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Musing on the challenges that face men considering priesthood, Father John H. Hayes recalled one father's reaction to his son's plan to become a Franciscan priest.

"As of this moment, you are no longer part of our family," the father told his son.

Fortunately, few parents react so negatively to their sons' priestly intentions, emphasized Father Hayes, parochial vicar of the Corning-Painted Post Catholic Community.

In fact, most seminarians come from devout and supportive families, noted the priest, who co-directs a program for Southern-Tier young men who are attempting to discern vocations to the priesthood.

Nonetheless, Father Hayes' tale of the disinherited seminarian dramatically highlights the atmosphere of indifference and even hostility encountered by many U.S. men seeking to become priests.

Members of modern society — and, indeed, even members of the contemporary Catholic church — often subtly or overtly discourage vocations to the priesthood, noted Father Thomas J. Valenti, Bishop Matthew H. Clark's assistant for vocations.

Many factors affect formation of priests

By Rob Cullivan, Staff writer

"There's so much in society that really makes it difficult to respond" to a call to priesthood, Father Valenti said. "The (aspiring) priest often finds that he's swimming against the tide."

As his peers pursue corporate careers, materialistic ambitions, sexual pleasures and a host of other rewards the world offers, a man with a potential vocation may ask himself: "Am I the only one experiencing this call to the priesthood?" Father Valenti added.

Yet worldly ambitions are not the only clouds on the horizon of priestly vocations. Many men who have little desire to prove their worth in wholly secular terms can still feel a pull to marry and raise children.

Others wonder if it is better to serve the church in other ways, including the myriad lay ministries that have opened in the church since Vatican II.

The root of many men's reluctance to express interest in the priesthood is a fear of standing out among their peers as conspicuously pious, Father Hayes said.

"They're afraid of looking like a 'holy roller,'" he observed.

Pope John Paul II discussed several of these obstacles in his lengthy

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