

# FOOD...

## ...for thought

For some time the elderly woman had been struggling with cancer. When it became difficult for her to leave home, the eucharistic ministers from her parish took on the task of visiting her daily. They brought the Eucharist and spent an hour or so chatting with her.

Later, as she lay dying, the eucharistic ministers, retired persons themselves, arranged to have someone with her around the clock.

That incident occurred in Dominican Father David K. O'Rourke's parish. He related the story to illustrate the kind of informal yet very real pastoral counseling that takes place in parishes.

"Pastoral counseling is a very broad term," Father O'Rourke indicated in an interview. Presently he is the associate director of the family life office in the Diocese of Oakland, Calif.

In his experience as a pastor, he has seen different kinds of people do pastoral counseling in parishes.

Some parishes have a professionally trained psychologist on the staff to counsel parishioners. But, Father O'Rourke said, this kind of pastoral counselor is most likely to be found in large urban parishes with many resources. Father O'Rourke himself is a

licensed counselor.

Sometimes Catholic schools have counselors who are also able to provide some psychological services to families, he added.

But much of the counseling that takes place in parishes isn't done by professionally trained psychologists or counselors. Father O'Rourke said. Instead it's done by staff persons and volunteer pastoral helpers. These pastoral counselors perform a valuable service, Father O'Rourke commented, by helping parishioners deal with "the coping and survival issues which come up in normal living." And their counseling is aimed at getting people's "finger off the panic button."

Father O'Rourke explained that "the chief challenge facing a pastor is to mobilize resources in parishes, to help people overcome their natural reticence to help."

For Father O'Rourke, pastoral counseling in the broadest sense can be defined "not by who does it but by what the person is doing."

It involves one person talking with another on a short-term or long-term basis. And talking is the medium through which the parishioner is helped, Father O'Rourke said.

## ...for discussion

1. Think of a time when you experienced a difficult conflict, or when you had great difficulty making an important decision about your future. Did you talk with anyone about this? Does it surprise you that many people turn to pastoral counselors of the church for assistance at such times?

2. Dominican Father David K. O'Rourke says that counselors are not magicians. How does he view his work as a counselor?

3. Some of our writers say that what pastoral counselors do is to help people regain proper control over their lives or to rediscover some direction for their lives. They help people to help themselves. Why — and when — is this kind of support needed?

4. Do you agree that the work of the pastoral counselor can be called a Christian vocation, a special way of living out the Christian life. Why? What is your idea of a Christian vocation?

### SECOND HELPINGS

"Community of Faith" by James and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead. Christians believe community life "is both a gift and a most difficult ambition," write the Whiteheads. Combining their talents as theologian and psychologist, they say their book is intended for use by groups of people in the church "who struggle to understand themselves as community." The authors discuss topics vital for community living. Conflict, for instance, is normal and to be expected in relationships; it usually "indicates that we are involved in something we feel is significant." But, the Whiteheads counsel, "this energy can be harnessed; it need not always work against us." Also discussed is the need for Christians to tend to their "spiritual, intellectual and emotional development." Personal development "is neither irrelevant to nor distracting from one's life with God," they write. (Seabury Press, 815 Second Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017. \$9.95.)



## cal insights into the heart

temptation and fall. How countless writers and novelists have depicted the workings of these human experiences. But it is widely agreed that no writer ever surpassed the Yahwist in depicting the psychology of his. He would have made a superb pastoral counselor.

"Countless writers and novelists have depicted the workings of these human experiences. But it is widely agreed that no writer ever surpassed the Yahwist..."

It is not the common practice among clinical psychologists to make decisions for their clients. To do so would reinforce the person's emotional immaturity. The aim is to lead the person to make his or her own decisions, to grow in maturity and self-direction. There are many examples of this in Scripture. After David committed the double crime of adultery and murder, the prophet Nathan did not confront him with a moral judgment. Nathan helped the king come to terms himself with what had been done.

Nathan told David a little story about a poor man who had just one lamb, a real pet. His rich neighbor, with flocks of sheep, had a visitor one day. Instead of preparing a meal from his abundant resources, "he took the poor man's ewe lamb and made a meal of it for his visitor. David grew very angry with that man and said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this merits death!'" Then Nathan said to David: "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:4-7)

Jesus used this technique often. After the parable about the tenant farmers who killed the landowner's servants and even his son in their greed, Jesus asked his hearers: "What do you suppose the owner of the vineyard will do to those tenants when he comes?" They answered: "He will bring that wicked crowd to a bad end and lease his vineyard out to others who will see to it that he has grapes at vintage time" (Matthew 21:40-41).

Thus Jesus led them to their own insight, their own conclusions. John wrote that Jesus "was well-aware of what was in man's heart" (John 2:25). It could stand as an apt description of an astute pastoral counselor.

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