

Answering God's Call

Seminararians' paths to priesthood began at Masses

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

Although they grew up in different parts of the Diocese of Rochester, Frank Fusare and Doug Della Pietra both discovered their vocations while attending Mass.

For Fusare, that discovery came early in life at Elmira's St. Anthony's Parish.

"I can remember as a kid, our assistant pastor (Father Francis Falletta) was saying Mass, and I remember walking out of church that morning and saying, 'That's what I want to do,'" Fusare recalled.

Della Pietra, on the other hand, began to consider the priesthood while attending daily Mass at Perinton's St. John of Rochester Church the summer between his junior and senior years of high school.

"I first really started thinking about it when the assistant pastor (Father Alexander Bradshaw) at St. John of Rochester asked me after Mass if I'd ever thought of being a priest," Della Pietra remembered. "It caught me off guard — I had never really given it any thought."

Although they started down the road to the priesthood at different times and places, the two seminararians will cross paths at 11 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 14, at Corning's St. Mary's Church. There, Bishop Matthew H.



Doug Della Pietra

Clark will ordain them to the transitional diaconate, before their next meeting — scheduled for June 1, 1996, at Sacred Heart Cathedral — when they will join the ranks of the diocesan priesthood.

Fusare, for one, had not expected to be a part of that number.

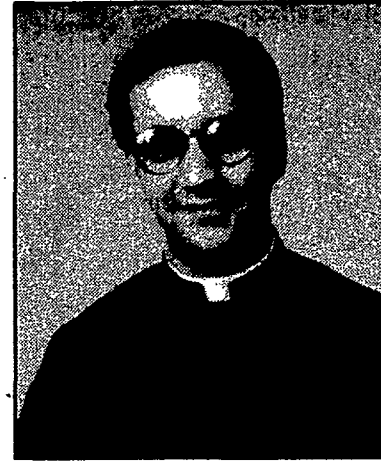
"I left Corning Community College in 1982 thinking I was going to join a religious order," Fusare said.

But brief explorations with such congregations as the Franciscans and Dominicans proved that religious orders were not for him. So Fusare instead went to work with an insurance company in Elmira.

Nevertheless, the priesthood remained in the back of his mind — despite some people's attempts to dissuade him.

"If you feel the slightest hint of a call, at least give it some weight and look into it."

— Frank Fusare



Frank Fusare

the nurse."

And at Strong, although he found the social workers effective, he noticed that they sometimes could not do enough. The families of shooting victims, for example, wanted more than the counseling social workers could offer.

"What they wanted right away was prayer," Fusare reported. "They wanted a more religious aspect. They needed to have somebody to talk to about God."

Della Pietra's path to the priesthood took fewer turns.

About a year after his conversation with Father Bradshaw, he contacted Father Thomas Valente, who was then the diocese's vocations director. Della Pietra subsequently became involved with the diocesan discernment program while in col-

lege. "I was still kind of hesitant about it," Della Pietra acknowledged.

But those years convinced him to take the next step and enter Becket Hall — a residential program for men considering the priesthood — during his junior year of college.

"My two years at Becket Hall — those were the two years that were to make it or break it," Della Pietra said of his calling. "If I didn't have that chance to go to Becket, I don't think it would have come as quickly."

The two years at Becket "definitely gave me a sense that God was involved in my decision," he added. That sense continued during his years of study at St. Augustine's Seminary in Toronto.

Della Pietra is also following Father Bradshaw's example in encouraging other young men to take an interest in the priesthood.

While serving his pastoral year at Corning's St. Mary's Parish last year, he met one-on-one with some youths in whom he saw potential. Thus far, no vocations have arisen out of those discussions, Della Pietra acknowledged. But, "most of the stuff that's been done is planting the seeds," he added.

Although he said he is completely certain of his vocation as he approaches ordination, Fusare still has some nervousness about his choice.

"It's an awesome responsibility, and the closer I get to it, the more I realize what an imperfect instrument I am," Fusare said. "I say to myself, 'Oh God, are you sure about this?'"

Still, he has a message for any young man who has considered, even briefly, the possibility of becoming a priest.

"If you feel the slightest hint of a call, at least give it some weight and look into it," Fusare concluded.

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