

# Parental support fosters vocations

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I have mentioned to you that in our series of regional gatherings with the priests of our diocese, we have devoted at least half of our time speaking about vocations to the diocesan priesthood. Thus far, we have held nine of those meetings. The 10th will be later this morning at St. Thomas Aquinas in Leicester.

Those discussions have been most interesting, even edifying, not only because they demonstrate the interest and commitment of our priests in this matter, but also because they stimulate conversation about broader themes of ministry. What will be the shape of the church in the future? How do we contribute to that reshaping every day? And what implications will continuing change hold for us as the years go by?

There are no ready answers to those questions, of course, but I hold a sure conviction that such conversations as these are the building blocks, however modest in size, from which we shall construct the future. I say that because our priests in faith reflect on their experience, the effect of that experience in their lives and the life of that community, and they share their ideas, hopes and dreams of the future. Whenever this happens, the shape of the future

changes because people change.

When we speak of attracting young men to the diocesan priesthood, the priests are always curious about what draws candidates to consider it and what seems to hold them off. Our experience has been that the prime attractions to consider diocesan priesthood are people who demonstrate a strong faith commitment that is expressed in selfless service to others, the example of people already ordained and strong parental support. Elements that serve to keep potential candidates away are the obligation to celibacy and a fear that they will have to live alone in the future. These people judge that they could live a celibate life, but that they could not do so without the support of a loving community. Another element that keeps potential candidates away is lack of support from parents and peers.

I can understand all of these reasons, positive and negative. They are real and they find confirmation in more scientific studies that identify them as significant factors in the thinking of potential candidates to priesthood all over the nation. It would be surprising if they did not exist, because they are normal and predictable issues in the life of a person considering this vocation.

But I am especially curious about one of those factors and would very much like to learn more about it. That aspect is the negative influence exercised by some parents on their sons who express an interest in studying for the priesthood. Here are some of the comments, I am told, that parents offer to sons who express such an interest:

"You are too bright/personable/gifted to waste your life that way."

"I don't want you wasting your time on that. It's too uncertain."

"Why be content with that when you have so much to offer."

"You'll never make any money that way."

I am very curious about the origin of such comments and am deeply interested in better understanding the sense of priesthood and experience of priests held by the parents who make them. I would dearly love to enter into dialogue with these parents. I expect that I would understand a little better something that puzzles me deeply just now, and I think that such dialogue would open those parents to a more expansive sense of priesthood and of our priests than they now have.

If you are such a parent and are willing to engage in such an interchange, please let



## Along the Way

me know. Or if you have any insight, suggestions, encouragement in this matter, drop a line. I would be very happy to hear from you.

Peace to all.



## 'Courier' challenged to re-examine editorial policies

To the editor:

The last two issues of the *Catholic Courier* raise the question of what contributes to good journalism and editorial decision-making. Specifically, I am referring to the misleading headline and article regarding the 110 potential priests on the front page of the Aug. 17 issue and the letter to the editor from Dominic A. Aquila in the Aug. 24 edition which seriously challenges the *Courier's* editorial policy to include only letters written in the spirit of fair play.

The banner headline heralding 110 potential priests led into an article so filled with hype that it was virtually impossible to get an accurate reading of the facts. If there were 600 single male names submitted and only 110 came forth, the potential

number responding is less remarkable than implied. Taken one step further, only 60 single men *actually* felt drawn to meeting with the Bishop. The age of the candidates was glossed over. Young boys in high school have many years of education and life experience ahead of them before they can really be considered potential priests. Furthermore, it would seem that no matter what the age of the candidate the required educational component places any potential priest some years into the future. What happens in the meantime? Are we to live on the hope and promise of what the future *might* hold at the expense of overlooking the present? Statistically, how many men actually reach ordination even when in seminary? To highlight the rare exception to the norm for priesthood (Vic Bartolotta)

and not offer a vision which includes all people called to ordained ministry in the Catholic Church perpetuates the myth that the Church will never change. To exclude mention of the total number of people from all walks of life who were named as potential candidates to the priesthood is both insensitive and unjust. "Potential" is a dangerous word in the author's hands. On one hand he implies fact, on the other hand he omits possibility. I suspect that if 5 of the 110 men become priests it would be considered an optimum.

I have often read the *Catholic Courier's* policy regarding the criteria for letters to be published. I wonder how seriously the policy is upheld. Reader interest is a frequent concern of mine. But, I am appalled at the letters printed which are so vicious and full of irrational statements that they only belong in one place — the wastebasket. A case in point, is the letter from Dominic A. Aquila. What is accomplished by printing such a letter? Certainly we are all free to voice our opinions. However, when it comes to anger, there is a difference between healthy anger and vicious anger. And there is the matter of appropriate expression. You do readers a disservice when letters full of hate and vindictiveness are printed. Furthermore, these letters are published against your own editorial policy of selecting only letters which convey a sense of fair play. I urge you to adhere to your own policy in the future. There is enough violence in the world already. Why perpetuate it on the editorial page of your paper?

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** With regard to the story on *Call to Priesthood*, perhaps Ms. Arrington missed the paragraphs concerning women whose names were submitted. Those paragraphs were as follows:

"Such flexibility, however, cannot be extended to the 36 women whose names were submitted to *Call to Priesthood* along with those of the men. The people who submitted women's names for the campaign were sent letters explaining that the church's 'present discipline is that only single men can be invited to ordained ministry.'

"I've worked hard to open doors and to invite women to share their gifts in ministry to God's people," Bishop Clark explained. But as for ordination for women, or even their involvement in discernment programs, 'I'm simply not able at this time in our history to follow up on that in a realistic way,' he said."

## Fathers have right to take part in abortion decisions

To the editor:

In the wake of the Supreme Court's Webster decision on abortion, there are new issues to be confronted. One of the most important of these is the right of the father to have a say in decisions concerning the fate of the unborn child.

Long has it been trumpeted that this is solely a woman's issue. I would like to debunk this myth. As the father of two sons, one of them having just turned a year old, I am ever closer to the truth that life is God-ordained. It is clear that in God's plan He intended both men and women to play direct roles in the parenting process.

*Boston Herald* columnist Don Feder puts it well: "Men may not gestate but are equa-

lly responsible for the existence of children." Anyone who believes in *true* equality between the sexes will recognize that the father should have a role in any decision regarding the continued existence of the life he has helped to create.

There is new evidence that men as well as women suffer emotionally and psychologically from PAS (post-abortion syndrome). To cite just one example, permit me to quote from a recent article by New York City columnist Ray Kerrison: "An acquaintance I'll call Joe discovered that his girlfriend was pregnant. Joe was not religious, but the prospect of abortion horrified him. 'It's our child,' he would say.

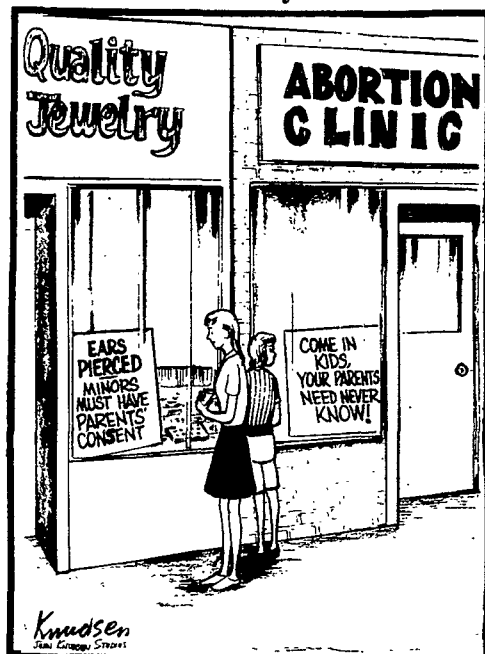
"Joe proposed marriage, but the woman

declined. He offered to support and look after the baby, but still the woman declined. She went ahead with the abortion. It left Joe so distraught that he had to check himself into an institution to cope with his depression. He has never forgotten or completely recovered."

Finally, there is also evidence of growing public support for the belief that men should have a say in abortion decisions.

Pro-life lawyers in New York State are currently drawing up proposals to recognize the rights of fathers in all abortion decisions. Now is the time to contact your State legislators concerning this issue. Your opinion counts!!

John P. Hasak  
Cortland County Citizens for Life



## Communication can help resolve differences

To the editor:

How I regret stopping my chores to glance through the *Catholic Courier* of Aug. 24. The irony of it really hit me. On page 1, (in) the story of a visit to El Salvador ("Guns symbolize Salvadorans' plight") three of the people mentioned are Corpus Christi members. Santa Marta is a sister parish.

Then I make the mistake of reading the editorial page — Dominic Aquila's discourse in particular ("Faith in progress serves to preclude honest discourse"). The dishes are still undone. I'm seeing red, blue, green — then I remember and repeat "Non-violence, Janet." Another discourse heard and practiced at Corpus Christi!

If one considers indifference and non-involvement a casualty, I was one for several years. Then a friend introduced me

to this loving, caring parish community called Corpus Christi. I've signed on for life!

I believe that God should be the true judge. I often forget it and become judgmental. Mr. Aquila evidently has this very human quality too. He described "its famous 'social ministries' as glittery and shallow." Speak to the people involved — both the receivers and givers.

Come meet us, Mr. Aquila and others who share similar beliefs. This is your right and privilege. Communication not confrontation is the answer, at least in my mind. If individuals and nations practiced this, it might be a more peaceful, non-violent world.

Janet R. Straub  
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