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## Congress set for Montreal

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The term "continental congress" is known more to Americans as a reference to early American history.

But next year, it will take on added meaning when the Third Continental Congress on Vocations to Ordained Ministry and Consecrated Life in North America will be held in Montreal. Pope John Paul II called the conference.

While this is the third continental congress on vocations, it is the first one held in North America. The first was held in 1994 in Brazil for Latin America, and the second in Rome in 1997 for Europe.

The Montreal congress, slated for April 18-21, is expected to offer a pastoral plan for increasing vocations in North America. It will be trilingual: English, French and Spanish.

It is expected that 1,000-1,200 delegates from North America will attend. To date, 45 U.S. organizations have pledged to send more than 650 delegates. The two largest groups are the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Chicago-based National Religious Vocation Conference, with 60 delegates each. Patricia Finnerty, director of the Rochester diocesan Office of Vocations Awareness, and Sister Clare Brown, of the Rochester Sisters of St. Joseph, are among the registered delegates.

Also in attendance will be representatives of the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education and the Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations.

Archbishop Roger L. Schwietz of Anchorage, Alaska, discussed developments surrounding the congress in a report prepared for the U.S. Bishops' Fall general meeting in Washington in November.

"It is important that we advance the vision that everyone is responsible for promoting vocations to ordained ministry and consecrated life," Archbishop Schwietz, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Vocations, said in the written report.

Among the topics to be addressed at the congress are the theology of vocation; North American culture and its impact on the vocations climate; the gifts and challenges of cultural diversity; and vocations for the mission of the church.

Father Raymond Lafontaine of Montreal represents the Canadian bishops' conference as co-chairman; the U.S. co-chair is Father Edward J. Burns, executive director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Vocations and Priestly Formation.

## Priesthood

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ans had attended past vocations awareness retreats offered by the diocese. At this point, Father DeSocio noted, frank discussion about the priesthood is "the next step" in their discernment process.

### Answering the call

Father Marcoux serves as parochial vicar of Sacred Heart Cathedral, where he resides with Father John Mulligan, pastor, and Bishop Matthew H. Clark. The 36-year-old priest quipped that his lifestyle hasn't changed much from his previous career as a chef: "I'm still working weekends and holidays, and I'm still feeding people."

On a more serious note, Father Marcoux said that despite a good income and enjoyable social life during those years, he still felt unfulfilled.

"I knew there was a hole. I wasn't using all the gifts I had, and I knew it," he said.

Thus, Father Marcoux began serious pursuit of the priesthood. He describes this step as responding to a call, yet he can't pinpoint when the call became clear.

"I've never heard God say 'Oh by the way, Joe, I'd like you to be a priest today,'" he remarked.

Father Marcoux said that being aware of the call, and responding to it, is a process that can take years. "And that's a good thing, trust me," he said, explaining that such a deep commitment as a priestly vocation should be made with absolute certainty.

Father Marcoux, a native of St. James Parish in Irondequoit, lived briefly at Becket Hall in 1996 and 1999 while attending college and seminary. Though he is now a priest, Father Marcoux said he constantly reflects on his vocation.

"Even married people do that," he said.

### Challenges

Father Marcoux said he finds it essential to block out time for quiet reflection and leisure activities. With the whirlwind schedule he often keeps, this is no easy task. Yet he strives to avert falling into what Father DeSocio calls the Messiah Complex — believing that the parish can't function without his presence.

"You are no one's savior," Father Marcoux said.

Father DeSocio noted that active priests in the Rochester Diocese get four weeks of vacation, plus one week for retreat and another week for professional development each year, as well as a six-month sabbatical every 10 years. These benefits surprised some of the guests at Becket, but Father DeSocio said it's necessary to have this amount of time off "because of the intensity of the work."

When that intensity becomes overwhelming, Father DeSocio said, priests are allowed leaves of absence. He added that the diocese is connected with health-care facilities for priests who struggle with various addictions.

Whereas Father Marcoux acknowledged that the most talked-about sacrifice for a priest is his vow of celibacy, he also feels



A job well-done, Father Joe Marcoux tells Joelle Fenlon, 11, an altar server from Sacred Heart School, after Mass Jan. 10.

that taking a vow of obedience is daunting as well. Though he doesn't take issue with his present superiors, Father Marcoux mused about the potential difficulty of adjusting to a new pastor or bishop.

At the end of the day, the priestly vocation may simply not be a good fit for all young men in discernment. And that's nothing to be ashamed of, Fathers DeSocio and Marcoux emphasized.

"That's not a failure at all. It's just we're on a journey, and our paths crossed at Becket," Father DeSocio said.

"If you don't feel like this is where God is calling you, you should be able to walk away," Father Marcoux agreed.

Darius Kavilaunas, 29, was one of the non-seminarians who attended the Dec. 27 event. Despite the conversation regarding potential pitfalls, he's still intent on considering the priesthood.

"There are plenty of good days and plenty of bad days, and you've really got to have your faith for those bad days," Kavilaunas said. "If a person is called to be a priest, you've got to realize there are going to be tough times out there, and you've got to put up with it. That definitely wouldn't be enough to scare me away."

Kavilaunas, a parishioner at Greece's Our Mother of Sorrows, said he has been strongly considering the priesthood for three years. He remarked that people should realize that priests are not immune to burnout, addictions and other struggles.

"My feeling is, that's a view of the old-fashioned priesthood. Problems were pushed back more; the truth of the matter got hidden," he commented.

### Rewards

And yet, it's during some of the most potentially trying times that Father Marcoux feels best about his vocation. This is especially true, he said, when he ministers to the dying.



Sacred Heart sixth-grader Anna Vazquez, 11, asks Father Marcoux how tall he is.

"The most powerful experience is being with someone in death," he said. "Never in a million years would I have thought it would be being with people in their most vulnerable time."

He also looks forward to hearing confession. Among his most meaningful roles, he said, are "the healing ministries we do — the anointing, the burying, the reconciling."

Father Marcoux acknowledged that the declining number of available priests in this diocese will leave him with "completely different" circumstances in the upcoming years: "Some of us will be living in rectories alone and be sacramental ministers in four or five parishes, probably."

However, he stated, "It does not bother me in the least. It's going to be very exciting, and we have the people power to do it. All the needs will be met; it will just be done in a different way." One example he used was the role of women in ministerial and administrative roles: "If you have any issues with women, you'd better get over them right away," he advised.

Paul Flansburg, 33, who just moved into Becket Hall in mid-November, said he was inspired by Father Marcoux's many optimistic comments.

"It's a blessing that Joe came to talk to us with the intention of representing his joy, even though it's only been such a short period of time (that he's been a priest)," said Flansburg, who attends St. John Fisher College.

Flansburg grew up in St. Rose Parish in Lima and is now a parishioner at Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Church. Both Flansburg and his brother Joe, 20, a student at Monroe Community College, attended the session with Father Marcoux.

Flansburg also appreciated Father Marcoux's commentary about the challenges of the priesthood. "I thought it was great. The fact you have the perspective of a new young priest who's willing to speak candidly about his experience, it makes it real," he said. "It's less of something that I'll walk into it with a misconception."

## Vocations awareness on the rise in diocese

A promotional flyer from the diocesan Office of Vocations Awareness states in boldface: "These men are YOUR seminarians. One may be your future priest. Support and encourage them."

The flyer displays photos of nine men who are working toward becoming priests in the Diocese of Rochester. It has been distributed to all diocesan parishes and is designed to be used as a bulletin insert.

Many other young men stand to be similarly featured, said Patricia Finnerty, diocesan vocations-awareness director. Since she began her newly created position in April 1999, Finnerty has amassed a database of more than 100 people who have expressed interest in finding out about the priest-

hood.

"I definitely feel like the momentum is building, and that it will continue to grow," Finnerty said.

The office has garnered many names by offering vocations-awareness retreats such as "24 Hours With the Lord," held each June to coincide with the ordination of new diocesan priests. Participants gather for an overnight retreat, attend the ordination together, then have lunch and discussion with Bishop Matthew H. Clark. "That's been very successful," Finnerty remarked.

Finnerty said an increasing number of priests, parish staff and parishioners are suggesting potential priesthood candidates to diocesan officials. Some parishes and

planning groups are even forming vocations teams, she noted. In addition, her office places frequent notices about vocations awareness in parish bulletins throughout the diocese.

Assisting in the publicity effort is the Web site for Becket Hall, the diocesan pre-theology program. The site was launched about a year ago, at <http://www.dor.org/vocations/becket.html>.

You can also learn more about vocations-awareness programs in the diocese by calling Finnerty at 585/328-3228, ext. 229; or Father John DeSocio, diocesan director of pre-theology and seminarians, at 585/461-2890.

— Mike Latona