christ is divine, "his humanity still receives grace after the manner of other human beings, even if in an entirely distinct and superior mode. This superior mode is explained by the very intimate, [that is], hypostatic, relationship that exists between the human soul of Christ and the Logos."

The Capital Grace of Christ is one of the graces which Christ is given from God. Christ receives this Grace from God because he is the eternally begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Aquinas says that "on account of his nearness to God His grace is the highest and first, though not in time, since all have received grace on account of His grace..." Because Christ is Head of the Church, he is the fount from which all graces flow to the Church. This grace was bestowed upon us in the human nature which he assumed. According to Aquinas, "grace was received by the soul of Christ in the highest way; and therefore from this pre-eminence of grace which He received, it is from Him that this grace is bestowed on others, – and this belongs to the nature of the head." The Capital Grace of Christ is the fount of the sacramental life of the Church. The grace given to Christ by the Father is given to each son and daughter of God who is incorporated into the Church's life and communion through the sacrament of baptism. As we will see later, it is this Capital Grace of Christ which makes possible the sacrament of Holy Orders and the sacramental consecration of the priest.

### **The Priesthood of Christ**

Just as the members of Christ's body are able to receive the grace that he is given, so too are certain members of his body able to participate in his very priesthood. But the question must first be asked: How is Christ a priest?

In all religions, the distinguishing mark of the priest is that he is one who offers sacrifice to God. This sacrifice is usually associated with atonement for the sins of the people. St. Thomas says, "the office proper to a priest is to be a mediator between God and the people; to wit, inasmuch as He bestows Divine things on the people, wherefore *sacerdos*

(priest) means a giver of sacred things." The Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament is an example of this. The Levitical priests, commanded by the Law of God, offered sacrifice to atone for the sins of God's chosen people. They offered the blood of bulls and goats, and by sprinkling this blood upon the altar and even upon the community they were rendered clean. However, the blood of bulls and goats was not sufficient to cleanse the people from the sins they committed against God and to cleanse their consciences. As it is written in the Book of Hebrews:

Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of them, it can never make perfect those who come to worship by the same sacrifices that they offer continually each year. Otherwise, would not the sacrifices have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, once cleansed, would no longer have had any consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is only a yearly remembrance of sins, for it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats take away sins.

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment and the perfection of the priesthood of the Old Law. He became man so that he might reconcile us to God. He reconciled us to the Father in a similar fashion that the priesthood of the Old Law prefigured: by offering sacrifice. However, the sacrifice that Christ offered was the perfect sacrifice that definitively reconciled us to God. The sacrifice that he offered was himself. Jesus Christ is the perfect high priest because he is God himself. But how is it that Christ is the priest and also the sacrifice offered by the priest? On the Cross, he offered to the Father that which needed to be reconciled to him, our fallen human nature which is united to his divine person. He is both the sacrifice and the one who offers the sacrifice; he is offered and the one who offers. Again, Aquinas comes to our aid in explaining how Christ is both priest and victim.

Now man is required to offer sacrifice for three reasons. First, for the remission of sin, by which he is turned away from God...Secondly, that man may be preserved in a state of grace...Thirdly, in order that the spirit of man be perfectly united to God: which will be most perfectly realized in glory...Now, these effects were conferred on us by the humanity of Christ. For, in the first place, our sins were blotted out...Secondly, through Him we received the grace of salvation...Thirdly, through Him we have acquired the perfection of glory...Therefore Christ Himself, as man, was not only priest, but also a perfect victim, being at the same time victim for sin, victim for a peace-offering, and a holocaust.

## The Sacramental Consecration of the Ordained Priest

The Church, the People of God, is a priestly people. Each member, through baptism, shares in the threefold ministry of Christ, priest, prophet and king. The Ordination Rite of a Priest acknowledges this. In the bishop's homily he says, "it is true that God has made his entire people a royal priesthood in Christ." The rite goes on to say, "But, our High Priest, Jesus Christ, also chose some of his followers to carry out publicly in the Church a priestly ministry in his name on behalf of mankind." We have seen how Christ is a priest, but how is it that men share in his priesthood?

It must be clearly stated that there is only one priesthood, the priesthood of Jesus Christ. All other men who are ordained priests *participate in the one priesthood of Christ*. Christ, the High Priest, reconciled us to God by his sacrifice on Calvary. However, he willed that the effects and merits of his sacrifice be given continually to the Church. Thus, he calls men to continue his priestly ministry and to be dispensers of the divine mysteries. Aquinas says that it is the nature of Christ's priesthood to be communicated to others:

"...A priest is set between God and man. Now he needs someone between himself and God, who of himself cannot approach to God; and such a one is subject to the priesthood by sharing in the effect thereof. But this cannot be said of Christ; for the Apostle says (Heb. vii. 25): *Coming of Himself to God, always living to make intercession for us*... And therefore it is not fitting for Christ to be the recipient of the effect of His priesthood, but rather to communicate it to others. For the influence of the first agent in every genus is such that it receives nothing in that genus: thus the sun gives but does not receive light... *Now Christ is the fountain-head of the entire priesthood*: for the priest of the Old Law was a figure of Him; while the priest of the New Law works in his person, according to 2 Cor. ii. 10: *For what I have pardoned, if I have pardoned anything, for your sakes have I done in the person of Christ*.

Thus, Christ bestows the effects of his priesthood and his priestly action on the Church by allowing other men to participate in his one priesthood. Just as Christ redeemed us by a priestly act of worship, so the ordained priest, by virtue of his participation in Christ's priesthood, offers that same sacrificial act of worship on the altar. "The sacrifice which is offered every day in the Church is not distinct from that which Christ Himself offered, but is a commemor-

ation thereof." The priest, who is a sharer in the priesthood of Christ, offers the Mass in the Person of Christ.

Thus, we now turn to how it is possible that the priest shares in the one priesthood of Christ, how it is that the ordained priest is *In persona Christi*. The ministerial priesthood "has its source in the Blessed Trinity... Through the priesthood which arises from the depths of the ineffable mystery of God, that is, from the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's gift of unity, the priest sacramentally enters into communion with the bishop and with other priests in order to serve the people of God who are the Church..." The key phrase in the above quote from *Pastores Dabo Vobis* is "sacramentally enters into." It is by virtue of the sacramental consecration which the priest receives in the sacrament of Holy Orders that he is given the grace to enter into the mystery of Christ's priesthood. Again, the Ordination Rite speaks of this: "By *consecration* he will be made a true priest of the New Testament."

This sacramental consecration can only be understood in light of the Capital Grace of Christ. As we saw, the Capital Grace of Christ is that grace given to Christ by the Father which makes Christ the Head of the Church and thereby makes the Church holy; it is the fount of the sacramental life of the Church. Just as the members of his body receive that grace and become sharers in the divine nature through the sacrament of baptism, so do men who are ordained priests receive the grace of participating in his priesthood. Christ is the source of the sacramental life of the Church, and he is the source of the one priesthood which is bestowed on the men he calls to follow him as priests. When Christ was on earth he gave to St. Peter the authority to bind and loose, he gave to the Apostles the power to forgive sins, and he bestowed on them the dignity of the priesthood at the Last Supper. Priests are ordained by bishops because the bishops are sharers in that authority which Christ granted to the Peter and the Apostles. Priests are ordained through the laying on of hands because the bishops are in the line of Apostolic Succession, and this is only possible because Christ willed that his Apostles be sharers in his Capital Grace.

By virtue of sacramental consecration, the ordained priest does not simply become a functionary. This consecration does not set him apart to simply *perform* certain tasks in the Church. No, by virtue of the sacramental consecration which the priest receives, he is *ontologically changed*. He is configured to the Person of Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd, in a new way in his very *being*. "The relation of the priest to Jesus Christ, and in him to his Church, is found in the very being of the priest by

virtue of his sacramental consecration/anointing and in his *activity*, that is, in his mission and ministry." Just as at Baptism and Confirmation the Christian is sacramentally marked on the soul, so is the man who is ordained a priest marked sacramentally and configured to Christ the Priest.

This is where an orthodox understanding of the Person of Jesus Christ helps to shed light on who the priest is in his very being. We can use an analogy: *Just as the human nature of Christ is personalized by its union with the divine Person of the Word, so is the priest, by virtue of sacramental consecration, configured in his being to Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd.* Thus, we are able to say that the ordained priest is *In Persona Christi*. John Paul speaks of this when he writes about "...the specific ontological bond which unites the priesthood to Christ the high priest and good shepherd." And again, in the same Exhortation, the Pope writes, "the priest shares in Christ's consecration and mission in a specific and authoritative way, through the sacrament of holy orders, by virtue of which he is configured in his being to Jesus Christ, head and shepherd..."

The dignity of the priestly vocation in no way diminishes the importance of the lay vocation. Both are equal in dignity and both are called to holiness. However, there is an essential difference between the two vocations. By looking at the Hypostatic Union of Christ we have seen, albeit analogously, how the ordained priest is configured to Christ in his very being. To repeat what was said above: *Just as the human nature of Christ is personalized by its union with the divine Person of the Word, so is the priest, by virtue of sacramental consecration, configured in his being to Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd.* This is the only analogy by which we are able to grasp the ontological character of configuration which takes place when a man is ordained a priest.

Only by having a deep knowledge of the Person and work of Jesus Christ is the priest able to understand his own identity. John Paul says, "the priest finds the full truth of his identity in being a derivation, a specific participation in and continuation of Christ himself, the one high priest of the new and eternal covenant. *The priest is a living and transparent image of Christ the priest...*Reference to Christ is thus the absolutely necessary key for understanding the reality of the priesthood." The priest is called to be a man of prayer and contemplation, for it is through prayer (and study) that the priest comes to a deeper personal knowledge of the Person and work of Christ. In prayer and contemplation he is sent forth by Christ to minister to his people in pastoral charity. Possessing this understanding of his own vocation the words of Pope John Paul II will echo true in the heart of the

priest: "Our priestly life and activity continue the life and activity of Christ himself. Here lies our identity, our true dignity, the source of our joy, the very basis of our life."

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## Married priests no remedy for "vocations crisis"

*Madrid, Jan 18, 2007 / 02:11 pm (CNA) ---* The renowned Italian journalist Vittorio Messori published an article recently in which he blasted one of the most popular myths of the day: that married priests would solve the "crisis of vocations."

Reprinted by the Spanish daily "*La Razon*," Messori's article notes, "The Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish communities are all undergoing similar 'crisis of vocations', if not greater, than that of the Catholic Church, despite the fact that their pastors, priests and rabbis can marry."

"Marriage, therefore, would not be the remedy for the shortage of priests," Messori continued. "Nor would it be the remedy for the sexual disorders in certain religious environments, beginning with pedophilia. Most of all because pedophilia manifests homosexual impulses (boys are more often victims than girls) and having a wife would therefore not be an adequate solution. And moreover, as the statistics confirm, because the vast majority of abuse takes place in the home, between parents and children and uncles and nephews, this would not be remedy for such situations."

Messori underscores in his article that "sexual continence" is not some imposition by the Church, but rather the result of a free choice that has its origins in the early Church and that has been practiced for centuries both in the West and the East. It is not a dogma, he noted, but rather "an aspect of Tradition that should be treated with the reverence due to that which is considered to be of apostolic times."

"In the early Church, the vast majority of the clergy was made up of older men who assumed holy orders, left behind their wives, who gave their consent, and entrusted their families to the community. From that moment they were called to live in perfect continence, no longer living at home but rather in church buildings," Messori asserted, citing a study by Cardinal Alfons Stickler, the former Vatican librarian and archivist.

Cardinal Stickler's research proved that priestly celibacy was never considered a novelty and that it has always been an indisputable part of early Church

tradition, and it demolishes the theory that “clerical celibacy can only be traced back to 1139, to the Second Lateran Council.”

“And what of the Eastern Churches, where only monks and bishops are obliged to embrace celibacy, while priests and deacons can marry, as long as it is the first and only marriage and takes place before ordination?” Messori asked. “All of the documents show that for many centuries, the abstinence practiced in the West was discussed in those communities and the exceptions that are cited today are actually based on fraudulent sources.”

Messori explained that “only in 691, at the Council of Trullano, was the practice of today’s Orthodox established. But there was an explicit capitulation: the Church in the East did not have the hierarchal organization of the West and it lacked means for repressing abuses, which were increasingly more numerous. And not only that: subject to the Byzantine emperor, the Church in the East gave in to politicians who claimed that a clergy ‘with family’ was more easily controlled. The attempt was made to salvage the principle, imposing sexual continence at least during the period in which priests were exercising their ministry and saying Mass, while aspiring to chastity for bishops and monks. No doubt it was a forced situation, not ideal at all, as many complained and as many still complain about in the East. It’s curious that some today consider that to be desirable for the West also.”

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/new.php?n=8419>

## Six Effective Habits of Vocational Recruiting

*Newspaper Cites the Eucharist and Dads Among Key Secrets*

NORTH HAVEN, Connecticut, FEB. 6, 2007 (Zenit.org).- Dioceses reporting successful rates of vocational recruitment have something in common, says the National Catholic Register.

In a summary of reporter Tim Drake's article "Vocations Surge" in a recent issue, the Register compiled a list of "six habits of highly effective dioceses."

The first habit was putting the Eucharist at the center of vocational work.

In an editorial the newspaper explained: "Eucharistic adoration is especially effective because it draws sharp attention to the great gift that makes the priesthood so extraordinary and so needed -- we

have the priesthood to thank for God's real presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

"And the dynamic of silent Eucharistic adoration inevitably leads to the question, 'What do you want me to do, Lord?'"

According to the newspaper, the Web site Vocation.com worked with American bishops to deliver Vatican monstrosities to dioceses to promote adoration in parishes.

"Program leaders like David Craig have been astounded to see parishes produce their first vocations ever after Eucharistic adoration was introduced," the editorial stated.

### Invitations

The second habit cited by the newspaper was the invitation. According to a U.S. bishops' survey, 78% of those being ordained began considering the priesthood after an invitation to do so from a priest.

Third, seminaries must be faithful to the magisterium in order to attract candidates. The Register editors mentioned three seminaries that are booming: St. Mary's in Emmitsburg, Maryland; St. Vincent in Latrobe, Pennsylvania; and St. Gregory the Great in Seward, Nebraska.

Seminaries are not the only element that needs to be faithful. Candidates to the priesthood also come from faithful families.

The editorial cited a key role played by fathers, explaining: "There are beautiful exceptions, but the rule is that priests come from committed Catholic families in which the father is an active player in the family's faith."

### Youth Day

The fifth and sixth habits reported by the Register are interaction with priests and attendance at a World Youth Day.

Youth need to meet and interact with priests or "it may never occur to many young men that the priesthood is a life that would appeal to them," the article explained.

Key among the venues for this interaction is altar serving: "For many priests, serving at the altar was the first place they first came to know men who had been called and understood what the call entailed."

And the "World Youth Day factor is very real," the editorial said. It explained that these events give young men the chance to see that they can have "a big, positive impact on the world -- one that lasts for eternity."

<http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=102482>

## Vocations Surge

## The Priest Shortage Isn't Over, But Seminaries Are Filling Up

— by Time Drake  
January 14-20, 2007 Issue

SAVANNAH, Ga. — It's vocations awareness week — but most Catholics aren't aware of which dioceses are having successes with vocations.

The list might surprise you.

Dioceses such as Boston, Chicago, Newark, Philadelphia and St. Paul/Minneapolis continue to have the largest ordination classes, in part because of their larger Catholic populations. When the number of seminarians is compared with the total number of Catholics in the diocese, however, a very different list emerges — one that shows that the largest number of priests per capita are coming from the Midwest and the southern United States.

"The south is very religious," said Father Tim McKeown, vocation director for the Diocese of Savannah, Ga. "We're about 3% to 4% Catholic, but there is a strong Christian ethos. I think that certainly helps."

According to the Official Catholic Directory's 2006 statistics, the Diocese of Savannah ordained five men in 2005, putting it at second in the Top 10 list of dioceses with the most ordinands per Catholics. With a total Catholic population of 73,649, that makes the ratio one ordinand per 14,730 Catholics.

Compiling data from the 2006 Official Catholic Directory published by Kenedy and Sons, the Register discovered that outside of Ogdensburg, N.Y., those dioceses with the most ordinands-per-Catholics are concentrated in the South. They include Savannah, Ga., Alexandria, La., Knoxville, Tenn., Pensacola-Tallahassee, Fla., and Memphis, Tenn. The remaining four are located in the Midwest: Fargo, N.D., Duluth, Minn., Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Mo., and Springfield, Ill.

Comparing the 2006 data with that provided by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) from 2004, the Diocese of Fargo and the Diocese of Memphis appear on the Top 10 list of ordinands-per-Catholic both times. The only diocese to make both the list for most ordinands and list for ordinands-per-Catholics was the Diocese of Ogdensburg.

The Diocese of Memphis has quadrupled its number of seminarians in the past five years. Father Keith Stewart, vocation director, cited personal contact as the key.

"I've really worked with our priests to get them to extend a personal invitation to men," said Father Stewart, who has been at his post for five years. "It's been one of my biggest priorities because I've seen it borne out in experience that the personal invitation is what gets the ball rolling."

According to Father Stewart, those interested in pursuing a priestly vocation come to him only after having initial contact with a priest.

"The priests are the real recruiters," said Father Stewart. "Ninety percent of them come to me only after someone else got the ball rolling. I've only had one or two who have come to me on their own."

A U.S. bishops' conference survey bears that out. According to the study done by the Secretariat for Vocations and Priestly Formation, 78% of the men being ordained said they were initially invited by a priest to consider the priesthood. That same survey showed that very few men are inspired to consider the priesthood by a website or advertisement.

"Ask any of our seminarians and they will tell you that they began to seriously consider the priesthood only the third or fourth time someone asked them," said Father McKeown.

Toward that end, the Diocese of Steubenville, Ohio, which was on the Top 10 list two years ago, has instituted an Andrew Dinner in conjunction with the Knights of Columbus.

"In January and February we host three dinners in different parts of our diocese," explained Father Timothy Shannon, director of vocations for the Diocese of Steubenville. "Parish priests invite anyone from junior high school through college whom they think might have an interest. It's based on the fact that Andrew heard the call of God and brought Peter to Christ."

The format of the dinner includes a testimony by a seminarian and a talk by the bishop.

The Diocese of Steubenville currently has 11 seminarians studying for the priesthood.

In addition to personal contact, vocation directors also point to the importance of one's relationship with Jesus Christ.

Father Tim Donohue, assistant vocation director for the Diocese of Savannah, credits Eucharistic adoration as key to his own call to the priesthood and as influential in the call of others.

"It is a building block for vocations," Father Donohue was quoted as saying in the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors' newsletter. "I have discovered that more than a few vocations have come from men with a devotion to the

Blessed Sacrament, who found their calling by spending time with Christ in adoration or prayer before the tabernacle.”

Father McKeown also credits the importance of prayer. He said that was fostered under the diocese’s previous vocation director, Father Brett Brannen, who now serves as vice rector at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md. Under Father Brannen’s leadership, the diocese developed a prayer card. On the back side of the prayer card each of the seminarians is listed, one for each day of the month.

“We have a vocation prayer that’s been part of the diocese for over 50 years,” said Father McKeown. “The previous director had prayer cards made up and got them into the parishes and diocesan schools. He handed them out to those who were sick so that they can offer up their prayers for the diocese.”

Father McKeown said that when prospective candidates see healthy, young seminarians joyfully following Christ it is attractive to them.

“It snowballs. It resonates with them,” said Father McKeown. “They can put themselves in those shoes easier.”

While studies conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate have tended to show that priests are trending toward being older, more educated and foreign-born, that’s not quite the case among American-born ordinands.

“Our seminarians are getting younger, especially when you look at the American-born seminarians,” said Father Stewart. The Diocese of Memphis currently has 18 men studying for the priesthood. “We have only two second-career vocations. Most are right out of high school or college.”

Seminarian John Johnson, who is a transitional deacon studying at Mount St. Mary’s for ordination to the Diocese of Savannah, has observed the same trend. He said that the priesthood is attracting younger men.

“We have 150 to 160 guys here,” said Johnson. “All of them, with the exception of one or two, are about my age. There’s a fresh, vital spirit among the young guys. They are ready to go out, be good priests, remain faithful to their state in life, and do their best to serve and defend the Church.”

Another example can be found in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. There, 142 young men from across the United States are studying at St. John Vianney Minor Seminary. The Diocese of Duluth, which is on the Register’s Top 10 list, has 16 seminarians studying at St. John Vianney. In 2005, the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis ordained 15 men to the priesthood. The archdiocese currently has 34 of its own young men studying at the seminary.

In an age where the Church has been marred by

the past scandals of some of her priests, one would think that that would impact the numbers of men desiring to be priests, but Deacon Johnson said that isn’t the case.

“We all have a sense that we are in the wake of the scandals and we’re learning about the modern situation, but it doesn’t faze us,” said Johnson. “I felt that after the scandals there would be a sharp drop-off in the numbers of young seminarians, but it hasn’t been that way at all.”

*Tim Drake is based in St. Joseph, Minnesota.*

<http://ncregister.com/site/article/1733>

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## Why the Church must continue to uphold priestly celibacy

by Fr Pat Stratford  
Brisbane Diocese, Australia  
February 2007

**Perhaps it is time for committed Catholic parents, as well as priests and teachers, to start nurturing a new respect for celibacy among the young.**

Guided only by the secular press over the last 30 years, many young men could have come to believe that priests in general are unhappy in their vocation and resentful of their celibacy. We priests need to show by word and example that we are in fact happy in our vocation to the priesthood.

The Second Vatican Council recommended celibacy for priests (*Ministry and Life of Priests*, paragraph 16) and in 2004 the bishops from many countries around the world rejected the idea of changing the law on celibacy for priests. Should this be surprising?

While the number of ordinations to the diocesan priesthood has been on the increase in many parts of the world since 1978, the year John Paul II became Pope, at the same time, vocations have decreased in the West. Why has this occurred?

Two sociological factors should be recognised. First, the sharp decline in priestly vocations has coincided with a decline in the numbers of marriages and a rise in the levels of divorce, cohabitation and single motherhood. Second, these trends, which emerged in the 1960s, are characteristic of contemporary Western culture.

I was ordained in 1958 and for nearly ten years after that there were no public complaints about celibacy from priests. Then it began - coinciding with the sexual revolution - much to the delight of the secular media. Priests who left to get married received front-page coverage in some daily newspapers.

In fact, the so-called crisis of priestly celibacy is really a crisis of all forms of lifelong intimate commitment in marriage, priesthood and religious life. The cultural forces attacking celibacy are the same ones undermining and devaluing marriage.

The Christian community should not give way to this cultural onslaught. We need celibate priests, for they are ordained to offer sacrifice: not their own sacrifice, but that of Christ. A priest is a minister to the eternal sacrifice of Christ, a ministry which extends outwards from that core to the ministry of the word and sacraments. He is, in a general way, representative of God to people and of people to God. In that context, celibacy has many values.

Several years ago Fr Seamus Murphy SJ made the following points about the value of celibacy.

\* Celibacy expresses the Church's belief in the truth of the New Testament, since it accepts the example and teaching of the Lord Jesus and St Paul that celibacy is positive and life-giving.

\* It expresses the priest's own faith in the gospel and his personal trust in Jesus. In committing himself to celibacy, he is putting himself on the line, staking a most important part of his life on the call of Christ.

\* It is a significant form of acceptance of Jesus' call to total renunciation for the sake of the gospel. The Christian community is always in need of people who will respond to that call.

\* It is an imitation of the celibate Jesus, motivated by love of Him. It represents an acceptance of the idea that the priest must, as far as possible, be like the Master.

\*It is sacrificial. It is a sharing in the sacrifice Jesus made through his life and death, as described in the Letter to the Hebrews 2:9-18 and 5:1-10. It is a way of living out Romans 12:1-2, where Paul appeals to the Roman Christians to involve their bodies in their sacrifice to God, going against the norms of the dominant culture.

\*It is an expiation for sin, particularly sexual sin. In our time, when the sexual sins of clergy and religious are highlighted, it would be a serious mistake to drop

celibacy, since it would amount to abandoning hope that abstinence is possible.

\*It is a badly needed counter-witness to the sexual exploitation and irresponsibility, and contempt for sexual self-discipline, promoted by a consumer culture.

\*It expresses solidarity with those who are fated, despite their desires, never to marry or have children.

\* It is a counter-witness to the collapse of belief in permanent commitment, whether marriage or celibacy. It expresses belief in: (a) the possibility and (b) the value of lifelong celibacy. If the Church appears to give up on the possibility of lifelong celibacy, it will weaken the cultural support for lifelong marriage.

These values are very important, and the Church ought not risk giving the impression of watering them down. Given the contemporary culture, a decision to drop the celibacy requirement, going against 1,600 years of tradition, would inevitably be seen as undermining those values.

*Fr Pat Stratford is parish priest of Sandgate-Brighton in the Brisbane Archdiocese.*

Source:  
[http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2007/feb2007p20\\_2468.html](http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2007/feb2007p20_2468.html)

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## **American Priests and seminarians survey: more vocations in orthodox dioceses**

-- Human Life International

*A comparative analysis of different 'styles' of US dioceses was recently undertaken by Human Life International (HLI). The survey sought to compare the numbers of priests and seminarians in dioceses broadly typed as "orthodox" and "progressive".*

For the purposes of its study HLI defined an "orthodox" diocese as one that had exhibited a "general predisposition of fidelity towards the Magisterium since Vatican II."

The term "progressive" was applied to a diocese exhibiting "a general predisposition towards liberal

activism and systematic toleration towards dissent from the magisterium since Vatican II".

In the United States, with its large number of dioceses, the contrasts between those at each end of the theological/liturgical spectrum have tended to be more obvious than in Australia.

One might have predicted at the outset that dioceses where, in general, the sacred character of the ordained priesthood is more emphasised, liturgies are celebrated reverently according to the Church's rubrics and doctrinal orthodoxy is insisted upon and promoted, would attract more recruits - e.g., Lincoln, Nebraska, or Arlington, Virginia. This, in fact, proved to be the case.

The HLI calculations were based on figures from P.J. Kenedy & Sons' Official Catholic Directories, 1956 to 1997 editions, and editions of the Vatican Secretary of State Statistical Yearbook of the Church for the years 1975, 1981, 1987 and 1993.

The study examined two clusters of 15 dioceses over the period 1955 to 1996. One cluster consisted of 15 dioceses that have had a generally orthodox tradition since 1955 (and especially since Vatican II); the other consisted of 15 dioceses that have had a generally progressive tradition over the same period. HLI found the following 15 dioceses to be in the "orthodox" category: Amarillo, Texas; Arlington, Virginia; Atlanta, Georgia; Baltimore, Maryland; Corpus Christi, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Fargo, North Dakota; Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana; Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska; Peoria, Illinois; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Steubenville, Ohio; and Wichita, Kansas.

The following 15 dioceses were considered to be in the "progressive" category: Chicago, Illinois; Detroit and Grand Rapids, Michigan; Los Angeles, California; Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin; New Ulm, Minnesota; Phoenix, Arizona; Portland, Maine; Rockville Centre, New York; San Bernadino, San Diego and San Francisco, California; Seattle, Washington; and Tucson, Arizona.

HLI conceded that the terms "orthodox" and "progressive" were "necessarily subjective", but explained that the 15 dioceses "of each persuasion" were selected "after an extensive review of articles carried in four publications over the past 30 years: National Catholic Reporter, National Catholic Register, Commonweal and The Wanderer.

A list of these dioceses was then submitted to a number of individuals "with extensive knowledge of the history of the American Catholic Church for confirmation and correction."

Two patterns were apparent from the statistics:

1. There are currently nearly twice as many diocesan priests per million active (or practising) Catholics in orthodox dioceses as there are in progressive dioceses

(2,057 vs. 1,075); and

2. The proportion of diocesan priests in orthodox dioceses has remained steady, while the number of diocesan priests in progressive dioceses has been continually declining for four decades. In orthodox dioceses, there were 1,830 diocesan priests per million active Catholics in 1956, and 12 percent more (2,057) in 1996.

In progressive dioceses, there were 1,290 diocesan priests per million active Catholics in 1956, and 1,075 in 1996, a 17 percent decrease.

A second statistical analysis looked at the numbers of diocesan priests ordained in the period 1986 to 1996.

Two patterns were evident from this:

1. There are currently nearly five times as many ordinations of diocesan priests per million active Catholics in orthodox dioceses as there are in progressive dioceses (53 vs. 11); and

2. The rate of ordinations of diocesan priests in orthodox dioceses shows a strong upward trend, while the rate in progressive dioceses, relatively low four decades ago, continues to decline. In orthodox dioceses, there were 34 ordinations of diocesan priests per million active Catholics in 1986, and 53 in 1996 - an increase of more than 50 percent. In progressive dioceses, the rate was 16 in 1986, and only 11 in 1996 - a one-third decrease.

*With acknowledgement to HLI.*

Source:

[http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/1998/aug1998p12\\_554.html](http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/1998/aug1998p12_554.html)

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## **New survey of successful US dioceses: lessons for Australia**

Michael Gilchrist  
April 2007

Results of a statistical survey of the United States' 176 Catholic dioceses have just been published in Crisis magazine (February/March 2007 issue). Titled The State of the Catholic Church in America Diocese by Diocese, the survey was carried out by Rev Rodger Hunter-Hall and Steven Wagner.

The better-known orthodox bishops and dioceses - such as Archbishop Chaput (Denver) and Bishop Bruskewitz (Lincoln) - ranked well, while long-time liberal dioceses, such as Milwaukee, Albany and Rochester, fared very poorly. Not all dioceses fitted

this pattern, due to other factors, but there was an evident correlation between success and strongly orthodox leadership.

Three sets of official Church statistics were used: a diocese's number of ordinations as a proportion of the total number of active diocesan priests; the increase in number of active diocesan clergy over a ten year period (1995-2005); and the number of adults received into the Church as a percentage of a diocese's population.

The survey's authors noted, 'If these three measures imperfectly reflect the vitality of the dioceses, they are a pretty good start. The change in the size of the priesthood and the effort invested in increasing vocations and adult receptions do say something fundamental about the state of the dioceses'.

Further information that might have fine-tuned the comparisons, like Mass attendances rates, was presumably difficult to obtain for all dioceses.

### **Ordained priests**

The first criterion of success, the number of ordained priests, was measured as a proportion of a diocese's total number of active priests. The leading diocese here was the very small Las Cruces, New Mexico, with three new priests out of a total of 21 (14 percent). Chicago (under Cardinal Francis George) had the greatest single number with 17.

In 1995, 45 dioceses reported no ordinations, while in 2005 the figure was 48. The survey noted: 'It seems the persona of a bishop is all important. Increasingly men are seeking out congenial bishops and seminaries.'

Overall, the number of active diocesan priests declined from 22,000 in 1995 to 18,000 in 2005, with 385 diocesan ordinations in 1995 and 335 in 2005.

The survey suggested, 'a bishop could contribute to a climate in which priests from overseas or other dioceses are attracted, or remain eager to serve beyond retirement'.

Twenty-nine dioceses (16 percent) saw an increase in the number of active priests from 1995-2005, the best being the small diocese of Tyler, Texas, with a 128 percent increase. The vast majority showed a decline.

During 2005, 149,306 adults were received into the Church in the US, or about 0.2 percent of the total Catholic population (almost 66 million). Here, the most successful diocese was that of Kansas City-St Joseph in Missouri (under Bishop Robert Finn), with a 3.2 percent reception rate, or 16 times the national average.

In order to arrive at a composite rating, each diocese was ranked according to each of the three

measures and the ranks then combined. But even more interesting than the overall ranking of dioceses for 2005 was the change in ranking between 1995 and 2005. Large shifts, either up or down, might reveal something about the condition of a diocese.

The worst region of the US - with an average ranking of 136 - was the Northeast (New England) which has the highest percentage of Catholics in the population. The most successful region was the South - with an average ranking of 49 - where Catholics comprise the lowest proportion of the population.

A priest in the Knoxville Diocese (Tennessee), ranked number one in the survey (and number two in 1995), commented: 'We are outnumbered, we are young, we are building churches, we are growing, there is an enthusiasm for evangelisation among the laity'.

There was also a strong correlation between size of a diocese and ranking. Smaller dioceses - those with 100,000 adherents or fewer - were disproportionately represented among the higher rankings, while larger dioceses - with 500,000 or more adherents - were heavily represented among the lower rankings.

The influence of bishops could be seen in the case of neighbouring dioceses, broadly similar in size, region, socio-economic status, ethnicity and population movements, yet having vastly different rankings.

### **Factors in success**

The survey then sought to pinpoint possible factors in the successes of individual dioceses, speaking with officials in the top-rated dioceses. It found the most striking common factors were that successful bishops attribute their success to the Holy Spirit, are 'joyful', exude enthusiasm for the Faith and the Church, are confident in what the faith offers and teaches and are not apologetic for being Catholic.

The survey also found that successful bishops are personally involved in leading men to discern a vocation and in promoting the morale of their priests and take a direct role in evangelisation programs. Diocesan-sponsored Web sites also reflected the character of successful dioceses, with easy access to information on how to become a Catholic, return to the Faith, or consider a vocation. Prominence tends to be given to the sanctity of marriage and pro-life issues, as well as other topics related to the Church's doctrinal teachings.

The survey's authors concluded that the Church needs 'to recognise the characteristics common to successful bishops, and to systematically elevate priests with an appropriate profile'. Successful strategies for evangelisation and vocations promotion

need to be drawn upon and applied in less successful areas.

There are lessons here for Australia.

Source:  
[http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2007/apr2007p9\\_2504.html](http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2007/apr2007p9_2504.html)

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## NOVENA

Rosebank Catholic Church  
July 2006

Heavenly Father, you show your divine love for us in sending us your Son, Jesus Christ to live, suffer, die and rise from the dead. As a tangible sign of this desire to be present with us until the end of time, he gave us Himself, risen from the dead, body, blood, soul and divinity, in the Blessed Eucharist. In the light of this, Heavenly Father, we ask you to be with the People of Rosebank Parish as they pray, think, meditate on and discuss the problem of the shortage of priests who stand before the altar to consecrate bread and wine to make your Son mysteriously present to us in this Sacrament.

In your mercy and compassion;

Give us a love for Jesus Christ and let this love motivate everything we do. We ask especially for a deep love, reverence and appreciation of our Saviour, truly present in his suffering, death and resurrection under the appearance of bread and wine.

Fill us with a love for and loyalty to the Church which he founded, which is an extension of him in time to continue his work of teaching, healing and making holy.

Bless our Holy Father Pope Benedict, our bishop Buti and all the Bishops of the Church; reward them for undertaking the arduous task you have called them; give them wisdom and courage to act in the interests of your Church in this, the twenty first century of its existence.

Bless the priests and deacons, Diocesan and Religious, who today minister to your people. Reward them for their work. Give them life, health, happiness and perseverance as they strive to serve the flock which your Son has committed to them.

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