

# A Vocation — a Calling by God — A Most Mysterious Thing

(Guest editorial by the Rev. Louis J. Neumann,  
Diocesan Director of Vocations)

Autumn is the season of golden foliage and football, but in the Diocese of Rochester it is also associated in our minds with focus on the seminaries and the priesthood. Along with the annual appeal for our seminaries we have opened house at both our seminaries—St. Bernard's two weeks ago and St. Andrew's this coming Sunday (Oct. 15).

Which brings us in a rather roundabout way to the subject of vocations. A vocation—a calling by God—is a most mysterious thing. Ordinarily God calls a person to his service not through some miraculous intervention but through the authorities of the Church accepting a candidate who is in their judgment qualified and desires that service. The desire, of course, comes under the inspiration of God's grace operating through ordinary social channels.

So the traditional pictures of a boy or girl receiving a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, where Christ is depicted as looking over the shoulder of the young person and whispering a call are not very realistic. Most often the young person must work and pray to determine the reality of the call.

Perhaps we can get a better insight into the idea of vocation to the priesthood and religious life if we understand the basic vocation, calling, which God gives to all men.

First of all, realize that each of us is unique. No human person ever has been or ever will be exactly duplicated in creation. There never has been or ever will be someone exactly the same as each of us. And every human person has a specific place and function in creation, at least in the sense that no one can live and act precisely as each of us do.

At the same time we are each part of a great symphony which creation was meant to be. Because of the large numbers of human beings we sometimes seem to become faceless and lose our individuality like so many members of a symphony orchestra whom the audience seldom notices as individuals and even more infrequently hears as individuals. Still that is not to deny the singular importance of the part each plays. So we cannot become swallowed up in the crowd, lost in the shuffle, even though sometimes we might desire it.

How does a person know what part he is to play in this symphony of creation? The call has gone out to each and every one of us and we can hear it in the Word. Note that we spelled Word with a capital. For the Word which has gone out to us is the Word of God, spoken by John in the opening verses of his Gospel, the Word who was in the beginning, the expression of God who became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.

Indeed the Word of God, Jesus Christ, has come to each of us, calling us to a specific way of life. That way of life is best expressed in the acts and words of Christ. As the Psalmist said of him, "Behold I come; in the written scroll it is prescribed for me, to do your will, O my God, is my delight..." (Ps. 39).

At another time he told his disciples that he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a redemption for many. To make very graphic his role as a servant of God and the children of God he stooped to wash the feet of the Apostles at the Last Supper. And he told them, "If therefore, I the Lord and Master have washed your feet, you also ought to wash the feet of one another." (Jn. 13:14). And as the moon reflects the sun, so does the Blessed Mother of God reflect the message of her Son in her answer to the angel, "Behold the servant of the Lord: be it done unto me according to thy word."

This then is the message of the Word: he calls all of us to use our lives in the service of God and of our fellow men. He calls us to give ourselves over to the will of God, to expand our talents and our energies to order and beautify the creation of His Hands, to enrich the lives of our neighbors by communicating our love to them.

This particular approach to life is not a popular one in our time. To use the old chestnut, we live in an affluent society. More people are beneficiaries of more material goods and services than at any time in the history of man, at least in our own country. When children are brought up in an atmosphere where they are continually the recipients of services from others, it is easily explainable why they come to think that they are living to receive rather than to give, why they work hard to be served rather than to serve, why in their minds happiness is synonymous with what they can get out of life rather than what they can contribute to it.

The net result of this worldly attitude is the loss of the sense of our Christian vocation, to share in the life and vocation of Christ, giving himself to the world. In this consists the priesthood of Jesus. The Latin word for priest is sacerdos which, translated means Sacred Giver. We are all meant to share that priesthood of Christ in the sense that we are called to be sacred givers of self in union with, that is, in the spirit of Christ.

In our opinion, the seed of vocations to the religious life is to be found in this most basic and universal vocation to give self in service. From homes where this spirit is fostered and exemplified in opposition to the world's philosophy of getting as much as one can, vocations to the priesthood and the sisterhoods will spring in abundance.

This sentiment is already partially verified in the fact that more priests come from larger families than from smaller ones. In the larger families there is of necessity a sharing in responsibilities and tasks around the home. In small families (there are of course exceptions) the tendency of parents is to give and give to their one or two children because there is such little need for demanding service from the children.

In our late Holy Father, John XXIII, we were all inspired to this sense of service. Here was a man who gave little or no thought to himself but a prodigious amount of time and sympathy and help to the needs

of his fellow man wherever he found them. His example can be for all of us an inspiration to a new and livelier sense of our vocation as Christians.

As Director of Vocations in the Diocese of Rochester, it is my task to promote religious vocations. In my mind that endeavor will be successful only to the degree that a renewal takes place at the grass roots. Parents and teachers and pastors will sow the seeds of vocations to the priesthood and sisterhoods by sowing in season and out of season the basic Christian vocation to serve. They will do this by their example of service as did our late Holy Father. They will do this by inspiring young people to reach toward the beauty and fulfillment of a devoted life. They will teach young people

to serve by asking them to serve. Too often we feel that we are asking too much when we ask young people to be more generous than we judge them to be and are only waiting for the opportunity.

We would be remiss beyond belief were we to omit mention of one more essential ingredient in the search for vocations. Christ himself commanded it when he said, "Pray the Lord of the harvest that he send laborers into his harvest." A specific call to Holy Orders or to the religious life is indeed a call to God. So we must pray that God will send the laborers. The reason this is necessary is because Christ and his message are the gifts of God and we must want to receive them. God will not force his gifts upon us any more than he will force his love upon us.

May we ask them that all people join in this humble acceptance of God's greatest gift to mankind by their DAILY prayers for vocations. Perhaps you might care to use the prayer published by the Serra Club of Rochester.

"O God, who wills not the death of the sinner but rather that he be converted and live, grant we beseech Thee, through the intercession of the Blessed Mary ever Virgin and all the saints, an increase of laborers for Thy Church, fellow laborers with Christ, to spend and consume themselves for souls, through the same Jesus Christ Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the union of the Holy Spirit world without end. Amen."

## Venerable Neumann Had Rochester Ties

By FATHER JAMES CALVIN, C.S.S.R.

Venerable John Nepomucene Neumann, who will receive the title "Blessed" in Vatican ceremonies this Sunday, had several personal links with Rochester's early Catholic beginnings.

And it, as seems likely, he should be raised to the honors of sainthood, Rochester will seek landmarks of his stay in our midst: an altar, perhaps, where he once said Mass, a chair he often climbed, a room he lived in. Men will inquire about mementos and souvenirs.

Unfortunately, they will find but few. Perhaps we ought to explain the reason, touching on an estimated eighty days, it told, that he spent in the city.

His first glimpse of the Flour City was on a Tuesday morning in 1838, the Fourth of July, as the latest Indiana came up the Canal street of the Genesee. On June 26 Bishop Dubois had ordained him at the old cathedral on Mott St., Manhattan.

Rochester was his first personal contact with the active ministry... an eight-day stop-over en route to Buffalo, his first assignment.

While here Father Neumann was the houseguest of Father Bernard O'Reilly, pastor of the only Catholic church, St. Patrick's, on Frank and Platt Streets. Presumably the one-story clapboard rectory was near the church.

Anyway, in 1839 it was replaced by a more substantial residence for Bishop McQuaid, when St. Patrick's became Rochester's first cathedral. But the point is this: with the old wooden rectory, there was lost a Neumann relic: a house he lived in once.

But to come back to Neumann landmarks, in 1831 there is no trace of the church on Ely Street, or the house behind it on Minerva Alley. The only relic of that period are the signatures "John N. Neumann" in both St. Patrick's and St. Joseph's baptismal records.

But that was not his only stay here. In the summer of '38 and again in July 1840, Neumann came over the Ridge Road from the Niagara Frontier to minister to the German parishioners at Ely Street. On both these occasions he lived in the Redemptorist's town house at the rear of the church basement.

But though Father Joseph Prost, C.S.S.R., was absent, the effect of his ministry were vividly evident in the orderly piety of the congregation at Mass, the surprising numbers that approached the communion rail, Neumann's own parishioners back at North Bush and Williamsville could not emigrate with these good people of Rochester.

Ely Street left a deep impression. So deep, that within the year Father Neumann had made up his mind to become a Redemptorist like Father Prost.

In spring of 1841 Father Simon Sanderl built the first Redemptorist "monastery" in Rochester, a four-room frame house on Minerva Alley behind the church. Father Neumann spent part of his novitiate in this house. In June, 1841 he was all by himself, completely in charge of the parish. The Redemptorist in America: at the time were sorely short of personnel. No sooner did the novice arrive, than the two older men, one of them his novice-master, left Rochester at once.

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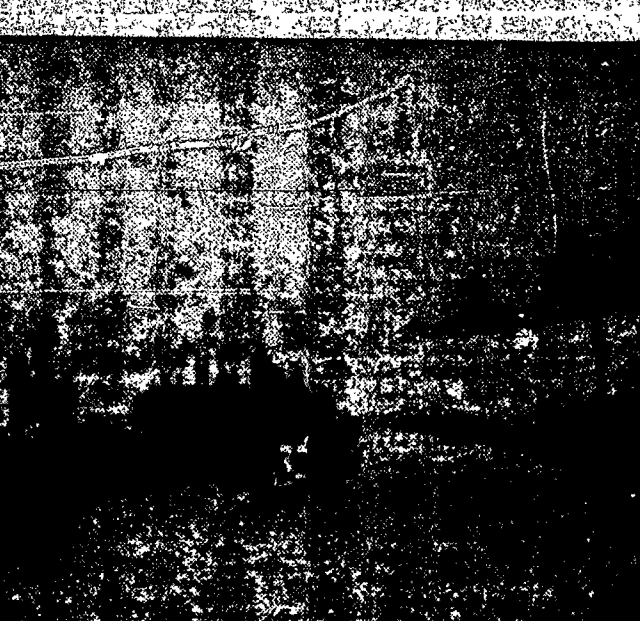
Living in this house were four members of the community: Father Berenick and Tchenhens; Brother Justus, the cook; Brother Joseph, just returned from overseas, an expert carpenter who also acted as sacristan in the church. Tight quarters. Brother Joseph slept in the sacristy. Justus spread a straw-sack on the floor of the dining room — and then in April of that year four missionaries arrived, one of them, Father Neumann.

In Lent of 1847 St. Joseph's had its first parish mission; and how eight men found sleeping quarters in the little house, the Annals do not say. But Father Neumann, being superior of the missionaries, probably chose the smallest of the attic cubicles for himself. Hence in tradition. The site of that little frame house on Franklin Street is occupied today by the Brothers' Office. Another Neumann landmark is a small, unassuming building, built in 1847, on Ely Street, which was the site of the first Redemptorist mission in Rochester.

As general superior of the Redemptorists in America, he was taking them on an extensive tour of the Order's foundations to give them first-hand assurance that in the United States there would be work aplenty for the teaching mission which he had been given. Over the years, 12 Venerable Neumann on this occasion stayed overnight, he slept in the now dismantled frame house. We are still without a landmark.

There remains one more possibility. A Bishop, he may have spent an evening in the greatest history. In July of 1854 Bishop Timon of Buffalo visited him up from Philadelphia to which two retreats for his priests. En route, to see him, he may have stopped at Rochester, his first stop as a bishop. But in the small of the house there is no mention of this.

We might mention another Rochester link. Venerable Neumann, a quiet, retiring man, was a member of the Society of the Holy Eucharist, which he joined in 1847.



A picture boat like the one on which Bishop Neumann travelled on his first visit to Rochester is shown in this reproduction of an old watercolor. The painting "Pifford (sic) on the Erie Canal—A Sultry Calm," is the work of George Harvey and was done around 1837. (Courtesy of New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, N.Y.)

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the diocesan investigation into his life and virtues was begun in Philadelphia, the then Rector of St. Joseph's Rochester, Father Joseph Wirth, C.S.S.R., was appointed Proprietor of the Cause of Beatification. Through most of 1887 Father Wirth conducted each week between Franklin Street and Philadelphia until the preliminary process was completed. In November of '88 he was chosen to take the sealed findings of the Philadelphia commission to the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome.

But Neumann landmarks in Rochester are mostly memories. This much the Diocese can say. He heard the clatter of some twenty mill-wheels along the Lower Falls. He got Rochester flourmills on his company of two monks from Munich: Mother Theresia and Sister Geraldine of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

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ONLY RELICS of Bishop Neumann's stay in Rochester are his signature in the baptismal records of St. Joseph's and St. Patrick's Churches. A page from the baptismal records at St. Joseph's, dated July 1841, shows several entries in his handwriting and signed by Bishop Neumann.



By DR. GARY MacDON

Rome—While formal opening ceremonies and clarification of procedures for the Council's new session follow their intensive and delicate course, I have joined my fellow crystal-gazers in earnest invocation of the guidance of the Holy Spirit not only for the august Fathers but for our unworthy selves.

Fully aware that we have no claim to special divine guidance, we are nevertheless profoundly thankful for Pope Paul's recent description of newsmen as his "colleagues and friends" and his desire to be indulgent to the "journalistic liberties" which the nature of our vocation combined with our human frailty render morally inevitable.

The intention may have been excellent, but the effect was to pervert his function by giving

the subjective precedents overruling Council events. Too much discussion centered on distributed not only to Catholic newsmen around the world, but particularly those who are members of the Union, because Pope John had set a precedent of the idea of greater autonomy by granting not only that access to information. The Council's Commission in July this article analyzes the philosophy that nobody should be passed on proposals for a more ecumenical and theological reconciliation in the examination of official policy governing press and why Catholics have a right to know what is going on in the Council. It is a characteristic of the Council that major progress has been made.

Perhaps the most significant development in recent months regarding the place of the press which every society to which a statement by Father Emilio Church, is obliged to respect. Some may reject his theoretical argument, but it is felt here that this viewpoint will in practice set the tone for newsmen's position in an article during the current session.

Not all approved, and eye-brows were raised in particular regarding the propriety of dis-

## Chalice Owned By Toledo Priest

Toledo, Ohio — (NC) — A chalice believed to have been used by Venerable John Nepomucene Neumann, who will be beatified October 13 in Rome, now belongs to Father Lawrence J. Ernst, diocesan moderator of lay councils.

It was given to him by his grandmother, Mrs. Lawrence (Margaret) Fisher.

SHE HAD RECEIVED it from Father John Johnston of St. Mary Parish, Lorain, Ohio, on April 18, 1927, with a note that said:

"As an act of gratitude to Mrs. Fisher for having erected a shrine in the mission (now Norwalk) hallowed by the labors of Ven. John Nepomucene Neumann, D.D., C.S.S.R., fourth Bishop of Philadelphia, Pa., I hereby bequeath the chalice used by

the distinguished ecclesiastic when stationed at Peru, O."

Mrs. Fisher lived in Norwalk, Ohio, located a few miles from Peru. Norwalk is Father Ernst's birthplace.

Father Johnston obtained the chalice in 1905 from Father Thomas M. Kolb, then pastor of the Peru parish, who wrote Father Johnston:

"It nearly breaks my heart to part with the chalice, because Bishop Neumann was my dear mother's confessor, and I, as a little baby, received his special blessings."

Father Kolb told of taking with a priest who was pastor at Peru in 1881 and had said the chalice was the first one used in the parish, brought to Peru by the Redemptorists.

## The Press: An Expanded Role at the Council

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