

The people of God need priests; the diocese needs vocations

Father Paul Duchschere

This is my sixth annual article for the New Earth as vocation director, because...well, it's my sixth year as vocation director! But this year is a bit different for me: this year, in addition to being vocation director, I am also the pastor of a parish. Bishop Aquila asked me to be the pastor of Sts. Anne & Joachim parish in south Fargo, and since I began my pastorate on Dec. 15, I have been doing "double-duty": both pastor-ing and vocation director-ing. I am happy to do both – I enjoy both. But sooner or later, I will need to pass off being vocation director to another priest in our diocese. It's an important job, and I do not want to give it the short shrift that I undoubtedly will if I try to remain doing both ministries too long.

But this particular juncture of ministries for me has given me not only a new experience, but also a new perspective on vocation ministry. It is this: we need good priests! Of course, I've always known this, as I'm sure you know this, too. But being put recently back into parish ministry after five years in the vocation office, it now once again strikes me in an experiential way how important parish ministry is in the life of the Catholic Church. Sts. Anne & Joachim is a marvelous parish, and there is a volunteer spirit there that I have rarely seen elsewhere, but...they need a pastor! Every parish does. There is simply no substitute in the life of the Church for a "good shepherd" in a parish, not only because the priest is able to do things that no one in the parish is able to do (e.g., offer Mass, administer the sacraments, etc.), but also because the People of God simply need a pastor! Someone called by the Lord God and sent to them by his Church to care for, guide, pray for, and love them as their shepherd in the image of Christ himself.

I am grateful that the Lord Jesus Christ called me over 20 years ago to follow him into the priesthood. In all of my priestly assignments I have felt an enormous honor in serving him and his people in the Church. And in this present assignment in my new pastorate, that feeling is also accompanied by a sense of what a precious gift it is to have the Lord and his Church entrust to me a particular part of his family who need me as much as I need them. What a family our Lord God has! And the priest has a special role to play in that family in each parish.

So, far from diluting my desire for vocation ministry, my new parish assignment has simply reinforced in me the absolute necessity for it, whether or not I am the vocation director myself. As a pastor, I will be able to keep my eyes open in my own parish for those men whom our Lord is calling to the priesthood, but I will still need all the people of God in the diocese to pray and watch and look with me, just as I have been relying on them for the last five years already.

I am quite sure that all of you in our diocese and our parishes certainly know how important it is for all of us to have priests who can help us live as faithful followers of Christ in his Catholic Church. Pray with me and let me know if you or someone you know might be called by Our Lord Jesus to be that priestly shepherd that each parish needs.

Father Paul Duchschere is vocation director for the Diocese of Fargo and can be reached at 701-271-1205 or paul.duchschere@fargodiocese.org.