



# Catholic Courier

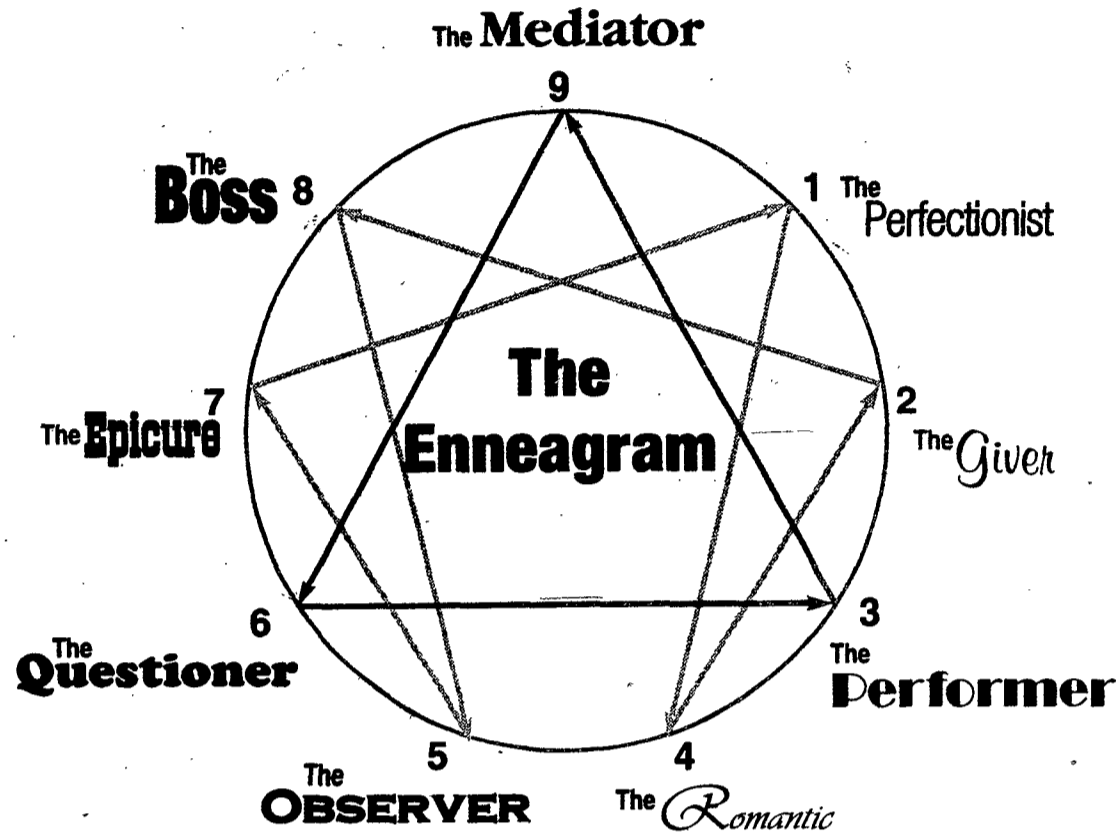
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## What's your type?



## Personality theories offer guides for spiritual growth

Imagine a parish social hour with people milling about. A man and woman begin to talk to each other with obvious interest.

Then one of them says, "I'm an ESFJ." "Oh," the other responds, "I'm a four." Far-fetched? Perhaps.

But an increasing number of people in the diocese and across the country identify themselves by such four-letter or numerical labels.

They are using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (the letters) or the Enneagram (the number).

Both MBTI and Enneagram are methods to describe personality types. The MBTI posits that there are 16 basic four-letter combinations of letters; the Enneagram — from the Greek words for nine (ennea) and drawing (gram) — divides the human race into nine basic personality types that, in essence, represent nine facets of God. These types are often diagrammed as nine points on a circle with interconnecting lines.

Practitioners say the methods help one to understand one's own and other people's motivations for actions and behaviors. Thus these methods are used in everything from marriage counseling to improving the workplace.

Among church circles, they are also considered ways to understand and nurture one's spirituality — hence a number of retreat centers and spirituality groups have offered workshops covering the two.

"Thomas Merton said in *New Seeds of Contemplation*, "When you find your true self, you truly find God," observed Sister Dolores Monahan, SSJ, who conducts Myers-Briggs spirituality workshops. "It's not two separate searches.

"God puts in us specific gifts," she added, "and getting to know the gifts becomes a way to praise God."

"Enneagram is a method of self-discovery which helps people see themselves as they really are, so they

can choose and let their true selves come to the surface," observed Sister Ruth Schlehr, RSM, who has led Enneagram workshops in Rochester at the Mercy Prayer Center and for the Sisters of St. Joseph Spirituality Center.

"It's not the only route to holiness," Sister Schlehr added. "It's not even a route. It just helps us find the way."

But some critics have complained the "way" that these two methods — and in particular, the Enneagram — lead people is astray.

In the October 1992 *Theology Today*, for example, Thomas G. Long — in an editorial entitled "Myers-Briggs and other modern astrologies" — complained about the "uncritical, theologically naive, rigid and overly confident manner in which Myers-Briggs categories are often employed in various church settings."

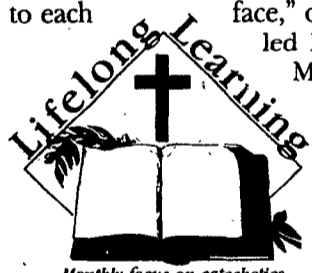
Long noted that the MBTI has been improperly used to make employment decisions, regulate staff, and advise people on such topics as marriage roles and prayer techniques. And, he warned, people have used it to excuse their own behavior or to stereotype other people.

Meanwhile, the October/November issue of the "CUF News" reported that at the 1995 Western New York CUF (Catholics United for the Faith) Conference held in October in Rochester, Father Mitch Pacwa described Enneagram as a "New Age fad."

But proponents of the two indicators contend that they are not "occult" or "New Age" systems intended to become the be-all and end-all in one's life.

"This is a tool," Sister Monahan observed. "It's not meant for explaining everything in your life."

Lucinda Wilcox, coordinator of education services and community relations for the Samaritan Pastoral Counseling Center in Rochester, noted that a person should not base self-assessment solely on a test like the MBTI.



Monthly focus on catechetics

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