

# Priests to consider 'heart of Catholic life'

Father Mike Brown reminded us at supper this evening (Monday, April 8), that one week from today we will be at the Holidome in Henrietta for our annual Priests' Convocation.

His quiet notice of that event was a pleasant reminder for me of an experience I always enjoy. It was also a reminder of the thoughtful and careful work our priests, their co-workers and communities have done to prepare for this year's event, which will focus on our eucharistic life.

As I hope you know well, we are facing the need to make some adjustments in our pastoral life because we are not attracting young candidates to the priesthood in sufficient number to replace those who are serving now.

As a result of that fact, our presbyterate is growing smaller in number. And we are aging. We had a painful example of that reality during the last calendar year when, through illness and accident, we lost five active priests 62 years of age or younger and ordained only one new priest.

I dearly hope that we will not be asked to endure that kind of unusual loss again for many years to come. But the fact is we inevitably will experience the normal attrition that is part of life. It is also true that, in the short range at least, we will not be ordaining enough men to replace ourselves as we retire and/or go home to God. In the

## along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



next five years, for example we will ordain no more than 10 men.

I hope you will agree that, in light of these realities, all of us will need to make some adjustments. We simply cannot go on with business as usual. To do so would, in the short range, place inhuman burdens on the ordained priests we have. In the long range, we would blind ourselves to more creative, enriching and humane ways to meet the challenges we must face.

In the discussions we have had this year around this issue, I have been deeply impressed by the deep love in which all in our community hold our eucharistic liturgy.

I mention that not because it surprised me. It didn't. I mention it because it gave me renewed confidence that, whatever adjustments we must make, we will make them thoughtfully and carefully. And, we will make them with the sense that the eucharistic liturgy is the heart of Catholic life.

One final note: While it is true that we must make some thoughtful changes in our present pastoral practice because of the realities to which I referred above, we are not in desperate straits. Compared to many times in the history of our own diocese and compared to many dioceses in our country today, we are still in a fairly strong position. We do not need to act with any hurried sense of panic. Indeed, to do so would be damaging.

What can you do to help? You can think about the ministry of the ordained and what it means to the community and to you. You can pray for vocations to the priesthood and encourage likely candidates to think about the possibility for themselves.

You can become acquainted with your local pastoral scene. What changes have occurred there in recent years? What further changes are under consideration? How can we help people better understand and move with them?

Two favors, please. First, pray for our brother priests as they gather in convocation and work with them in our continuing reflections on the treasure that is our eucharistic life.

Secondly, if you have a chance, send the priests you know to the convocation with an expression of your prayers and affection.

Thanks and peace to all.

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### Kids' Answers

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