

Matching form with function

As the single candidate for ordination this June in the Diocese of Rochester and a single parent to boot, Victor Bartolotta is getting a lot of attention.

People want to know what draws him to priesthood at a time when that vocation is failing to attract other men. They ask how he will shepherd a flock while caring for his young daughter.

His answers in this week's *Insight* section reveal that Deacon Bartolotta's vocation is no phenomenon. Like priests spanning history and culture, he wants to spend himself serving the people of God, share Christ through the sacraments and lead others to the Lord.

In some ways, this year's ordinand is particularly suited to his time. He is a single parent, as are many of those to whom he'll minister. He has family responsibilities, but also family grounding at a time when priests are becoming increasingly isolated from one another. He has not only worked with lay church professionals — he has *been* one, struggling with ministerial salaries and demands.

Yet the prospects he and other priests face are daunting. As their numbers continue to decline, research compiled by Richard Schoenherr of the University of

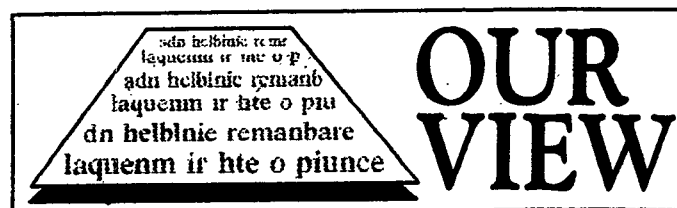
Wisconsin at Madison points out, the Catholic population continues to grow.

Today, Schoenherr says, the ratio of U.S. Catholics to priests is about 2,000 to one. Fifteen years from now, he predicts, the ratio will be 3,100 to one.

Given the demands priests already face, we must ask what kind of ministry they will be able to exercise in the year 2005. How will this increasingly elderly group of men stretch themselves to serve an average of 1,100 additional people each? Will sheer numbers force priests to become 21st century circuit-riders — weary distributors of sacraments to thousands whose names they will never learn? And, if so, what would attract candidates to that kind of vocation?

It's a delusion to think that our need for priests can be met by raising the retirement age, recalling those serving outside the diocese or recruiting more religious-order priests, whose numbers are reportedly declining even faster than those of diocesan priests.

Nor does the answer seem to lie in improved vocation awareness. Church leaders have studied and sweated over their approaches to recruitment, casting and recasting programs like so many fishing lures.



Yet young men continue to balk at swallowing the hook — a lifelong commitment to celibacy and service.

And while the church declines to make formal changes that would permit acceptance of candidates outside the pool of single men, those changes are already underway on an informal level.

With special Vatican approval, priests with spouses and children are serving here and in dioceses across the country. This week's list of diocesan appointments reveals that women and married men are being assigned to serve as parochial administrators. Such assignments are temporary now, but soon necessity will mandate them for the longer term.

People who feel called to the ministry at the heart of priesthood are finding ways to respond. The remaining change is for the church's form to catch up with its function.

Education offers only answer to abortion confrontation

To the editor:

Please don't throw bricks at me. I am pro-life, with certain reservations. But you won't find me marching in front of an abortion clinic or on a bus bound for Washington.

Pro-life! Pro-choice! Pro-abortion! Anti-abortion! Where are we going? Nowhere, it seems, until we get to the very heart of the matter — the root cause of this confrontation. ...

It seems unfair to accuse the "pro-choice" people of being wholly and com-

pletely "pro-abortion." The two appellations are not synonymous. There is a gray area in between. The good Christians who are sincere in their pro-choice stance are terribly concerned about the millions of abortions and would like to see an end to them as much as we. We're pro-choice, too — the choice not to become pregnant in the first place! ...

The problem (of overpopulation and unwanted births) must be solved through education now, and starting from early childhood. We are made in God's image

which makes us like God. As God's children we should be convinced of our own dignity and self-worth and if that concept is not present in each individual it needs to be taught and hammered in. Teenagers and adults must learn to respect their bodies and to have a reverence for their own sexuality and responsibility for their actions. The ideal is abstention for the unmarried and thoughtful planning on the part of married couples. ...

Education is the only answer. It's going to take dedication. It's going to take hard, hard work. It's going to take time. It's going to take money. It's going to take prayer and lots of it.

In the political arena, it has been recent practice to condemn those in government who take a pro-choice attitude, without looking at the total picture. We can try persuasion and prayer to change them but, meanwhile, we should support those who

advocate larger sums for education, child care, etc.

Our bishops have contracted to spend a large amount of money — our money — to fight abortion. I'm afraid it will be wasted because the other side will match dollar for dollar and will become even more firmly entrenched in their own beliefs. Wouldn't it be wiser to use the money to teach young people reverence for themselves and to "Just say 'No' to sex"? And, then, gentle subtle and prayerful persuasion to justice for the unborn. Incidentally, this whole education approach is the answer to all addictions — alcohol, drugs, compulsive-eating disorders and so on.

I don't suppose the bishops would listen to this small voice out of the pew but the Holy Spirit speaks to me, too!

Grace B. Carnes
Eagle Ridge Circle
Rochester

Nazareth pleased one alumna ...

To the editor:

I read both the article in the May 24th *Catholic Courier* on Nazareth Academy restricting two students from participating in the graduation ceremonies due to unusual hair styles, and also your view on this decision. I became very annoyed as I read your comments! The accompanying cartoon was in very poor taste!

As an alumna of Nazareth Academy, I totally agree with Sister Mary Clouser that the "hairstyles did not fit the formality of the celebration." It's time students realize that there is appropriate dress and appearance for certain occasions. This is part of an education. We're talking about partly shaved heads — rather unusual I would

say. These students were told in March to let their hair grow out or they would be unable to participate in the graduation ceremonies. Why should two members of a class mar the beauty for the whole group?

In your editorial, you state that you "do not discount the value of high school dress codes or of traditions within the Church." I really question that. Your entire commentary sounds very typical of a feminist group. It's really a shame that you feel so oppressed as female members of our Catholic Church. Pushing for ordination of women, lay homilists, etc., has nothing to do with the decision of Nazareth Academy's administrators. When a student chooses to attend Nazareth Academy, she knows the rules and is expected to follow them.

Congratulations to the assistant principal for keeping tradition alive!

Rosemary Kleehammer
Chestnut Hill Drive
Rochester

How many Catholics does church turn off?

To the editor:

Father Cuddy, in his May 10 column, grieved over the "fallen away" hitchhiker stressing the need for evangelism. He muses in conclusion "the hitchhiker ... ideally ... might marry a 'strong' (I presume not related to muscular development) Catholic girl and become confirmed in the practice of the faith. More likely he will not. He and his children will be completely lost to the church."

I wonder how Father Cuddy would respond to baptized Catholic acquaintances who were denied Church weddings on the grounds of their weak faith? What encouragement do we have to evangelize when so many of us — including clergy — appear more intent on hoarding rather than sharing our faith?

David Henke
Harford, N.Y.

Avon council lost trust

To the editor:

In response to the May 24 article "Diocese tables proposed closing of school in Avon." St. Agnes Parish is now mourning another loss, lack of trust in the parish council representatives, by the office of the Bishop of Rochester.

St. Agnes Parish Council, after prayers and much discussion voted to close St. Agnes School. It was not an easy decision to make. There were many considerations that were not available to the public. I think that the diocese should have supported the 9-6 vote to close the school.

Last January, St. Agnes lost both its pastor and resident priest within 18 days of each other. We are still mourning that severe loss.

Instead of the parish drawing closer together during this time without a pastor, it is divided into two groups: those who support the school and those who would like to see it closed. It seems that Bishop Matthew Clark is listening to the voice of the minority and choosing to ignore the majority of parishioners of St. Agnes Parish.

Mary Lou Whitford
Avon

... shocked, disappointed another

To the editor:

I am writing in regard to the article on Tonya Harding. I am a recent graduate of Nazareth Academy myself. One of the most important things I learned at Nazareth was to be my own individual. I was very shocked and disappointed to see how Nazareth has acted toward Ms. Harding. I never once would have believed that I was being taught to be an individual to a certain point. When graduating upon the Eastman stage it was not the style of my hair that made that traditional ceremony so special. I cannot believe that the administrators are being so shallow or so hypocritical about this whole situation. If they felt Ms. Harding's hair was inappropriate for graduation then they must have thought it was inappropriate for the school, also, and they

should have confronted Ms. Harding the first day she arrived at school with her hair style as it is. However, "beauty is only skin deep" and I was always told not to judge a book by its cover because it is what is in the person's heart that really matters. People may not like Ms. Harding's hairstyle but if they are so crass as to gasp and heckle if she were to walk across the stage then it is not saying too much about the family and friends of the students at Nazareth. I would never have guessed Nazareth would act in such a way. I am sorry, Ms. Harding, that Nazareth is taking away your right to graduate on the Eastman stage for vanity's sake.

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