

Pray for church's work ahead

Tuesday at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Elmira, we will be celebrating in a special way the anniversaries of our priests who were ordained 25 and 50 years ago.

It will be a time of special remembrance and thanksgiving — for the jubilarians, for their brother priests and for the people who have benefited from their ministry and supported them in ministry through the years.

In anticipation of the event I reread the April 22 edition of the *Catholic Courier*, which carried their stories. It was a pleasure to revisit their full ministerial careers in this way. And, I confess, it was a special delight for me to remember the years of ministry I have shared with them.

We are blessed with a generous and faithful presbyterate. I knew of their quality by reputation before I came to Rochester. Personal experience taught me of that quality from my earliest days here. Lengthening experience with them has only deepened my awareness of their goodness.

They know and so do you that we clergy are fewer in number, that we are growing older and experiencing more and more of what accompanies the aging process. Nonetheless, I am happy to tell you that your priests remain generous in their willingness to serve and good-hearted in their commitment to their communities, as we work to adjust to rapidly changing circumstances.

As I thank God for that goodness in them, I must also express my gratitude to

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

you for your generous concern for our brother priests and for your cooperation in the challenging work of Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium. Such generosity has allowed us to move with the times and to be good stewards of the resources God has made available to us. Through such efforts we have realized many economies of finance, space and energy and, in the process, productive and mutually rewarding partnerships have developed among our communities.

All of that is on the bright side. But many of us remain deeply concerned about the realities of the numbers, age and health of our ordained priests referred to above. One needn't be a wizard in mathematics to realize that changes more painful than any we have yet experienced are in the offing if we cannot attract more candidates for the ministerial priesthood. Generous and good-hearted they are, but our current priests have limits beyond which not even extraordinary generosity can carry them.

So, what can we do about it? For one thing we can continue (or begin!) to volunteer in support of parish ministries and mission. When volunteer activity does not suffice for such necessary efforts, we can support the employment of professional pastoral ministers to serve the parish.

And we can continue to bring a critical eye to ministerial priesthood in today's church: In which areas should our ordained priests concentrate their efforts? What shifts would such concentration require in their present patterns of service and ministry? What adjustments would such shifts call for in our communities? Are our communities able and willing to make those adjustments?

In the long run, we need to look at vocations in the church from several points of view. For example, do we do enough to encourage vocations to priesthood? Or do we discourage them by silence or active opposition? Is our church looking at the real questions people are asking about celibacy as a requirement for priesthood in our church? Or do we leave people discontented because we seem to them to be unwilling to take seriously questions that are quite important to them and to the church?

Please do pray about these questions, our wonderful jubilarians and for vocations to priesthood. It will give life and good direction to the important work that lies ahead.

Peace to all.

MISSION NEWS

"We are full of joy--our brother has become a priest. We are full of joy — he has followed Christ," sing the people of Wahgi Valley in Papua



Father Tul (right) celebrates Mass with Bishop William Kurz of Kundiawa.

New Guinea, as the newly ordained priest, Father Jack Tul, approaches the altar to celebrate his first Mass. For the villagers, this day-long celebration will remain fixed in their memories for a long time. For Father Jack

Tul, the everyday life of a local mission priest has just begun. † *Through a Gift Annuity with the Propagation of the Faith, you can help the future missionary work of the church—and you benefit as well. A Gift Annuity with the Propagation of the Faith can provide you with income for the rest of your life at a favorable rate of return.*



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