

FEATURE

Brothers answered call of the collar and the court

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — Father James A. Schwartz, pastor of St. Louis Parish, Pittsford, remembered articulating his call to the priesthood when he was in the third grade at Our Lady of Good Counsel School in Rochester.

The nun who taught the class asked each of the students to write down what they wanted to be when they grew up.

"Without missing a beat, I wrote on the paper that I wanted to be the pope," Father Schwartz said, as a luncheon audience at Oak Hill Country Club laughed in response Oct. 17.

Father Schwartz, 59, spoke at the luncheon with his brother, Rochester City Court Supervising Judge John R. Schwartz, 57, on the topic "Healthy Families, Healthy Communities."

Attended by 180 people, the sixth annual luncheon raised about \$15,000 for the Mercy Center with the Aging, a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy. The Rochester-based ministry provides education and training for caregivers and older adults, and cooperates with faith communities, health systems and other organizations and agencies.

The brothers eschewed formal presentations in favor of asking each other questions about how they arrived at their career choices, and how they work in their respective fields to strengthen families.

Judge Schwartz spoke at length about his work creating New York State's first Drug Treatment Court in 1995. The court, modeled on the only other one at the time, in Florida, requires nonviolent narcotics offenders to undergo a two-year regimen of intensive treatment, obtain a high school degree, and get a job in exchange for dismissal of criminal charges.

The judge said defendants he was seeing inspired him to create the drug court. They were "all giving their lives away to the god cocaine," he said.

The court has become a model for similar courts in the state, which now has 40. According to one report, only 10 to 15 percent of the Rochester drug court's defendants are rearrested, whereas the judge said 70 percent of narcotics offenders punished in the traditional manner with jail sentences were being rearrested after completing their first sentence.

"We realized that drug addiction could be cured," he said. "People started getting



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

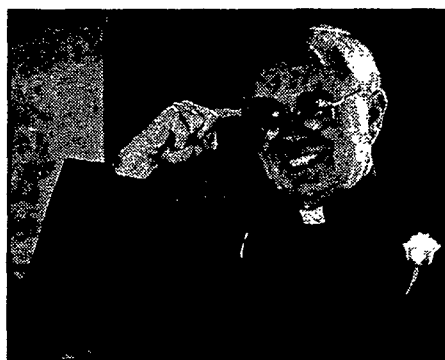
Father James Schwartz (right) listens to his brother, Rochester City Court Supervising Judge John Schwartz at Oak Hill Country Club in Pittsford Oct. 17. The brothers were guest speakers at the sixth annual luncheon for the Mercy Center with the Aging.



Rita Augustine, a parishioner at Immaculate Conception Church and executive vice-president of Catholic Family Center, listens to the brothers.

off drugs and reuniting with their families."

To illustrate his court's success, Judge Schwartz read from a letter one defendant's son had written him thanking him for helping his mother get off drugs. The



Father Schwartz, pastor of St. Louis in Pittsford, takes a turn at talking.

judge added that society needed to reform laws that harshly penalize substance abusers and focus instead on helping drug-addicted defendants.

"Each and every one of these people are God's children, and the only way that we are going to restore them is to give them hope," he said.

He also said that many of the defendants grew up in homes headed by parents who were teenagers when they became parents, and who lacked parenting skills. Many teenagers raised in such homes are often the same ones who wind up killing other teenagers, he said. Schools, churches and the community

have to begin educating youngsters about the responsibilities that child-rearing entails, he noted.

"We're teaching in our schools reading, writing and arithmetic," he said. "We do not teach our children today the importance of raising a family."

As for what churches can do for families, Father Schwartz noted their response to the Sept. 11 attacks on America exemplified what faith communities can do. Churches offered comfort to people trying to understand the evil that occurred, he said, and aided people trying to find God.

"I would say if Jesus were writing parables today ... he would say 'God is like a nurse who traveled from Boston to New York to spend her vacation at ground zero.'"

Both men asked each other about the role of faith in their work. Father Schwartz said that he starts each day with a "contemplative cup of coffee" where he prays to Christ.

Judge Schwartz said that he considered the words of Matthew 25 to be his inspiration — "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me."

The brothers used humor throughout the talk, even deflating each other's more serious comments from time to time. For example, Father Schwartz talked about how, as a grown man, he finally told his father, now deceased, that he loved him, and that it was the only time he ever saw his father with tears in his eyes.

Judge Schwartz followed the poignant story with this comment:

"First off, I'd like to say, I did see Dad's tears, and usually it was when I brought home a report card," the judge said to audience laughter. "Or, worse yet, when I brought the car home."

After their talk, Father Schwartz said both men were raised in a devout family with four other siblings whose father took them to Mass daily.

"There was a spiritual dimension to our lives," Father Schwartz said. "When we won a ballgame or lost a ballgame, had some disappointment or did very well, we were in God's hands."

Father Schwartz added that other families could learn from his family's reliance on faith.

"The key to a healthy family is not success, is not perfection, is not a lack of argument," he said. "It's a sense of spiritual direction ... to believe that God cares for us."

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