

On recruiting new priests

Rob Cullinan/Catholic Courier

The Diocese of Rochester plans to focus more closely during the next few months on recruiting men to the priesthood, according to Father Timothy E. Horan, diocesan director of priestly vocation awareness.

Father Horan, who was appointed to the position in December, said the diocese wants to examine why it is not succeeding in attracting more men to the priesthood. As a first step, in March the diocese will host three listening sessions on that subject with its priests in Rochester, Auburn and Elmira. In April, priestly vocations will be the theme of the diocesan priests' convocation, he added.

Only six men currently are studying to become diocesan priests, according to Father James A. Schwartz, diocesan director of seminarians. He added that the diocese plans to ordain one man this year, one next year and none in 2006. The Rochester Diocese has fewer seminarians than any other diocese in the state, he said. Both he and Father Horan noted that this diocese has emphasized developing lay ministry in recent years, but needs to do more to recruit new priests.

"We certainly want to recognize and affirm lay ministry, but in the midst of that, we need ordained leadership," Father Schwartz said.

"My task is to take (priestly voca-

tions) off the back burner and move it to the forefront of guys' and parishes' minds," Father Horan said.

More than 50 people attended a Jan. 14 conference on increasing vocations to the priesthood. On hand to give presentations at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry in Pittsford were Father Schwartz as well as three representatives of the Diocese of Albany's vocations-awareness team.

In an interview prior to the conference, Sister of St. Joseph Katherine Hanley, a member of the Albany vocations team, said that her diocese has 14 men studying to be priests, with four more in the application process. What has worked for Albany, she said, is having vocations-team members go to where people are — to parishes' weekend Masses, retreats, colleges, high schools and youth-group meetings.

"We try to make ourselves available to as many groups as possible," she said.

Sister Hanley also advocated that dioceses create attractive Web sites about priestly and religious life. She said today's young men often research things extensively on the Web before they even bother to contact the sites' sponsors.

Deacon Thomas Driscoll, primary organizer of the Jan. 14 conference, said the Albany team's presentation was inspiring. He noted that one

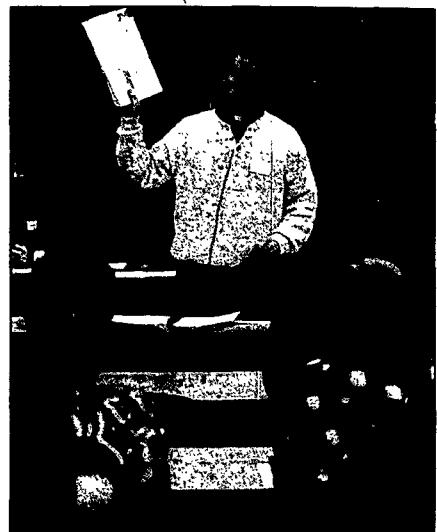
team member emphasized keeping in touch with men interested in the priesthood and developing a database of such men. The Albany team member also noted that he asks various diocesan institutional leaders — including school principals — to identify people who might be interested in ordained or religious life.

Father Schwartz said he wants all diocesan pastors and youth-group leaders to nurture vocations through personal invitations to young men they think might be interested in the priestly life. He noted that Jesus invited his apostles one by one, and the church's leadership would do well to emulate his example.

Father Schwartz cited a number of reasons he thinks young men are not attracted to the priesthood these days, including celibacy and the wide variety of career choices now available, as opposed to the narrower options available to previous generations. However, he said he believes there are potential priests out there, and the diocese and parishes need to be more aggressive in finding them.

On that note, Father Horan said, it's not always easy to ask a young man to consider the priesthood.

"You're dealing in a profoundly personal level in someone's life," he said. "Priests are never called to say to a young person, 'I think you should consider marrying Sarah,' but we say that it's our obligation to say once



Mike Craci/Catholic Courier

St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry in Pittsford hosted a Jan. 14 conference on nurturing priestly vocations in the Diocese of Rochester. Guest speaker Father James Walsh of the Diocese of Albany shared the ways his diocese recruits young men to the priesthood.

in a while to a young man, 'I think you should consider becoming a priest.'"

Yet he noted that in his youth, a priest he admired invited him to consider the vocation he eventually chose.

"On the superficial level, it bothered me," Father Horan said of the invitation. "I didn't want to be sidetracked from a career and family and those things. But underneath that, there seemed to be a certain wonder and excitement."

Conference agenda shows diverse priorities

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

Granting parents the option to choose their child's school, modifying the Rockefeller Drug Laws and maintaining human services are among 70 priorities identified by the New York State Catholic Conference in its 2004 legislative agenda.

The conference, which is the public-policy arm of New York state's Catholic bishops, issues an annual legislative agenda outlining specific public-policy goals. The priorities are based on a consistent set of social-justice principles, drawn from Catholic teaching and Gospel values, as well as current situations in the state.

"There are a number of issues on the agenda because the church's interests are so varied," said Dennis Poust, director of communications for the conference. "The size of this is directly related to the breadth of the church's ministries throughout the state."

Each priority falls under one of

seven categories, including health care, criminal justice and human services. The environment category has seen the most change from last year's agenda, including three priorities this year as opposed to the one statement of general concern in last year's agenda, Poust said.

Although the agenda lists 70 priorities, Poust said it's hard to tell which will receive the most attention since the conference reacts to legislation. There are several things the conference will pursue proactively, however.

"We certainly will be once again promoting the school-choice initiative," said Poust, referring to a plan to urge the state to enact scholarships, tax credits and vouchers so parents can choose their child's school. "It is particularly timely this year, because the state must change the school-aid formula as it currently exists."

Another priority high on the agenda is the modification of the sentencing provisions in the Rocke-

feller Drug Laws and the increased use of addiction-treatment programs both in prison and as an alternative to incarceration, Poust said.

"Because it came so close last year to an agreement, we don't want that momentum to be lost," he said. "People continue to rot in jail who are no danger to anyone."

Twenty-five of the priorities fall under the human-services category. At a time of budget deficits and cuts, "it's critical that the budget isn't balanced on the backs of the poor," Poust said. The human-services priorities are aimed at providing for basic human needs, supporting people who need special services, and welcoming immigrants and migrants.

The fiscal and regulatory priorities call for, among other things, an on-time state budget, campaign-finance reform and the maintenance of tax-exempt status for not-for-profit organizations. Six health-care priorities call for expanded health-care access and coverage, adequate

funding for health-care services for those in need and opposition of measures which threaten the Catholic health-care mission.

The priorities in the family life/respect life category address the death penalty, physician-assisted suicide, human cloning and partial-birth abortion, as well as adoption, sexual-abstinence education programs and domestic violence.

Poust said that too many Catholics don't know about the public-policy functions of the church, why the church takes those positions or what individuals can do to promote them. Legislators have to know that "there are millions of Catholics out there who care about these issues. This isn't the old days anymore, when a bishop picks up the phone and calls his legislator and a bill gets killed or passed," Poust said.

For more information on the 2004 legislative agenda, visit the New York State Catholic Conference Web Site at nycatholic.org.