

All vocations need support

I am beginning this week's "Along the Way" in the Pittsburgh Airport. Since I have over two hours before take-off and another hour of flight time, it is my fond hope that I'll finish this prior to our 6 p.m. arrival in Rochester.

This visit to Pittsburgh was occasioned by the spring meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, which ran from Thursday morning to Saturday noon. I remained, as did many other bishops, for a symposium on vocations. For that experience we were joined by vocation directors from many of the dioceses of our country. Our own Father John DeSocio was among those who attended.

In the brief time that has elapsed since adjournment of the symposium, I have been reflecting on the themes and questions raised in my mind by our principal speakers — Cardinal Pio Laghi, prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, and Bishop Robert Carlson of Sioux Falls, South Dakota — and by other participants in the experience.

At this point I cannot be systematic about them, but let me share those reflections with you in the hope that they might set you thinking about the issue:

We who are baptized into the life of Christ have a common call to holiness. How that is to be lived out we discover by understanding the action of God in our own spirit, by following up our interests and talents; by the circumstances of our lives, with the encouragement and support of the community.

Whether the call is to married life, consecrated religious life or the committed generous single life, we discover and we live our vocation in and through the community and for its common good. In other words, what is truly a vocation is never a purely private affair between God and an individual.

Any vocational call is a perduring and lively one. In the discovery-decision-commitment stage we ask, "What does God want me to do with my life?" and try to give the most generous, honest answer we can, no matter what the cost. In the living out of a vocation through the years, it is important to keep

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

alive such questions as "How is God acting in my life just now?" and "What is the next step the Lord is asking me to take?"

Most studies of vocations to priesthood indicate that a personal invitation from a priest and other members of the community to consider priesthood, the example of priests hopeful and excited about life, family support and positive retreat or other spiritual experiences are all significant factors. It would probably be a stimulating exercise to think about that — all of us — to judge whether we are doing what we can to promote awareness of priesthood as a critically important and rewarding vocation.

I have long been aware that some parents and families do not encourage their children who manifest interest in priesthood and the religious life. In some instances they actively discourage such interest. I thank symposium participants, particularly vocation directors, for making me aware that these attitudes often come from parents who might like to help, but who report that they simply don't know what the life is all about.

In the absence of good information, stereotypes take over, e.g., priesthood and religious life are characterized by loneliness; not much happiness in their lives between Sundays; no one can possibly be happy without marrying and raising family.

I have been impressed by the generosity and good gifts you bring to Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium. I am also mindful of your consis-

tent statement, "I am happy to work hard on this, but I hope that we are doing all we can to promote vocations to the priesthood." The good news is that we have an excellent program in place. The dual challenge before us is to make those opportunities known, and to engage the prayer and energy of the community in the promotion of such vocations.

We had a feedback session in which we were invited to react to our symposium and to make suggestions for future ones. I made the observation, seconded by many present, that in another session we should deal in an honest way with the neuralgic questions that inevitably attach to the discussion of vocations to the priesthood.

We did not discuss the celibacy issue, nor did we speak about challenges that are there in light of our teachings about the ordination of women. It seemed a bit strange to many of us that those issues were not raised. It would have been helpful to know the experience of others in their reception of and response to those questions.

Let me invite you to think about your own vocation as you now experience it. Do you have a sense that you are called to holiness by the Christ who loves you? Do you find God in the principal responsibilities and relationships of your life? Do you find support for your vocation in family and parish? Do you contribute to the growth of both?

What is your level of knowledge about the vocations of priesthood and religious life in today's church? If that level is not what you might like it to be, what questions would you like to ask? Have you ever invited your pastor, or some other priest, to tell his own vocation story? Where and how it began? How it has grown? The challenges? What it means to him today?

We are about to land in Rochester. Before we do, let me tell you that as is my custom, I will not be writing "Along the Way" for the July issues of the *Catholic Courier*. God willing, you'll find the next installment early in August. In the meantime I hope that the summer will be good to you and that we can pray for one another in the weeks ahead. Peace to all.

The Monthly Prayer Request For Priests

THE BEAUTIFUL HANDS OF A PRIEST

We need them in life's early morning,
We need them again at its close;
We feel their warm clasp of true friendship,
We seek them when tasting life's woes;

When we come to this world, we are sinful,
The greatest as well as the least;
And the hands that make us pure as angels,
Are the beautiful hands of a priest.

And when we are tempted and wander
To pathways of shame and of sin,
'Tis the hand of a priest will absolve us
Not, once, but again and again.

And when we are taking life's partner,
Other hands may prepare us a feast,
But the hands that will bless and unite us
Are the beautiful hands of a priest.

God bless them and keep them all holy,
For the Host which their fingers caress;
When can a poor sinner do better
Than ask Him to guide them and bless?

When the hour of death comes upon us,
May our courage and strength be increased
By seeing raised over us in blessing
The beautiful hands of a priest.

Prayer Suggestions: Mass, Rosary, Fasting, Day Offering, Eucharistic Adoration, Offering Sufferings, Divine Mercy Chaplet

July, 1998

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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			Revs. 1 Robert S. Bourcy	2 John R. Cavanaugh, CSB	3 Alexander H. Bradshaw	4 Bishop Matthew H. Clark
5 Pope John Paul II	6 Priests on Sabbatical	7 Marcellus Earl, OCSO	8 Msgr. Joseph G. Gefell	9 Robert J. Kanka	10 Anthony P. Mugavero	11 John A. Colacino, CPPS
12 Joseph M. Sasso	13 Msgr. Joseph A. Cirincione, Ph.D.	14 Jerome Machar, OCSO	15 Francis H. Vogt	16 John J. Phillips	17 William Spong	18 Walter L. Wainwright
19 Robert J. Winterkorn	20 Michael G. Upson	21 John A. Reddington	22 Joseph P. McCaffrey	23 F. James Lawlor	24 George P. Heyman	25 Matthew A. Kawiak
26 Leo J. Klem, CSB	27 Peter C. Clifford	28 James C. Burke	29 Richard J. Belgotti	30 Vocations	31 Seminarians	Look for the August MPRP Calendar in the July 30th Courier.

Many thanks to Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Elmira, NY Social Ministry Committee for sponsoring this month's calendar.

Share a Great Compassion



Sr. M. Lucy
Native of: San Francisco, California
Prior Experience: Medical Technologist

When I was in my mid-thirties, I felt myself drawn to God. One evening I had occasion to read closely the 25th Responsorial Psalm... "One thing I ask is to dwell in the house of the Lord forever... behold His beauty." The words bit me profoundly. It was as if they expressed my deepest heart's desire.

A few months later I applied to the Hawthorne Dominicans and here I am. In retrospect, how simply and smoothly Our Lord guided me along the journey of discernment.

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We nurse incurable cancer patients in seven free, modern nursing homes. Many who enter our community have no prior nursing experience. Living our vows and participating in the life of the Church by prayer and sacraments enables us to serve God in this apostolate.

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