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Who will answer the call?

Convocation discussions center on vocations crisis

Who will form the next generation of priests is a growing concern for the men currently serving as priests of the Diocese of Rochester.

This question occupied participants at the annual diocesan convocation of priests and pastoral administrators, held April 19-21 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Rochester. Carol Dady, newly appointed coordinator of the diocesan vocations awareness team, said she plans to use ideas gathered in convocation discussions in her efforts to raise awareness of vocations to priesthood.

Concerns about priestly vocations are growing as the effects of the priest shortage become more and more apparent in the diocese, according to Father Timothy Horan, diocesan director of priestly vocation awareness.

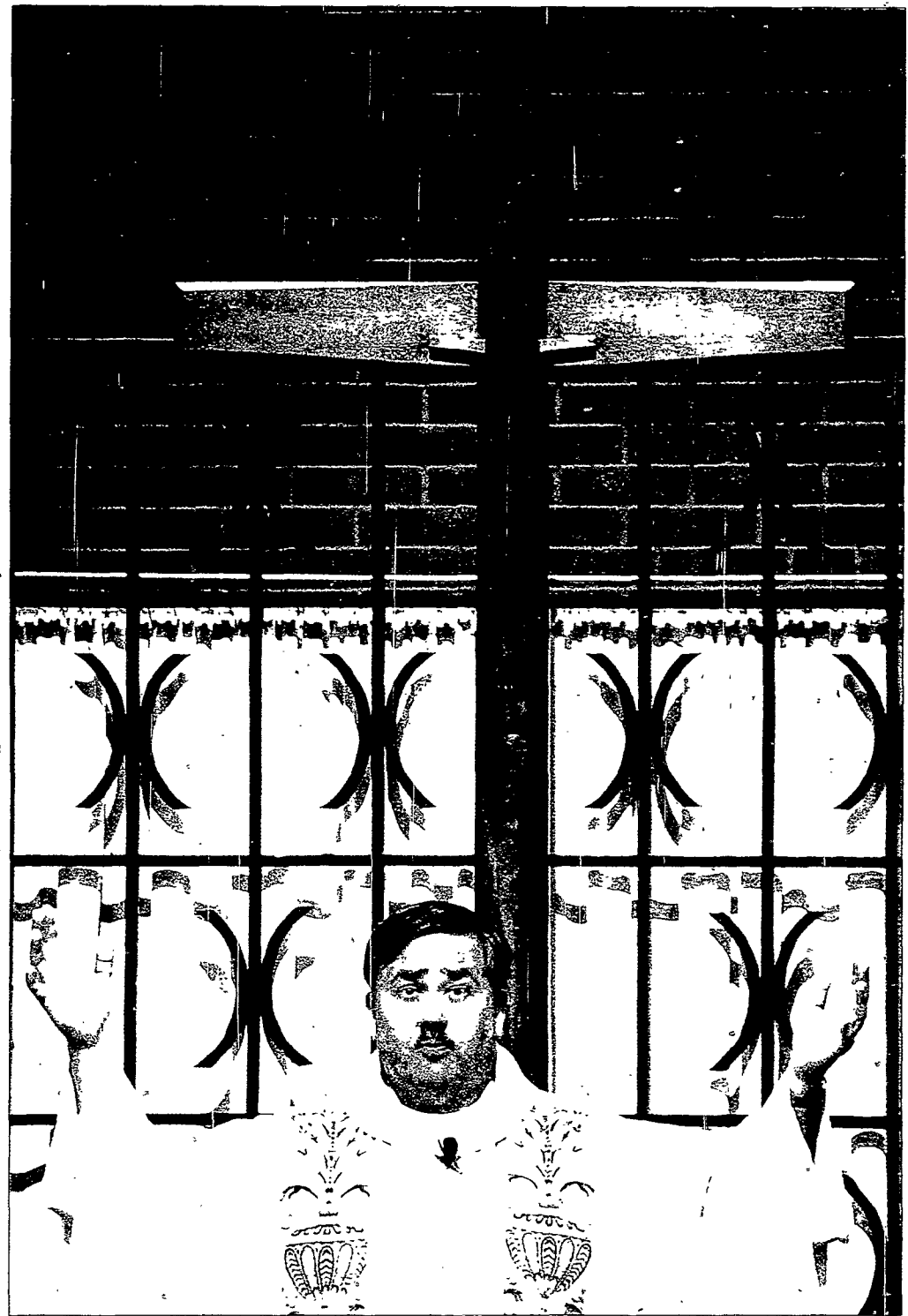
"It's reaching the kitchen table when Masses get canceled and parishes are closing and people have to travel to experience a faith community," Father Horan said.

Statistical projections listed on the diocese's Web site note that "the number of active diocesan priests available to serve the faithful will diminish from the current level of nearly 140 to 62 by the year 2025 — a decline of 60%." At the national level, the number of diocesan priests has dropped from almost 36,000 in 1965 to a little more than 29,000 today, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University.

Father Horan said priests and pastoral administrators prepared for the convocation sessions by holding discussions in Auburn, Elmira and Rochester about two questions: What are the forces in the diocese that frustrate the priestly vocation in young men? and What forces are in place in the diocese that would encourage men to answer the call to the priesthood? The regional discussions surfaced the following items as some of the forces obstructing vocations:

- A fear among young people of commitment to anything permanent — including marriage and the priesthood;

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Father Michael Schramel, pastor of St. Ambrose Church in Rochester, invites parishioners to join him in the Lord's Prayer during Holy Thursday Mass April 8. During their April 19-21 convocation, priests of the Rochester Diocese discussed their concerns about increasing vocations to the priesthood.

Story by Rob Cullivan • Photos by Mike Crupi

