

Young men encouraged to be priests

In this special *Catholic Courier* devoted to the subject of vocations, I would like to address this column especially to the young men in our diocese who are thinking about whether they have a call to serve God and our church as priests.

First of all, I want to encourage you. I offer you my personal prayer that your consideration of this special vocation of lifelong service to Our Risen Lord is a time of richness and growth, and that the Holy Spirit will lead you to the right decision.

Years ago, when I was your age, I had the feelings I would guess that you're experiencing now.

I wanted to do something special with my life, change the world for the better and use whatever talents God had given me to help people. I wanted to make a real difference. The question was, how? Like all of you, I wondered if I might become a good husband and father, perhaps a lawyer or teacher or social worker — noble goals for anyone. The possibilities, like my hopes and dreams, seemed endless.

Yet, perhaps because of my family environment and the example of women and men who mentored and taught me, one path seemed to be drawing me in a powerful way —



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

desire to serve God and Jesus Christ. But how could I do that? After much thought, prayer and many conversations with people I trusted, I decided to test my attraction to the ordained priesthood. And, in 1962, after much preparation and study, I was ordained. That day remains as one of the happiest of my life.

More than 40 years later, I am still energized and moved sometimes beyond words by the privilege God has given me.

I have had moments of great joy and deep happiness. Yes, there have been painful moments of sadness and sorrow, and all the moments in between that life brings to us.

Through all of this, in all of life's twists and turns, I've felt strongly what I believe is God's special gift

to priests — an overwhelming sense that God was with me, guiding me, loving me, propping me up when I needed it, always present in powerful and mysterious ways.

I would do it all over in an instant, in a heartbeat.

I would choose this life again — because every desire I had as a young man to make a difference in the lives of people has been fulfilled.

The path I chose has led to me to riches beyond my imaginings. These riches are not of gold or material wealth, but an immeasurable bounty nonetheless. I have been given the treasure of helping people discover the workings of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and witnessing the power of the sacraments to heal and inspire, to spark happiness and courage and hope.

These stirrings within you — a certain excitement at the thought that Jesus may be inviting you to follow him as a priest, a feeling of happiness and excitement at being "sent on a mission" — these may be signs that God is calling out to you through the grace already in your heart.

Seek the wisdom of others. A long time ago, wise and loving people encouraged me. My family and friends

who cared about me and about whom I care deeply listened to me. They offered their own good sense of who I was, of whatever gifts I had been given and of what I could yet be.

Think about your deepest longings in life. Think about what it is you want to do with the gifts you have been given. If you can, find a quiet place where you can hear the gentle voice of God within you and wanting to help. I have always found that nature is a marvelous place in which I can feel in the silence my own heart's urgings and God's gentle stirrings.

And I encourage you to pray. Pray every day. Pray honestly and openly.

Don't be afraid to ask, "Lord, show me your way in my life. Help me to find the right path. Guide me along it. Show me the way, Lord. Show me the way."

And God will. I promise you that.

Let me close by saying that you need not be alone in this important consideration. If you wish to speak to someone who can answer your questions about the priesthood, please talk to your parish priest or contact our Vocation Awareness Office at 585/461-2890.

Peace to all.

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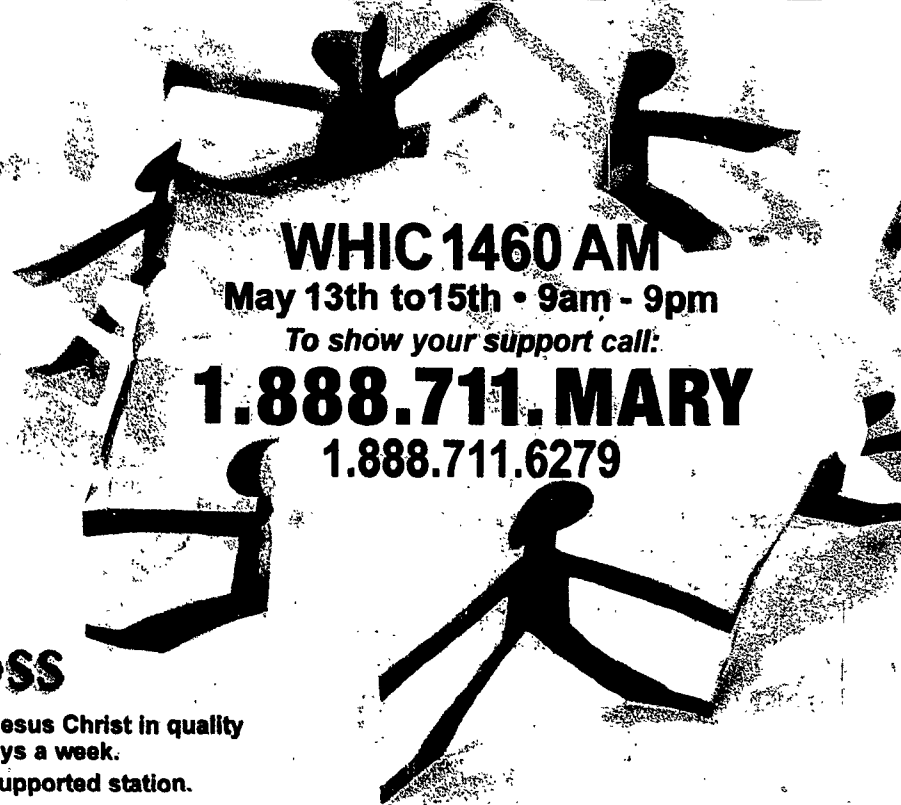
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