

Bishop Kearney Explains Religious Vocation Needs

His Excellency Bishop Kearney discussed the need for religious vocations in a radio interview last Sunday with the Rev. Richard T. Torney. Following is a transcript of the broadcast made over Station WHEAM:

FR. T: Bishop Kearney, it is a distinct honor to have you here. Am I correct in saying to the public that it is one of the major responsibilities of the Diocesan Bishop to promote and increase vocations in his diocese?

BISHOP: Yes, Father, you are correct. That is one of our major responsibilities, because upon the recruitment of priests and sisters to carry on the work of the churches and schools depends the future progress of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the community.

FR. T: At the very outset of our talk, Bishop, would you sketch for us just how critical are the vocational needs of the Rochester Diocese?

BISHOP: Well, as you know, Father, within the last few years we have increased to a great extent the number of our parish schools. We have opened a number of new parishes also. We find, for example, when there is talk of opening a new parish, the parents are always concerned that with the opening of a new church there should be the opening of a new school.

I have had the experience time and time again, as soon as there is talk of a new parish in a certain community, of having fathers and mothers come and say: "Now, let us have our school from the very beginning." Of course that means that we must have available the Sisters to teach in those schools. The opening of every new parish also means a draining of the supply of priests to carry on that work.

Now we also face a very serious situation, and that is the need for more priests in the armed forces. Many of our priests who are eligible for service are anxious to go but they realize that they leave a serious vacancy behind if they undertake the work. Consequently we are in a very serious situation, not critical I would say, but a situation where we must increase our vocations if our work in all these fields is to be effective.

FR. T: Bishop, taking your word that the expansion of parochial schools is of major concern, would you discuss with us about the annual number of applicants to our diocesan teaching orders? The Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of St. Joseph teach

in most of our diocesan schools. Has their number grown in recent years or is it quite stationary?

BISHOP: The number is more or less stationary. I would say it has not grown in proportion to the demands. Now, of course, there is another angle that must be considered and that is some of the young women graduating from our own schools go to other religious communities. We have no fault to find with that because these vocations vary.

There are some very fine graduates of our schools we should like to have in our local community, but they have been attracted to missionary work of various kinds. However, there is this regrettable fact that there has not been an increase in the number of vocations to keep pace with the requirements even of our own diocese.

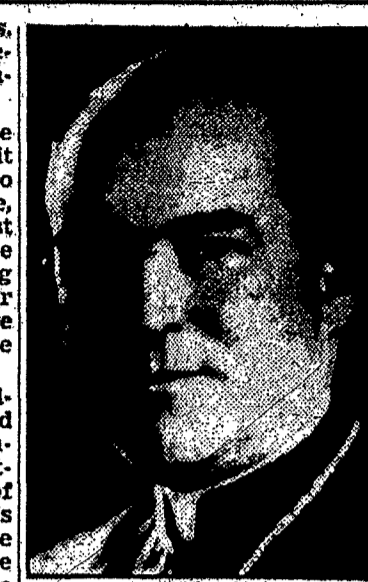
FATHER T: I did a little research in preparation for this chat, Bishop. In the last three years, Nazareth Academy has graduated about 784 girls, and about forty-five of them have gone to the convent, either here or in another diocese. And in the same number of years, Mercy High has graduated 591 and some thirty have entered the convent.

Now this, according to their official records, shows no gradual rise in proportion to their large school attendance. There is a steady sameness over the past 10 or 15 years. That isn't a healthy condition, is it?

BISHOP: It's not. Yet, of course, we must realize that a vocation to the convent is a very serious call and it makes a big demand. It demands a tremendous sacrifice and demands generosity of heart. It demands a willingness to serve God.

There is another angle to be considered, and it is this. With the increasing restrictions on the type of girl that we can take into our religious communities the problem becomes more serious. For example, it is necessary now for a girl teaching in elementary school, and even our religious, to have her Bachelor's degree. Consequently, a religious community will not accept, and should not accept, girls with the idea of making them teachers unless they are convinced they're capable of doing the necessary preparatory work.

What I want to point out is that as in every vocation, when you increase the requirements, you are making it more difficult to get the personnel. For example, many years ago, when the



BISHOP KEARNEY

educational requirements were not as high as they are today for the classrooms, it was easy to accept many fine and generous girls, generous of heart and willing to serve, but, unfortunately, many of those are not acceptable today because they are just not able to meet the standards.

Now we realize all that, but at the same time, we feel that there are a great many who have all this equipment, and for some reason or other, this particular vocation has failed to impress them as it should.

FR. T: Bishop, many listeners do not clearly understand what the Church means by a vocation. In your mind, and in the Church's, what does it really consist of? How does a girl know she has one?

BISHOP: In a general way you best get the meaning of this word "vocation" simply by translating your Latin. The "vocatio" is a calling. We have other callings. We meet one man and we say his vocation was to be a doctor. We have the teaching profession and we say after having listened to them or attended their classes "their vocation was to be teachers." We are coming to realize that motherhood is a very definite vocation. However, in the sense that we are using it, we have come to restrict it to the "call of God."

I suppose it goes back to the words of Christ in speaking of His apostleship: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." In other words, God calls people to His service.

Now there is no supernatural way that this call comes to us. We cannot hope to have any

tangible, definite, outstanding phenomena to indicate that. After all this demand for special signs and wonders was condemned by Christ Himself, when He said in reflecting on the faith of His followers: "Unless you see signs and wonders, you believe not."

The best signs of vocation to me would be, first of all, an intense love for God. Christ has laid down the commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord our God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul and with all thy strength." The first feeling of a vocation is the willingness to interpret that thing in its very fullest. That is, God should be everything in our life.

Then comes the question of our equipment so that when a young girl has this intense love for God and a spirit of self-sacrifice, she is willing to give up many of the legitimate pleasures, and satisfactions of this life, in a consciousness that sacrifice is necessary to make her work more effective. And then, having that courage, that self-sacrifice, she is willing to undertake the particular type of work for which she thinks God has especially equipped her. That is about my interpretation of "vocation." Personally, that is the way it came to all of us.

FATHER T: Bishop Kearney, I think everyone would appreciate that this means a very big decision in a girl's life. How would you answer parents who say that an eighteen-year-old girl is incapable of knowing her own mind and of making such a decision?

BISHOP: Father, an eighteen-year-old girl is capable of talking to God, of getting divine inspiration, of getting divine messages into her youthful heart, just as well as a man 50 or 60 is. And a young girl of eighteen has reached the crossroads of life.

Anyway she is bound to make a very vital decision in a short time as to where her path will go and it is a mistaken notion for parents to say that a girl of eighteen does not know her own mind. My experience with girls of that age, and boys of that age is they very definitely know their own minds.

FATHER T: Some people say there is a great spirit of selfishness among young people today. Do you think that is as important a factor in holding back vocations as some people think?

BISHOP: I don't think that selfishness has so much to do with it. I think the self sacrifice of the matter frightens a lot of our young people. They are awed by the whole program — what they give up, the responsibilities, what they figure is the terrible monotonous routine of the thing. And then, of course, very often their experiences, sometimes, with religious have not increased it — the very ones, the people who represent religion in their life and person have not been able to attract these young people. After all in this matter of vocations, personal relationship has a great deal to do with it.

of our intense admiration of some particular priest. It was because we saw the priesthood personified in an individual man, that we had the desire to be something like him. The same thing is true of the Sisters. The Sister in the classroom who will personally in every moment, in every relationship the ideals of the religious life — these are the ones that will attract young people to the service of God. That is why it has been my experience that very often I have noticed particular priests who, we might say, have a "little following" who went to the priesthood. And I know particular nuns who have a "little following" who went to the Sisterhood, all attracted because they saw the ideals represented in a person.

FATHER T: In this whole matter I have often felt that the place of the parents was not sufficiently emphasized. What about the selfishness that they display? Do you have any strong feeling upon that?

BISHOP: I have, and I have had several unfortunate experiences — very fine young women who obviously had vocations, who had an intense desire to serve God, but who met with opposition at the very spot where they should have gotten cooperation. That is to say their parents interfered with them. I have a very interesting quotation that I would like to read, written by a young college woman recently on this subject and she sums it up very well this way:

"Closely related to the misunderstanding about vocations and equally responsible for the failure of parents to recommend the religious life to their children is the misconception of the meaning of children. Children do not belong to parents as so many parents seem to think. They belong to God and are on loan to parents until He asks for them back again.

"If every parent could be made to realize that, there would be no need for vocational conferences for children; there would be no shortage of vocations to the religious life.

"Parents must learn early the true meaning of vocation and the true meaning of their parenthood. Once they grasp this everything will follow, even though as it is, God will have His way. They must be taught above everything else that children are given them in trust, not as possessions, and that in asking for His own gifts back again God is asking the gift He gave to them and is not bestowing any insult or an injury upon them.

"They must realize that religion is as much a vocation as any one of the professions which they urge upon their children."

FATHER T: Bishop Kearney, in all this problem of recruiting vocations in the Diocese, what special projects are going on in your schools, that the general public should hear about?

BISHOP: This particular month, we open the question, we lay it open in the classrooms — we present the problem to the

children. We bring in representatives of various religious communities in order that the whole program of the service of God may be open.

We are not simply concerned with our own religious communities. We realize that Christ's Church is something vastly bigger than the problems of the diocese of Rochester and so we open the whole program and we have this vocation month.

We invite representatives of the Jesuits, Redemptorists, Franciscans, Passionists, Maryknoll Sisters, Missionary Sisters, Medical Missionaries of Mary — the whole field. From time to time these different groups come here so that our young people can see how vast the field is and how critical the necessity.

FATHER T: The particular emphasis on the home Sisterhoods, the home Priesthood, is carried on by the teacher in the classroom, is it?

BISHOP: We feel that in the classrooms our own Sisters and Priests have the great advantage of personal contact with these young people. If it cannot be done in the classroom, it will hardly be done anywhere else.

FATHER T: Bishop, to close this very sincerely presented statement of the interest in the Church in vocations, what word would you give to the laity in general, those people listening in who have no children or even nieces or nephews who might be interested — what can the laity in general do to aid in the broad vocational program of the Church?

BISHOP: The laity, in general, concerned as they are with the spread of the Kingdom of Christ on earth, can always assist us by their prayers. By prayer, especially to St. Francis Xavier, the great patron of the mission, and to our Blessed Lady for whom the welfare of the Church is a very deep concern. Prayer can solve many of these problems — after all they're God's problems.

'Human Rights' Amendment Backed By Monroe CWV

A Resolution urging support of an amendment designed to prevent the destruction of the rights of the American people by treaties or by "Executive Agreement" was unanimously adopted by Monroe County Chapter, Catholic War Veterans meeting Tuesday at Monroe Dame Retreat House, 246 Alexander St.

The amendment was initiated by Senator Bricker of Ohio and signed by 55 other Senators, the Resolution said.

"This proposed amendment to the Constitution of the United States," the veterans declared, "has as one of its primary objectives the focusing of attention on a grave constitutional defect and is aimed at preventing the Covenant on Human Rights drafted by the United Nations from destroying the Constitution of the United States."

Copies of the resolution will be sent to representatives in Congress from this area.

Another resolution backing the American Legion in their move to return the Memorial Day Parade to its former status as a gigantic civic and patriotic project was also adopted by the delegates and copies were to be sent to the Memorial & Executive Council in charge of planning the parade.

Howard Meath of St. Augustine's Post was elected to the office of County 3rd Vice-Commander.

Plans were also announced for the Annual Military Ball of the Chapter on Saturday May 24.

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Writes one distracted mother: "My husband is missing... dying a slow death in Siberia! We were expelled from our home. Had to flee in winter with my four children. Two died on the way. The other two are suffering and sick and I am a nervous wreck. God bless you for your angelic charity!"

Father Thomas, Director of Claretian Relief, on his next mercy trip to Europe will take to His Holiness Pope Pius XII a beautiful album containing the names of all Claretian Relief beneficiaries. Let your name be inscribed. Our dear Lord will reward you. He said, "As you did it for one of these... you did it for me."

Read These Piteous Appeals
"A nightmare! We lost everything. My husband and two sons were deported. Have pity on us dear Father Thomas and help us if you can. I am alone with two daughters, sick, hungry, homeless, penniless," writes distressed Anna Dolts from Poland.
From bomb blasted Japan a parish priest writes: "No church, no school, no home. We are celebrating Mass in the ruins of the church. Please remember me and my hungry Japanese Catholics. Send us food, clothing, vestments, etc."
In the name of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother, we come knocking at the door of your heart. These desperate mothers and hungry children as well as priests and nuns, afflicted and persecuted, cry to you for help. Respond NOW with your gifts, be generous, the more you can give the greater your blessing.

Gift Book FREE Fill out and mail coupon. All donors will receive "The Mystery of Kohnenruth" an amazing story of Theresa Neumann by the Rev. Dr. Father Thomas, O.M.F., 130 pages, 12 photographic illustrations. Gold stamped, cloth binding. Father Thomas reports: "The Holy Father orders me to convey His special blessing for all benefactors of Claretian Relief. The stigmatic Theresa Neumann too is praying for them in a special way. The generosity of your gifts will be remembered and your intentions prayed for at our altar Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary."
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