

Hold that thought

By Cindy Liebhart
NC News Service

"Try to catch yourself in the act of having an idea.

"Now figure out where it came from."

These are suggestions of M. Mitchell Waldrop, writing in the March issue of *Science* 85. The writer was talking about why researchers have been unable to develop computer programs that can perform with the ease or versatility of the human mind.

"You beat your brains out against a problem at work and then, 'Aha!' — the solution flashes on in neon lights. Now, how did you do that?" Waldrop asks.

"Nobody else knows either. But a big part of it — in fact, a big part of human problem solving in general — seems to be that jolt of recognition, that ability to suddenly see things as a whole."

Waldrop's comments highlight one of the more fascinating mysteries of the human person: the power of the imagination, which gives birth to creativity and invention.

The hidden spark which ignites the imagination eludes scientific understanding. Waldrop describes it as an "almost mystical" quality of the mind that people speak of as "intuition, insight, inspiration, gestalt."

Yet we can readily identify products of the imagination's activity. Beethoven's symphonies, Edison's inventions, Lee Iacocca's business ingenuity — all fueled at some basic level by imagination.

What many people fail to recognize, however, is that imagination is not the exclusive realm of great artists, scientists, innovators — or children. People, however unconsciously, are calling upon the powers of imagination in everyday, ordinary situations.

Imagination is a "catalyst for movement toward the future, but not an escape from present reality," said Father Donald Ahles, director of campus ministry for the Rockford Diocese and pastor of Christ the Teacher University Parish in DeKalb, Ill.

"It has an awful lot to do with the practical," Father Ahles said.

—A couple's decision to marry stems in part from the ability to



imagine what their life together can be.

—A person experiencing job dissatisfaction engages the imagination in looking for ways to make it more challenging, or in searching for a different job that will expand his or her professional development.

—A parish staff brainstorms together and taps into the imaginations of others to develop plans for becoming more responsive to the needs of parishioners.

Thus, the imagination enables us "to think of ourselves in other situations and experiences beyond where we are presently anchored," Father Ahles said. But it also brings a greater understanding of the present moment.

And the imagination gives clues to how we might transform dreams into reality.

The imagination especially

enables us to cope with the darkest moments of life because it points to alternatives, Father Ahles said.

Imagination allows people to break out of unhealthy patterns, to see that there are many possibilities, to regain a sense of hope.

But people are not always open to their imaginative powers. Father Ahles believes people can stifle the imagination by not making room for humor in their lives and by denying themselves the freedom to try new things.

On the other hand, imagination can flow freely if "we're not afraid to take chances, if we have the courage to risk failure, if we're able to laugh at ourselves and then pick ourselves up and try again," he said.

(Ms. Liebhart is media reporter for NC News Service.)

Imaginatic

By Dolores Leckey
NC News Service

"Close your eyes," the retreat leader said, "and breathe deeply."

Then the leader began to read the New Testament story of the blind man's cure.

Our group remained silent, eyes closed, listening to the familiar account of the blind man begging by the side of the road and calling for Jesus to touch him.

Then the leader guided us into the story's Middle East landscape, with its sounds and smells.

Sensing the dusty dryness of the Middle East, I longed for water.

Gradually people came into my imagination's view. Their faces revealed the burdens and hardships of an oppressed people.

I felt myself enter into the gospel scene, and before long into dialogue with Jesus.

The imagination had served as a doorway to prayer.

Imagination is not the opposite of truth; it is another way of knowing — of moving toward understanding. St. Teresa of Avila in the 16th century found that the value of the religious imagination in prayer could be measured by its impact on Christian living.

And this way of knowing is at the heart of the New Testament virtue of empathy — the virtue by which a person views the world from another's perspective.

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Painting a king

By Father John Castelot
NC News Service

"Eye has not seen, ear has not heard...what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

That is undeniably true. Nonetheless, human beings have shown a need to visualize God's kingdom in some concrete way. The result may be a feeble approximation of reality, but at least it is something they can "see."

That is why biblical writers so often expressed themselves in vivid symbolic language. They were writing about realities which defied definition. Yet these were realities; they needed to be expressed in terms people could grasp.

When the Old Testament prophet Isaiah wanted to express his conviction that God would one day establish his rule over the earth, he had to imagine what life would be like under that rule.

Isaiah wrote: "Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young

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