

Events focus thoughts about priesthood

Yesterday I met with Father John DeSocio, the outgoing director of Becket Hall and my assistant for vocations for the last nine years. Soon John will be taking up his new position as vice rector of the American College at Louvain, Belgium. That distinguished seminary, owned and operated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has been training men for priesthood for more than 150 years.

John and I covered a range of items. Among those was the appointment to seminary studies of Hoan Dinh to the American College at Louvain and of Jeffrey Tunnicliff to Theological College and the Catholic University of America in Washington. It is always a joy to send off such fine young men to their years of theological studies. And I am especially delighted that we have a student of Vietnamese origin in preparation for diocesan priesthood.

Later this Tuesday morning, I'll be off to St. Helen Parish in Gates. There we will celebrate with priests observing special jubilee anniversaries of their ordination to the priesthood. This is an annual liturgy to which we invite all of our priests. I always look forward to it and to the lunch that follows.

The conversation with John and my anticipation of the gathering with our brother priests this morning have helped me focus some of the thinking I have been doing about priesthood in recent weeks, as we have struggled with the turmoil and pain of the sexual-abuse issue.

Let me share just a few lines of my thought in this regard:

1) I have a firm conviction that we will

along the way

By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

make our way through this hard time if we remain people of faith who trust in the Lord's promise to be with us always. It will take some time, because the wounds are deep and healing is slow. But, if we commit ourselves to pray for healing and the restoration of trust, God will grant us those precious gifts.

2) Above all things, please pray for any and all children who have suffered sexual or any other kind of abuse. I most certainly refer to those who were ever abused by a priest. But I also include all children whose bodies and trust have ever been violated by any adult. As long as any of them hurt, we all hurt.

3) I have never known a time in which there was more focused attention on, or conversation about, priesthood. It is occasioned by events we would never choose and that we regret deeply. But the fact is — at least, in my perception — our community has never been more acutely aware of the significance of priesthood in their lives, or of how much their priests mean to them. It is as if this current pain has made people more aware than ever how much a part of the fabric of their lives their parish priests really are.



4) Given such attention, I wonder how many gifted young men out there may be entertaining thoughts of exploring priesthood as a life's direction for themselves. Many of our young people are aware of what's going on in our church. They know the pain. They know the need. They know the good that priests do. Where will it all lead?

5) And how about you? Be honest now. If a young guy you love told you that he wanted to explore the possibility of priesthood for himself, how would you react to him? Would you encourage such exploration? Why? Would you try to steer him in a different direction? Why?

6) I'll be having a chance to explore this issue with a group of young men who will gather for an overnight retreat on June 21-22. The program is called "24 Hours with the Lord." It is designed for individuals in whom pastoral leaders and fellow parishioners find personal qualities and gifts that would serve them well in the priesthood. Those who accept the invitation will gather on Friday for prayer, instruction and conversation about this wonderful vocation. On Saturday, they will attend Jim Fennessy's ordination to priesthood at Sacred Heart Cathedral. I'll have the pleasure of joining them for conversation and a brown-bag lunch after the ordination.

7) Whatever your thoughts as you read this — whatever your response to my questions — I thank you for praying for our priests and seminarians. They are generous, faithful and hopeful. But like all of us they (we!) need the support of prayer during tough times. Thank you for that gift.

Peace to all.



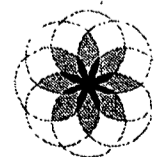
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