

FEATURE

Priest offers unvarnished counsel



By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Father John Forliti thinks it's high time the church spoke plainly to young adults about such moral issues as the place of sex in their lives.

"I think we've done a lot of dancing around," he said of the church. "We don't want like to hurt anybody. We don't like to offend anybody. I think it's the relativism of our times. We've been kind of bludgeoned into thinking that anything is relative."

To help correct the problem he perceives, he wrote the book *Straight Talk For Young Adults*, published this year by Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, Conn. (phone number: 1-800-321-0411).

Straight Talk is an 85-page volume divided into five sections devoted successively to "Values," "God's Law," "Faith," "Love and Sexuality" and "Virtues."

Father Forliti writes in a clear, direct style that reads more like a conversation with a friendly priest than a weighty analysis of sin.

The section on "God's Law," for example, examines each of the Ten Commandments as a way of teaching young adults how to live moral lives.

Take, for instance, the chapter on "False Gods," which deals with the First Commandment.

"I haven't seen anyone fall down on their knees to worship a golden calf lately," he wrote. "However, I have on occasion run into people who seem completely immersed in their investments or their possessions. I have met people who are captivated by the pursuit of fame or who are filled with self-indulgence. I suppose it could happen to any of us, human as we are."

Father Forliti, pastor of St. Olaf's Church in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minn., drew on his 30 years of youth ministry experience to write the book, he said in a phone interview with the *Catholic Courier*. Prior to becoming a pastor, he had been chaplain at St. Thomas University in St. Paul, he said, and his book's anecdotes reflect his widespread experience with college students.

Today's young adults grew up in the post-Vatican II era, a time of both

promise and chaos, when church teachings were questioned and old taboos shattered, Father Forliti noted. Society and the church as well have entered a new era in which the moral questioning of the 1960s and '70s has given way to a desire for a middle ground between the rigid morality of the past and the destructive permissiveness that undermined it, he commented.

For example, rather than condemn the sexual revolution wholeheartedly or celebrate it unthinkingly, his book both praises and criticizes the movement's results.

"(S)ome things have improved," he wrote. "Sexual information is more accurate and available. Generally people are less uptight, less traumatized by the topic."

He added, in his interview, that the sexual revolution unearthed such topics as the harmful effects of incest, spousal abuse and poor marital relationships, shining a light on subjects that many had feared to discuss publicly in the past.

"But some things have deteriorated," he wrote in *Straight Talk*. "Sex has become, for many, an end in itself, divorced from meaningful love. And grown adults, sometimes caught up in their own confusion about sex, cannot summon the courage to require abstinence from the young."

Straight Talk also points out that there are benefits to living morally. Practicing the First Commandment, for example, can only pay off for oneself in the end, he wrote.

"Believe deeply in the first commandment and watch the values of genuine religion, altruism, moral integrity and self-esteem grow," Father Forliti wrote.

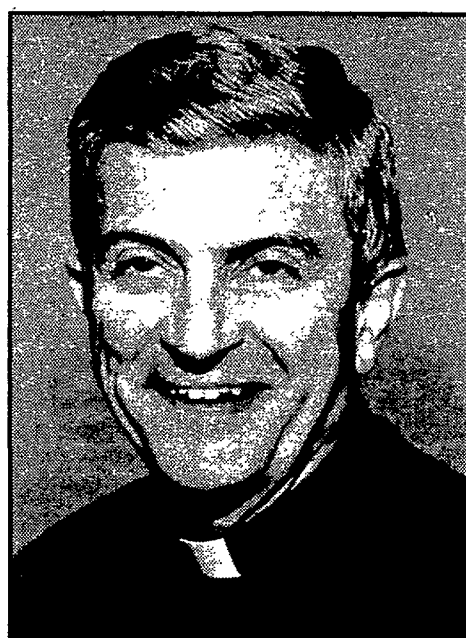
Straight Talk is his attempt to let young adults know that the church has 2,000 years of experience dealing with the issues they're facing, he said.

"There's some wisdom in the church that's got to be shared," he said in his interview. "Whether (young adults) accept it or not is their choice, but we've got to put it out there for them."

Upcoming Events

• Odyssey, the diocesan-sponsored network of Catholic young adults, will hold a pizza dinner and discussion on making better ethical decisions at work and home, in St. Louis School Gym, 64 S. Main St., Pittsford, on Monday, Sept. 22, 7-9 p.m. Father Kip Corriveau of St. Louis, a young adult himself, will facilitate the discussion. Reservations are needed by Friday, Sept. 19, so the planners can get enough food. Call Karen Rinefierd at 716/328-3228, ext. 255.

• If you're interested in joining a mixed bowling team (combination of four men



Father John Forliti

and women) or a co-ed volleyball team this fall in Monroe County, call Mike at 723-1191.

• Teams of eight to 10 people are needed to help serve at and clean up Blessed Sacrament Church's soup kitchen, located in the church basement at 534 Oxford St., in Rochester, on the following dates: Sept. 23, Nov. 4, Dec. 16, Jan. 27, March 10 and April 21. For information, call Tracy McCabe at 473-5328, or Cathy Daniels at 477-8716.

• The Catholic Leadership Forum has invited Sister Janet Korn, RSM, to speak on "Life in the 90s" on Friday, Sept. 26, at a luncheon set for 11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Genesee Valley Club, 421 East Ave., Rochester. For more information, call Mary Conslar at 328-3228, ext. 281.

• A group of young adults will spend an afternoon at the Abbey of the Genesee outside Piffard in Livingston County on Saturday, Oct. 4. For information, call Rinefierd at 328-3228, ext. 255.

• A free retreat for Catholic singles will be held on Sunday, Oct. 5, from 1 to 7 p.m. at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse, 4095 East Ave., Rochester. For information, call 235-4068.

• Bishop Matthew Clark will share a pasta dinner and his thoughts on "What Does It Mean To Be Catholic" with young adults at Siena Catholic Academy, 2617 East Ave., Brighton, on Wednesday, Oct. 29, from 6:45 to 9:15 p.m. Reservations are needed by Oct. 27. Call Rinefierd at 328-3228, ext. 255.

For information on Odyssey events, call 1-800-388-7177, then press 1-5-375.

Author calls peers to God

WASHINGTON (CNS) — At age 23, Matthew Kelly isn't doing too badly for himself.

His first two books — on spirituality — sold 400,000 copies, mostly in his native Australia.

The William Morris Agency signed on to represent the Catholic college student for his newest book, *A Call to Joy* from HarperCollins, plus the requisite speaking tours and tapes that go with being a successful author.

You may ask how such wisdom can come to one so young. Kelly replies that the messenger shouldn't be the focus but the message.

"The mature approach is to look at the message," for its authenticity, he said.

Kelly attends the University of Steubenville, Ohio, where he's studying theology and philosophy.

He said 90 percent of Christians "don't have the foggiest clue as to what Christianity's all about," which means 99 percent of non-Christians are left clueless as well. When most Christians read the Bible, "we almost convince ourselves that if we were alive when Jesus was alive, we could have kept him from being crucified," Kelly said.

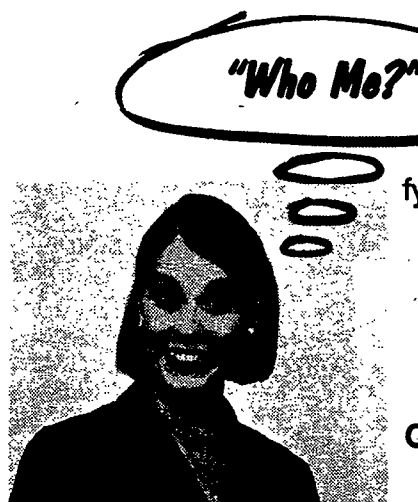
Christians' purpose in life, he said, is to "understand where we are, work out a goal to get to where we want to be." It's a practice used by every budding young executive who wants to be a corporate CEO, Kelly said.

"You cannot become more like Jesus Christ and stay as you are," he said. But it takes knowing Jesus to change and grow, Kelly added. "You cannot become like someone you do not know," he said.

Kelly says Generation X is not all that different from the baby boom generation in its spiritual quest. But while boomers, as young adults, have tried and discarded all sorts of things in their quest, Generation Xers' experience is "intensified," he said.

"Today's generation has gone through all that searching early," Kelly said. "They had their first beer at age 8, they've had their first sex by 13. By the time they're 15, they've gone through all these other avenues."

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