

YOUTH

Priest's packed itinerary stuns 'shadow' group

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

After last weekend, Ben Briggs will never, ever again think of the priesthood as a leisurely vocation.

In a period lasting just over 24 hours, Ben and 10 other boys accompanied Father Charles T. Manning on a whirlwind schedule:

Saturday, Oct. 14: 11 a.m., deacons' ordination at St. Mary's Church in Corning; 2 p.m., wedding at Sacred Heart Church in Perkinsville; 5:30, Mass at St. Pius V Church in Cohocton; 7, Mass back in Perkinsville.

Sunday, Oct. 15: 9 a.m., Mass at St. Pius V; 10:45, Mass at Sacred Heart.

Break out the Air Jordans!

"It's a lot busier than I thought," admitted Ben, 13. "I thought (priests) just sat around."

"I thought we would just go to a couple of Masses," added Andrew Dyckman, 11.

Brent Wensel, 13, was equally surprised by the pace he discovered priests must maintain.

"They do a lot of work, a lot of running around," said Brent, who participated in the weekend program along with his brother Chris, 15.

Brian Washer, 14, found this frenetic lifestyle to be an intriguing one.

"It looked cool," he remarked.

The 11 youths who participated in this "shadow weekend" are parishioners at St. Pius V and Sacred Heart in Steuben County as well as St. Mary's Church in Dansville, Livingston County.

This young contingent not only accompanied Father Manning to all six Masses, but they also took an active role by serving as eucharistic ministers, lectors and



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Father Charles Manning (center), pastor of St. Pius V Church, Cohocton and Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, Perkinsville, is surrounded by his 'shadow' group following the diaconal ordination of Douglas Della Pietra and Frank Fusare at St. Mary's Church in Corning last Saturday, Oct. 14.

altar servers during the weekend. Not surprisingly, Father Manning's topic for his Sunday Mass homily centered around vocations.

Also included in the activities was a Saturday-evening discussion and reflection at the St. Pius V parish center, where the boys and their adult chaperons stayed overnight.

A particularly memorable moment transpired at the ordination of transitional deacons Doug Della Pietra and

Frank Fusare in Corning. Bishop Matthew H. Clark, who celebrated the Saturday service, acknowledged the Steuben/Livingston boys in attendance

and led a round of applause for them.

Father Manning, the pastor of both St. Pius V and Sacred Heart, said he decided to stage this program because a call to vocations must be supplemented by people willing to serve as mentors.

"We pray and pray and pray about it, and we put out posters and a lot of papers, but this is taking it a step further," remarked Father Manning. "You get a good view of the sacramental life of a priest."

The pastor also wants to make young Catholics aware that priests lead lifestyles similar to mainstream society. For instance, during a concluding lasagna dinner held early Sunday afternoon at the St. Pius V rectory, the youths were introduced to Father Manning's compact-disc collection — which included music by Hootie and the Blowfish, the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Meat Loaf.

"Despite the bad press we've had, priests are, by and large, role models," Father Manning stated.

Father Manning was so pleased with the weekend that he said his next step is to organize a similar gathering through which girls can learn more about the lives of women religious.

Andrew suggested that these types of programs can have universal appeal for other age groups as well.

"That's something I think everybody should have a chance to do," he concluded.

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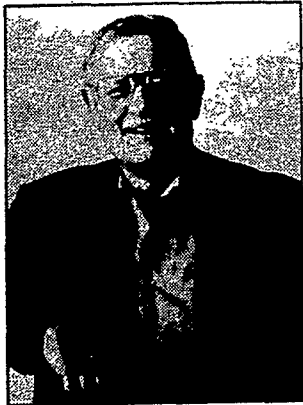
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