

## Encourage youths to answer call from God

Sam Collis is a friend of mine. We have not been acquainted for a long time — Sam is in the third grade — but I love it when we meet as we did recently at St. Louis, Pittsford. I greeted him as the procession moved down the main aisle and, later, gave him holy Communion. At the reception following Mass, we had our picture taken together. It was a memorable moment for me. It's always a joy to meet young people like Sam.

Later in the week, I received a letter from Sam. It was a kind letter. He said that he, too, was happy that we had met again. Included in his letter was the question, "What did you have to do to become a bishop?" I told him that one does not apply for the office of bishop or take any special courses to prepare for that ministry. Rather, one responds to an invitation which, in the case of the office of bishop, comes from the Holy Father.

Sam's question was not an unusual one. Young people often express a similar curiosity: Do you like being a bishop? How did you know that you wanted to become a priest? What do you do all week? What is a typical day for you? Don't you miss being married? Aren't you lonely a lot? What would you have done if you had not decided for priesthood?

Such moments are special. It is by means of such questions that young people connect with the experience of adults and explore their own possibilities. And they offer us a chance to speak with young people in their own language about our lives and the vocations we have chosen. For all of us, the probing questions of the young provide an opportunity to invite them to be open to God's call in their lives — whatever that call may be — to encourage them to explore and test it with their parents, pastors, teachers and friends.

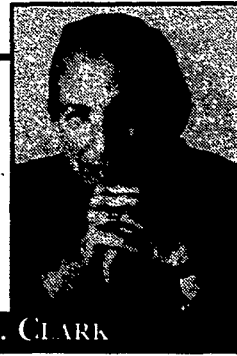
That is a daunting and delicate task, isn't it? In such sensitive issues we want to support and guide the young without taking over their lives.

What can we do to help? What are mistakes to be avoided? How do we support and encourage these young seekers without interfering or transferring our dreams to them?

There are no easy answers to those questions. But let

### along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



me offer a description of vocation that may help you to think about your own experience and assist you in supporting young people in their quest. This description was developed for the National Youth Congress held in Indianapolis last month:

"Through the sacrament of baptism each person is called to a life of holiness and service. This call or vocation is lived as a single, married, ordained or consecrated person. A vocation is a loving, generous and compassionate response to serve and give testimony to Jesus Christ in the world today."

The young people at the congress took to the theme with enthusiastic interest. That was certainly true of the seven teens at our table. The question of what they want to do with the rest of their lives is something they pray and think about a great deal. That did not surprise me. The same is true of lots of the kids I meet in our own diocese. What did impress me was the fact that their conscious effort is to respond with integrity and generosity to God's call in their life.

A second characteristic of those table conversations was the clear desire on the part of the young people for support and encouragement in this discernment from respected adults and peers. They don't want anyone to decide for them, but they are open to guidance, suggestions and questions that might help them in their efforts.

I hope that you will be open to doing what you can to create an environment in which people in your fam-

ily and parish can reflect on and grow in the vocations they have chosen, and in which those still searching for their life's direction enjoy the support of others.

Let me offer a few suggestions with the hope that you might find them helpful for yourself and others you care about.

1) Share freely your experience of your own vocation — what you value most about it, its challenges and difficulties, how you came to your decision.

2) Make prayer a normal part of decision making. Pray with and for members of the family, parish and neighborhood. Give children opportunities to lead prayer and to pray in their own words.

3) Reflect as a family on the talents of each person and how each can use her or his talents to be of service in the family and the parish. Be mindful of others who communicate a deep sense of vocation and talk about how they do that.

4) Regarding the encouragement to consider vocations to ordained ministry and religious life: Hear as much as you can about the life and work of your priests, deacons and women and men religious. Speak positively and enthusiastically about their activities, encourage them to share their vocational stories with the young people in your family and parish.

5) Some people who live out their vocations as married, single, consecrated or ordained participate in church-related ministries. Challenge young adults to include such a possibility in their thinking and their prayer. Name the gifts you perceive in them and help them to develop those gifts for the service of others.

I did not realize when I responded to Sam's question that I would get into that theme in *Along the Way* this week. But I thank him for the question. I hope my response was helpful to him in some way and that he will always feel free to ask questions like that of people like me. I think that is one of the ways in which we all discover and grow in our vocations. I am also grateful to Sam because he got me thinking about my own vocation. He helped me to realize anew how much I love it and how life-giving it always is!

Peace to all.

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## 2002 WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY January 18 - 25

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*The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, which began in the Episcopal Church in 1908, allows Christians from all over the globe to recall those who have lived under the sign of Christ for 2000 years, to celebrate the unity we already share, and to seek a deepening of that unity. *The Week of Prayer* is a response to Jesus' prayer "that they all may be one" (John 17:21) and that our unity be more visible each day.

The following represent a sampling of prayer services that have been planned for Sunday, January 20 to celebrate the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*:

**ST. LEO CHURCH, 3:00 P.M.**  
167 Lake Avenue, Hilton

The clergy and congregation of the eight Churches in the Village of Hilton and Town of Parma will gather for a prayer service.

**ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON, 6:00 P.M.**  
3747 Brick Schoolhouse Rd., Hamlin

The Hamlin Association of Ministers has planned a celebration of music and prayer, which will include Christian Churches in Hamlin.

**ST. CHARLES BORROMEO CHURCH, 7:00 P.M.**  
3003 Dewey Avenue, Greece

The Greece Ministerial Society has planned a joint prayer service.

For more information about prayer services being offered within the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, please contact Bernard Grizard, director of the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, at (585) 328-3210, ext. 328.