

Renewing Lives of Service



Father Benedict Ehmann renews his priestly commitment.



Bishop Joseph Hogan greets the priests at the kiss of peace.

Photographs by David Witbeck

Text by John Dash

The mellow spring sun poured over the chapel walls as 70 priests gathered to celebrate the Eucharist and to renew the commitments they had made at their ordinations.

The occasion was the closing of the annual Priests' Retreat, held this year at Becket Hall, the diocesan house for college students preparing for the priesthood.

Auxiliary Bishop Joseph C. McKinney, of Grand Rapids, Mich., who led the retreat, summarized the previous three days of prayer and discussion with an anecdote about a man who once challenged him on his understanding of the Bible.

"What are the two most important words in the Bible?" the man demanded. The bishop hesitated. To him, the scriptural meaning of his life is "Jesus Christ is Lord." That answer would not do.

The man gruffly supplied "Come and Go."

The idea of being called to serve and going forth to serve, were what the bishop felt was the core of the retreat. He praised the strength of the Rochester priestly community and paraphrasing the new testament, the bishop remarked that "with Christ we go forth in the Spirit to the Father."

His conclusion was greeted with applause.

At the time of the homily, Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, who presided over the concelebrated Mass, expressed his "gratitude to God for His blessings in these days in the desert."

He thanked Bishop McKinney by saying that it was a "joy to have him in the diocese." The bishop brought "blessings and many healing graces," he said.

He spoke of his own "spiritual odyssey" in the priesthood, roundly lauding recently retired Father Benedict Ehmann as a "blessing in his priestly career."

The bishop regaled his priests with anecdotes which drew hearty laughs and at the conclusion another round of applause from the assembly.

The celebration grew sober when, immediately before the offertory, Bishop Hogan questioned his priests from the text of the ritual of ordination. When the priests had assented to their intentions to serve the Church and God, Bishop Hogan slowly walked to the foreground of the sanctuary and kneeling recited his intention before God to be worthy of his state of life, and asked God's blessing upon him.

Then each priest, in turn, also repledged himself to the priesthood. There were tears in the eyes of many.

The summer morning grew late and the priests returned to their people, having prayed with Bishop Hogan that "God, fill my emptiness; and, please, God, that our people will soon know it."