

Vocations

Continued from page 1

"That makes a big, big difference. Things change, and the church needs to be reminded of that," Father Manning said.

Father DeSocio observed that the priesthood is no longer perceived as a route for getting ahead.

"When we were an immigrant country, the priest was the best educated," Father DeSocio explained. "As we went along, we became more specialized. Now we have psychologists and sociologists, and a priest used to be considered all those things."

In addition, Father Sewar observed, a religious vocation is now perceived more as a choice, rather than an obligation.

"You're dealing in a much more open society," Father Sewar said. "Also, I don't think we have as much support from parents."

Marketing and vocations

In addressing these challenges, the action plan's authors eyed numerous initiatives. Among them are: creating a vocations Web page for college students; staging diocesanwide college retreats; speaking at schools and youth-group meetings about vocations; forming vocations-awareness committees at parishes; sponsoring prayer cards, billboards, traveling statues (as symbols of religious vocations) and tours of religious communities in the diocese; and creating databases to track people who have expressed an interest in vocations.

Some of these ideas have already been



Sister Kathleen Wayne discusses vocations with St. Lawrence's teens as Father Dennis Sewar looks on.

set into motion. Finnerty said that a vocations-information gathering was held one October Sunday during coffee hour at St. Mary's Church in Rochester. In late February an intercollegiate retreat will draw 50 college students, campus ministers, religious vocations representatives and Bishop Clark. And in June, a retreat will be held for young men discerning the priesthood.

Finnerty also makes a weekly effort of sending "blurbs" to parishes, linking vocations with that week's Scripture reading. The notices, which have appeared in numerous church bulletins, implore people

who may be considering religious life to contact Finnerty or Father DeSocio.

Father DeSocio explained that Finnerty's primary focus is to handle initial inquiries. He, and vocations directors of the religious communities, would then do follow-up.

Father Manning, noting that Finnerty has an extensive professional background in marketing and public relations can be aptly applied to vocations.

"We've got to use the media. It's used for everything else on the face of the earth," he commented.

Father Manning emphasized that the marketing blitz for vocations must also involve parishioners. At Holy Name of Jesus, for example, he has formed a vocations committee of six adults — the first parish-based vocations committee in the diocese. Finnerty said she hopes that other parishes will adopt this model as well.

Meanwhile, Father Sewar said he implores the laity at Church of the Annunciation to promote vocations often.

"I say to parishioners, 'Have you talked to your grandchildren, nieces and nephews? Have you let them know that if they have any questions, there's a priest you know who can help them?'" Father Sewar said.

Walking the walk

Still, Finnerty and Father DeSocio emphasized, priests remain the chief initiators of vocations awareness to the priesthood. Father DeSocio said it's not always a given that priests promote vocations — and that is why he is developing a program to help

them in this effort.

Priests periodically may lose promoting vocations in the shuffle, Finnerty added.

"Priests have many demands on their time," she said. "I don't think they're purposely neglecting it, it's just not at the forefront."

Yet Finnerty also said that it's vital for priests to promote their vocation so that lay people hear the good news as much as possible. She asserted that while the majority of priests live happy lives, "the negative ones always grab the limelight."

A great way to promote vocations is right from the pulpit, said Father Richard O'Connell, a retired diocesan priest who resides at Rochester's Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward.

"I preach about it occasionally; I share my happiness," Father O'Connell said. "If you just show you're happy and invite others, then you might have put the thought in their minds."

Father O'Connell added that the late Bishop Dennis W. Hickey made vocations awareness a part of his homilies whenever he visited churches to administer the sacrament of confirmation.

Bill Lawrence, who is currently studying at Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary in Scranton, Pa., emphasized the importance of priest role modeling. Lawrence is in the discernment year of a program that could lead to his becoming a priest in the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter. He said he started seriously considering the priesthood after seeing the reverent example provided by Father Dennis Bonsignore during Latin Masses at Rochester's St. Stanislaus Church. Lawrence also cited Father Manning, who was formerly his pastor at Sacred Heart Church in Perkinsville.

"If you have a good interior life, it kind of overflows," Lawrence said. "It's extremely important for a priest to be a good example. In one sense he should be set apart, but not so much so that you can't approach him."

While pastor at St. Pius V/Sacred Heart in Cohocton and Perkinsville, Father Manning made himself approachable by leading a "shadowing" event — organizing a group of boys to follow him for an entire weekend, from performing liturgies to enjoying meals and leisure time. Father Manning said he plans to host a shadowing weekend at Holy Name of Jesus as well.

Meanwhile, Father Sewar has spoken on vocations at Irondequoit's Christ the King School and Northeastern Catholic Junior High School, and is planning talks at other schools in the upcoming months.

"I pop into youth-group meetings, and the kids come over to the rectory to watch basketball and football," he added.

Father Phillips said that such efforts allow priests to show that they're happy with both their vocations and their lifestyles.

"A person who's celibate doesn't cut himself off from life," Father Phillips said. "I mainly just try to be a positive, joyful person. Without that as a base, the rest is meaningless."

And yet, Father Manning said priests should be honest about the sacrifices and restrictions their jobs entail.

"The life of loneliness seems to be a big issue, and we can't deny it," Father Manning said. "And although it's a minority, there are priests out there who will not talk about vocations before there are women priests and married priests."

Father O'Connell acknowledged that many priests may be too burned out to be able to sing the praises of their vocations.

"It could be the human condition, that they're taxed to the point they don't want to try (to promote vocations)," he said.

However, Father Manning asked, what vocation or profession doesn't have its ups and downs?

"There are aspects of the priesthood I'm very, very happy with, and others I'm not," Father Manning said. "It's not unique to the priesthood; it's like that in almost all walks of life. We're out there like industry."

"The only difference," he quipped, "is we're not worried about losing our jobs."

Action plan will address wide range of vocations

By Mike Latona
Staff Writer

Pat Finnerty, diocesan director of vocations awareness, says promoting priestly vocations is her current top priority.

But she is quick to add that it is far from her only focus.

As the new diocesan action plan unfolds, such areas as women's and men's religious communities, the diaconate and lay ministry will emerge more visibly.

"The reality is, lay people in general are filling roles," Finnerty said. "It would be wonderful if the (priest) situation reversed itself. But in the meantime, the work has to be done."

Some of these vocations, Finnerty pointed out, are already being addressed — along with the priesthood — when general programs about vocations are presented.

"They overlap by nature," Finnerty said. For instance, she said, an informational program held Oct. 17 at St. Mary's Church in Rochester featured representatives from the Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of St. Joseph, Daughters of Charity, Christian Brothers and Jesuits.

Finnerty also meets monthly with vocations representatives from diocesan-based communities of women religious.

Sister Kathleen Wayne, RSM, vocation minister for the Sisters of Mercy in Rochester, Buffalo, Erie and Pittsburgh,

thinks the collaboration will be fruitful.

"I envision people contacting the diocesan office and Patty being a clearinghouse," Sister Wayne said.

Sister Wayne added that new ways of promoting women's religious life are needed in today's society, in which women have numerous opportunities in the workplace.

Meanwhile, Sister Barbara Lum, SSJ, vocations minister for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, said she is acting on an idea surfaced by Finnerty. She is arranging an open house on July 23 at the SSJ motherhouse in Pittsford, during which the order's history and traditions will be presented.

"It's obviously an opportunity to meet the sisters," Sister Lum said.

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