

Answering God's Call

† Catholic Courier Special Section † October 12, 1995 †

*Be courageous amid challenges,
pope advises priests in training*

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

YONKERS, N.Y. — The Catholic Church is looking for courageous men, Pope John Paul II said.

Speaking to seminarians Oct. 6 at St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers, the pope said the church's priests must be strong in their faith and unafraid of denouncing evil.

"You need courage to follow Christ, especially when you recognize that so much of our dominant culture is a culture of flight from God, a culture which displays a not-so-hidden contempt for human life, beginning with the lives of the unborn, and extending to contempt for the frail and elderly," the pope said.

Hundreds of Catholics from Yonkers and other communities north of New York gathered on the green seminary grounds hoping for a glimpse of the pope.

As soon as his helicopter was sighted, shouts arose. The applause continued as the pope wound his way in the popemobile up the lane to the seminary chapel for evening prayer.

Although the seminarians from New York and surrounding dioceses weren't the only ones in the chapel, the pope's remarks were focused on them.

"If you are to become priests, it will be for the purpose — above all other purposes — of proclaiming the Word of God and feeding God's people with the body and blood of Christ," he said.

Priests who do both faithfully and encourage people to accept and follow all of the church's teachings will often be ignored or even rejected like Christ was, the pope said.

Pope John Paul said he did not want to discourage the candidates for priesthood, but wanted to discuss serious matters with them as a friend.

"If there is one challenge facing the church and her priests today, it is the challenge of transmitting the Christian message whole and entire, without letting it be emptied of its substance," the pope said.

"The Gospel cannot be reduced to mere-human



Pope John Paul II speaks with seminarians at St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y., Friday, Oct. 6, the third day of his visit to the United States.

Michael Okoniewski/CNS

wisdom," he said. "Salvation lies not in clever human words or schemes, but in the cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The pope said the seminary is the place where candidates for the priesthood must learn "the wisdom of the cross" — not what would qualify as wisdom in the world. The words they speak as priests must be words inspired by the Holy Spirit and addressed to spiritual needs, he said.

He said that was what he was trying to do at the United Nations the previous day and what priests must do in the variety of political and cultural situations in which they find themselves.

"My task is not to speak in purely human terms about merely human values, but in spiritual terms about spiritual values, which are ultimately what

make us fully human," he told the seminary students.

The pope told the future priests not to be afraid of pursuing their mission.

"Conquering fear is the first and indispensable step for the priest if he is to open the doors, first of his own heart, then of the hearts of the people he serves, to Christ the redeemer," the pope said.

He told the seminarians — his friends — that he has been criticized for talking so often about "the culture of death," marked by contempt for human life, for the unborn, the weak, the poor and the aged.

But, he said, "choices once unanimously considered criminal and rejected by the common moral sense are gradually becoming socially acceptable."

"The church cannot ignore what is happening," he said.

The response of the church and its priests must be not only to denounce the culture of death, but to proclaim the love, compassion and mercy of Christ, the pope said.

"You will not become priests to be served, or to lord it over others," he said, "but to serve others, especially the poorest of the poor, the materially poor and the spiritually poor."

"The church needs joyful priests, capable of bringing true joy to God's people, which is the Good News in all its truth and transforming power," he said.

If God is truly calling a man to the priesthood, he said, he must leave behind the unspiritual man who used to exist and allow the Holy Spirit to transform him.

"I encourage you, the seminarians, to be unselfish in answering the call of Christ and in offering your lives to his church," the pope said. "Do not be afraid!"