



Life with Father

By Ruth Ann Hanley
NC News Service

Jesuit Father George Montague writes in his book, "Riding the Wind": "All the books that I have read and all the sermons that I have heard have never moved me so powerfully, nor made me feel the touch of the Lord so closely as the encounter with a brother or sister whom the Lord has touched."

When he was a chaplain at a large city hospital, Father Joseph Kos got to know the problems of the handicapped and elderly firsthand. Today he not only talks "about" how to treat these people in homilies on Sunday, he has had the opportunity to put it into practice every day.

Father Kos lives in a country rectory in Fortville, Ind., where he is pastor. For four years he shared the rectory with a housekeeper in her 70s, Anna Maier.

For the last of those two years the priest and Mrs. Maier were joined by Art Madaras, now 91. Often Father Kos got up at night to help Madaras, who was confined to a wheelchair.

And he washed his housekeeper's feet, Father Kos says, because "it was the only thing she still couldn't manage."

Mrs. Maier uses a wheelchair much of the time. But when she can she prefers to walk. Father Kos understood that. "She'd rather do for herself," he comments.

Mrs. Maier and Father Kos had been friends a long time. He stayed at her former parish while he worked at the hospital.

When Mrs. Maier reached for objects with her cane or figured out ways to carry the serving tray

to the table, Father Kos was appreciative. He knew she had come a long way. After a fall, doctors feared she'd never walk again.

Madaras is another of Father Kos' friends. After Madaras' wife died and he had a stroke, Father Kos became his guardian. He visited Madaras in the nursing home and saw how unhappy the man had become.

When Father Kos was offered the small rural parish, it seemed like a good move for him and also a fine solution for his friends. "I don't know what I would have done about Art if this hadn't been offered," he says. "Anna could have gone to her daughter but Art had no one."

The priest reports that Madaras was happy to be in a house where he felt connected again to someone he loved.

At the time, Madaras didn't need full-time nursing home care. But, because of increasing infirmity, the old man recently returned to a nursing home.

And Mrs. Maier wasn't ready to retire four years ago. After caring for a 28-room parish house in Indianapolis, she felt she still had spunk.

She was proud she could "give Father a free night" to spend at his mother's. On such occasions she took over the priest's care of Madaras, helping him as much as she can. "I can get up and help him," she insisted then.

Just recently, at the age of 82, she retired and now lives with her daughter.

Some people find it incredible that a pastor would pursue this lifestyle willingly. I find it is one way he made the good news visible.

(Ms. Hanley is a free-lance writer in Indiana.)

One priest's ministry to 'hurt'

By Father David K. O'Rourke, OP
NC News Service

Not long ago I took part in a program for couples whose marriages were not performed in accord with church law. As a consequence they see themselves as religious outsiders, are distressed by their situation and want to do something about it.

Our program was designed to help the couples move back to active participation in church life.

I think of this as I attempt to describe my work as a priest. For what we were trying to do lies at the heart of the priesthood.

The program came both from my personal desire to help people who say they need help and from the church's quite similar public mission.

The stories couples in the program told are familiar. The situations are common: the early, unprepared marriage; disillusion as human realities replace fantasy and romance; feelings of failure and rejection. And then with time and maturity the sense that there is hope that life might be happy again.

The couples reported that, after

they married again, they began to wonder where they stood with the church. Their questions were not always answered with accuracy or sensitivity and they resigned themselves to being, as they put it, "outside the church."

In this situation they came to us.

Our diocesan program for couples who see themselves in this situation is, to my mind, a good example of the meaning of the priesthood put to work.

—It combines human kindness and good theology.

—It combines the priest's individual mission with his public role.

Sometimes we get the impression that a priest acting conscientiously and with human sensitivity is going to find himself bucking the church's institutional side. We have this prejudice, I imagine, because we live in an age that tends to see institutions as cold and inhuman.

But this opposition is as much a product of unfounded fears as it is based on experience. In our program I believe that institutional strengths and personal kindness were joined in a useful, creative

The priesthood: Vocation or

By Father Robert Sherry
NC News Service

Allow me to introduce two friends, Father Jerry Dover and Father Miguel Solle. They're fictional characters, but they're true to life.

Let's eavesdrop on their discussion.

"Stereotyping seems to be a national pastime," Father Solle is saying. "The poor, the rich, politicians, lawyers, truck drivers, garbage collectors, social workers — just about everyone gets categorized by their race, creed or job sometime."

"That reminds me, Miguel," Father Dover comments. "About two months before the presidential election I was waiting for the light to change before walking across a street. Out of nowhere, a man started shouting in my ear: 'Religion and politics are the same thing, aren't they, Father?'"

"He kept on shouting it over and over," Father Dover continues.

"How did that make you feel?" "I felt he was accusing me of the whole church-state debate going on then," Father Dover responds. "He wasn't interested in my personal view. He was only

attacking me because of the Roman collar I was wearing."

"Don't you sometimes feel like you're treated more as a symbol than a real person?" asks Father Solle. "Sometimes I get the impression people think I say things or do things because as a priest I have to."

He adds, "Many people don't seem to realize I'm a priest because I want to say or preach certain ideas or truths. I really believe them."

"Same here, Miguel," says Father Dover. "I live and preach Jesus' truths because I believe them, not because someone makes me do it."

"Another thing that irritates me," says Father Solle, "is when I'm at a public dinner and someone shouts: 'You say the prayer, Father. That's your job.'"

"I don't like that either, Miguel," Father Dover agrees. "It's like they think priesthood is just a job. To me it's an expression of who I am. It's my life. It's not a matter of sticking a quarter in me and watching a meal blessing pop out."

"You're right, Jerry. But it seems to me if people ask you to lead in prayer today, what they really hope is that you can cap-