

Vocations arise from faith-filled choices

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

It's always a shining moment when young people let their talents burst forth for the enjoyment of others. Such a moment happened this morning (Sunday, April 14), during Bishop's Day with Youth at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center, when 17 teens from Our Lady of the Assumption Parish in Fairport staged the musical production *Friends Forever*.

Those young people let their talent fly. When they did, all of us moved with them — rocking, humming, thinking, laughing. I know that they offered precious gifts to us. Surely the players accomplished that effect through the message they gave about friendship. Just as surely — perhaps even more deeply — they gave us the gifts of their time, talent and wonderfully creative energies. In short, they gave us something of themselves, and we are all the richer for it.

To me, everything that happened in and through that production speaks strongly about vocation, the theme of this week's issue of the *Catholic Courier*. When we speak about vocation, we are speaking about a call, an invitation, a path, a fun-

damental direction that we freely adopt as a life's commitment and around which we are willing to marshal the gifts with which God endows us.

We can speak of vocation in a general sense as when we speak of our baptismal vocation. Through that sacrament of life, we are made sharers in the mystery of Christ's dying and rising to new life. Through that gift we are healed and reconciled. And because baptism makes us members of a priestly people, we share in Christ's mission to be healers and reconcilers. We fulfill that mission when we offer fitting worship to God; when we speak God's healing word to others; when we give life to the community in any way we can; and when we serve others, especially those most in need, in the name of Jesus Christ.

To be participants in the saving work of the Lord in this manner is at once a deep privilege and a strong responsibility. We enjoy the privilege for no other reason than that God loves us and calls us each by name. And we can carry out the responsibility only in the sustaining love of Christ. It's all gift; through this gift we are

called to grow in the love of God and neighbor and, in so doing, truly to find ourselves.

How we do this depends on the basic decisions we make about how we want to live our lives. About how we want to serve. About how we want to love. About the legacy and memories we want to leave to those who come after us. In the classic categories of our faith tradition, we choose the married life, the single life, the priesthood or the religious life.

And we make our decisions by a process through which we consider our gifts and our needs — the way in which we discover and share our deepest energies, the opportunities available to us, the counsel of good friends and mentors. But at the heart of the process, we hope that there is always an openness to and reliance upon the Holy Spirit, who inspires our minds and hearts to make the most loving use of our God-given human freedom.

In the vast majority of people I know, such choices are rarely automatic and immediately clear. More commonly, they are the result of prayer, conversation, testing and a consideration of alternatives. And, once made, they provide more a new beginning than an ending.

Married people will say that marriages work when spouses are willing to make them work. Single persons will tell you that community understanding and support



are critical to their growth and deepening. Men and women religious will be the first to tell you that their public bonding to their brothers and sisters community does not exempt them from the normal struggles of human relationships. And I can tell you for sure that ordination is, among many other things, an invitation to come each day to greater understanding of God and neighbor.

I don't know just where you find yourself on the broad range of vocation decisions or development. Wherever you are, I invite you to ask God for the grace to appreciate your holiness and the fact that God calls you to the fullness of that gift in your chosen life's path. I invite you further to realize that a life's vocation is a dynamic, living reality in which God wants us continually to find new gifts of life, love and freedom and to share them with others.

As I come to the end of these words, my heart and mind go back to those 17 incredible young friends from Fairport. They are at an age at which they will soon find themselves making some critical life decisions. I am at an age at which most of mine are made. They remind me by their vigor and vitality of the immense, almost daily richness and stimulus I find in living out my vocation as a priest. I hope those of us who gathered with them will encourage them that their goodness — already so evident — will deepen daily if they make their lives' choices with confidence in the Lord.

Peace to all.

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