

Discerning retreatants to witness ordinations

At this writing I am growing increasingly excited about the ordinations to priesthood that we will celebrate at Sacred Heart Cathedral Saturday morning. It is always a pleasure to welcome new members to our presbyterate. The event offers an opportunity to celebrate the years with all who have been part of the growth and development of those to be ordained. And, it is a special moment for all who will share their labors and enjoy their ministry in the future.

I know that it's always a special moment of ministry for me to invoke the power of the Holy Spirit and to impose hands upon those called to be presbyters. In this instance, I will ordain William McGrath and Patrick Van Durme. Mickey and Pat, as they are called, are gifted and generous men who will bring a lot of faith, maturity and good spirit to this new phase of their lives. Pat will spend his first year of priesthood at the University of Louvain in Belgium where he will finish his graduate degree in theology. Mickey will take up a parish assignment shortly after ordination.

Adding to my joyful anticipation of ordination this year is the presence at that celebration of some 40 men who are participating in a retreat that will begin at the Notre Dame Retreat House on Friday afternoon and conclude at a post-ordination luncheon on Saturday. The retreat participants will spend that time talking, thinking and praying about the possibility of pursuing vocations to the priesthood.

Two aspects of this program are especially pleasing. The first is that our pastors and parish communities were invited to send to us the names of men in the parish who possess talents and personal qualities we would like to have in the priests of our diocese. When we

along
the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

received these names, we sent each a letter inviting the person recommended to come to the retreat.

The second pleasing aspect is that the candidates recommended by their pastors will be there because they choose to participate. Others said that they were interested, but for a variety of reasons would not be free to participate this weekend.

I have been praying for the participants each day since we decided to offer this opportunity in the hope that it will be a rich and rewarding experience for them. Along with that intention, of course, I have prayed that some may one day be ordained for the service of the wonderful people of this diocese. I know for sure that we need that kind of ministry; I can tell them with honesty that the vocation of the ordained priest is life-giving, challenging and deeply gratifying. Note that I did not say carefree or totally free from frustration or suffering.

Thinking about and praying for Mickey, Pat and all of the retreatants has made me grateful to God for my own vocation as priest and for the incredible people I have come to know through ministry. I cannot begin to describe for you what they (read: you!) have done to

help me appreciate my vocation more and more, and to grow through the experience of ministry.

I also remember the people whose words and example raised the questions, embodied the values, and offered the gifts that first convinced me that we all have vocations in life. They taught me that God gave us life and gifts for the good of all, and that our choices are important for ourselves and others. Their lesson applies not just to ordained priesthood but to the single life, vowed religious life, married life and all of the significant choices we make within any one of those major life directions.

So, I thank my mother and dad, who never suggested priesthood to me but who supported me every step of the way; the devoted catechists — all lay women — who instructed me in the faith all through grammar school; the Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of St. Joseph and diocesan priests who taught me well in high school and challenged us to be persons for others no matter what we did; the Augustinian Fathers who staffed my home parish, who respected us and were good to us even when we were tiny kids; my friends and teachers at Holy Cross College, Mater Christi Seminary, St. Bernard's Seminary and the North American College. All these people were a part of the beginnings of my vocation, and I remain grateful to them to this day for their example, support and encouragement.

Please join me in praying for all who will gather at Sacred Heart Cathedral on Saturday morning, and pray especially for Mickey, Pat and the retreatants that years from now they will still remember Saturday's celebration as a deeply significant memory in their lives.

Peace to all.

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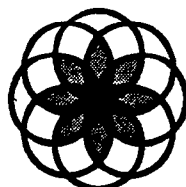
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