

Vocations



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Father John DeSocio (left), director of Becket Hall, shares with members of the class of 1971 some of the history of Becket since the class parted ways.

Strong bonds prevail at Becket Hall reunion

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

"Dawes, is that you? Give me a hug!" cried Lew Licari as he greeted Tim Dawes.

This joyful exchange reflected the prevailing sentiment for individuals who attended a 25th-anniversary reunion for Becket Hall's class of 1971. The party took place Oct. 4 at Becket Hall's

current location, adjacent to St. Boniface Church in Rochester.

Similar reunions were held for this class in 1981 and 1991. But because class members are spread out over the country, many of them were renewing acquaintances for the first time in 25 years at the October event.

Such was the case for Eleanor Bock, the Becket Hall secretary from 1967-83, who was attending

her first reunion of the 1971 class.

"It's wonderful. It's really been interesting to see everybody and find out what they're doing," she remarked.

However, the gathering was sparsely attended by clergy — mainly because only seven members of the 45-man class are currently priests. In fact, the amount of wives of Becket Hall graduates at the party was similar to the amount of priests.

Despite the class members' diversity, Father Robert Schrader said they will always share a common bond.

"The people who went to Becket Hall were, in some way, positively affected by one another. The environment — it's something that sticks with you whether or not they went on to become priests," said Father Schrader, a 1971 Becket graduate who is now the pastor at St. Mary's Church in Auburn.

"Most of the people here are not priests, but the fact that they're here at a seminary reunion shows that it had a positive effect," he said.

Father Schrader served as organizer for the Oct. 4 event. He also coordinated the two previous reunions.

Father Peter Clifford also said that the strong sense of kinship among his peers is everlasting.

"Some of my happiest days were at Becket Hall. There was tremendous bonding that took place," said Father Clifford, a 1971 class member who is pastor of St. Michael's Church in Newark.

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The 1971 group, he said, is the largest to date for Becket Hall, a program that was launched in 1965 as an alternative to the traditional seminary approach. Under the Becket Hall system, seminarians receive education alongside college students as they prepare to enter major seminary.

As freshmen in the fall of 1967, Father Clifford noted that his class was the first to reside at Becket Hall's modern facility based at St. John Fisher College. That building was used until 1980, when the Diocese of Rochester sold it to the college.

"We were pioneering a new form of seminary education — where it was going, and where it had never been," Father Clifford commented.

He added that the years 1967 to 1971 were also laden with social changes brought on by the Vietnam War and the Second Vatican Council. "It was an exciting time, it really was," he said.

Fathers Clifford and Schrader are among four class members

who serve within the diocese. The others are Father Thomas P. Mull, pastor of Sacred Heart Cathedral; and Father Thomas J. Valenti, chaplain of the Ithaca College Catholic Community.

Though most of the priests' Becket classmates were never ordained, many of those men have still chosen service-oriented careers. One such example is Bob Buckert, a longtime high-school teacher.

"I've served, hopefully, as a role model for young people," said Buckert, who is married and has three children. He is a parishioner at St. Paul's Church in Webster.

Meanwhile, Licari is employed as a financial consultant on the West Coast. He cited his long-time volunteer work with AIDS patients in the San Francisco area as his own special vocation.

"I've always been concerned with reaching out to the marginalized," Licari said. "It's certainly unusual for people in financial services to have any level of social concern."

Priests or otherwise, Fathers Clifford and Schrader stressed that all in attendance have found fulfillment in their lives.

"I hope that every one of us has the privilege and grace to do what God calls us to do, and what gives us great satisfaction," Father Clifford remarked.

"Each person had to discern what their proper calling was," Father Schrader added. "The joy, the affirmation and the positiveness of it all comes when you discover what you were called to be."

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Bishop implores parents to promote vocations

ORLANDO, Fla. (CNS) — Parents, priests and parishes are vital to the success of the U.S. bishops' strategy to increase vocations to the priesthood and religious life, Bishop Paul S. Lovende of Ogdensburg, N.Y., told diocesan vocations leaders Oct. 2.

Bishop Lovende, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Vocations, addressed the annual meeting of the National Conference of Diocesan Vocations Directors Oct. 2 in Orlando.

"A Future Full of Hope," the U.S. bishops' national vocations strategy, "emphasizes the crucial

role of parents," Bishop Lovende said.

But a recent study of Catholic youths active in church life showed that only 20 percent who had considered a religious vocation had been encouraged by their parents. "This must be addressed," the bishop said.