

## Ministry to Priests conference

# Through crisis in ministry, priests challenged to change

By Teresa A. Parsons

In the 10th century, monks began to notice that young people weren't coming to monasteries anymore. Instead, they were choosing to live as canons in great cathedrals.

Brother Martin Helldorfer, FSC, speculated that those monks experienced some spiritual crises as their prestige diminished and they began to question the value of their vocations.

Likewise, ministers in the Church today are experiencing crises as the institution undergoes a similar transition from a spirituality of service to something new.

The prestige of the professional minister is diminishing rapidly. "We went from number 11 to number 46, according to Time magazine," Brother Helldorfer said. "Our profession is disregarded. There is great suspicion of ministers in the U.S. Church at present.

"It's depressing, but it's also encouraging," he told nearly 100 participants in Ministry to Priest programs from across North America. "If you avoid the process of change, you avoid an invitation to new life."

A psychotherapist and director of the House of Affirmation's Consultation Center in Middletown, Conn., Brother Helldorfer was the last in a series of keynote speakers at the annual meeting of the Center for Human Develop-

ment, presented at the Rochester Plaza Hotel from September 22-26.

The center was founded in 1972 by Father Vincent Dwyer, o.s.c.o., to promote spiritual renewal among priests, which he believed was needed after the Second Vatican Council. From that beginning grew programs for ministry not only to priests, but also to religious, chaplains, seminarians and lay persons in more than 100 dioceses worldwide. All of the center's programs promote "holistic spiritual growth" by integrating the Christian tradition with contemporary culture and personal experience.

Last week's conference, entitled "Emerging Ministries: Signs of the Times," opened with an address by Bishop Matthew H. Clark on Tuesday. The following day, Rosemary Haughton addressed emerging ministries among lay persons. Father John Shea spoke Thursday on storytelling and the future of ministry. Between keynote presentations, the conference offered workshops on topics ranging from retirement planning to communications and media.

Perhaps most directly related to the work of participants, who minister to fellow priests, was Brother Helldorfer's presentation on Friday.

Although his personal experience illustrates that through sin and failure come awareness and learning, Brother Helldorfer pointed out

that neither contemporary spirituality nor culture recognize the value of crisis in ministry. Instead, they promote a spirituality of perfection.

Spiritual crises most often occur when one's image of God changes, he explained. According to one theory, a person actually becomes two selves — one that has already changed and one that has yet to accept the change.

"It isn't a process of change, really. It's a process of surrendering to a me who has already changed," he said. "If we didn't go through that, we'd stay exactly as we were."

Likewise, he suggested, the Church in this time of transition has two selves — that which has already changed and that which is still fearful of recognizing the change. "The time in which we live is an invitation to what already is . . . but to surrender to the Church that is, is a very hard thing," he said.

In both cases, he added, the dichotomy between past and present realities, and the effort to reunite them is "a haunting kind of journey."

And in tune with the spirituality of perfection, professional ministers generally try to hide their crises, even from one another. "When is there time for a local parish priest to have a crisis? He's got too much to do," Brother Helldorfer said. "Wouldn't it be nice

if we had a spirituality where having something wrong with you is OK, where having a crisis is OK?"

Psychologically, what happens to people who hide crises in their lives parallels what happens to many professionals in church ministry, he said. Indications of a refusal to accept changes in oneself include: a feeling of lifelessness, loss of creativity; anxiousness, fearfulness; a sense of low-grade depression or the "blahs;" and idolization or demonization of others.

The spirituality of perfection also dilutes the relationship between pastors and parishioners. When ministers conceal all evidence of their own struggles, they appear sheltered and isolated from life's realities.

"Our culture, which is so much in tune with depth and the search for depth, looks at priests as protected from life," Brother Helldorfer said. "So the people we go to, who help us out in bad times, are not people in official Church circles and that's terrible.

"We need more of the kind of failure that comes from living," he added. "We avoid depth and when we avoid depth, we avoid life.

Brother Helldorfer readily admitted that hoping for failure is crazy. But by recognizing it and questioning where it might lead, he believes that today's ministers have a "remarkable opportunity" to stand out as "holy, healthy and joyful" people.

"The people who are asking the questions are the ones in crisis," he said. "They are the lifeblood of the new Church."

## Black ministries

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"but we must begin to deal with education and jobs so you will not need those types of things. We need to stop doing what takes away people's dignity and pride.

"We need to deal with our educated brothers and sisters, not just with poor blacks but with middle class as well," she added. "The Catholic structure has had a very difficult time dealing with that."

Both Pryor and Dobson believe the solution lies in continuing to raise awareness. "The primary role OBM plays is educating . . . at a variety of levels," Dobson said. "On one hand, for four years I've been taking kids to visit colleges (on the annual Black College Tour). On the other, I think we've been exposing people to black Catholics who are intelligent and articulate."

Although the office currently offers more programs than it has in the past, neither its staff nor its budget have kept pace with growing needs. When he resigned in 1979, Father Robinson said staff and budget limitations were two of his biggest frustrations. Still, there remain only two staff positions — executive secretary and administrative assistant.

Roughly 90 percent of the office's funding comes from the annual Black and Indian Mission Collection which takes place during the first week of Lent. "Because I come from a race of people that make a way out of no way, my thinking has been that I don't want lack of money to destroy great potential," Dobson said. "But basically, I guess we are a second collection."

Despite a certain amount of frustration at the lack of dollars, support, and concrete results, Laird and Pryor said they are proud of what the office has accomplished in its first decade.

"Rochester has seen a lot of firsts," Pryor said. Most recently, the office founded what Pryor believes is the first black Catholic women's group in the country — the Association of Black Catholic Women of Greater Rochester, which was chartered last November.

Within the next five years, Dobson hopes there will be black Catholic clergy or religious serving in the diocese, an increase in lay participation in reclaiming inactive black Catholics and better evangelization in the black community.

"Most of all, I'd like to know that we're coming to a point where black Catholics are feeling good about being Catholic and that they know there is a haven for them in the Catholic Church," she said.

Father George Stallings Jr. will be the featured speaker at the Office of Black Ministries 10th anniversary dinner Saturday, Oct. 25, at the International Restaurant and Party House, 5375 W. Henrietta Road. Anyone interested in attending the dinner should call (716) 328-3210 by October 10.

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1:00 - 2:00	Welcome Admissions and Financial Aid Presentation
2:15 - 3:00	Academic Session

**TOURS OF CAMPUS WILL BE GIVEN SUNDAY AFTERNOON BEGINNING AT 3:00 P.M.**

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### PRE-REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Pre-registration is strongly recommended, although not required. If time permits, please contact the Admissions Office and indicate your choice of academic sessions. These sessions include: Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Nursing, Education, Transportation, Travel and Tourism.

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