



In Joy and Hope

by

Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy

Who will minister to us in the future?

At this time of the year, with the help of the Clergy Personnel Board and Office of Priest Personnel, I spend a great deal of time in trying to determine how best to provide quality pastoral care to our parish communities in Western Washington. Quality pastoral care in our communities is the result of the collaborative efforts of lay people, religious, deacons and priests who share their unique gifts with our people.

However, the challenge to provide quality pastoral care depends so often on the leadership that is available for service to our parish communities. We have been blessed with the leadership of lay persons, deacons and religious who share in the pastoral care of parish communities as pastoral life directors. Yet, at the heart of any parish community is the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments that are the responsibility of the priest-pastor or priest minister in our communities.

People could well ask, "Who will minister to us in the future?" Each year the church throughout the world tries to respond to this question by calling on all people to celebrate the annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations. This celebration takes place this year on Sunday, April 28, 1996.

In his pastoral message for the 33rd World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope John Paul II states, "While valuing all vocations, the church concentrates its attention for the World Day of Prayer on vocations to the priesthood and diaconate, to the religious life in all its forms ... to societies of apostolic life, to secular institutes ... and to the missionary life ..."

When requests are made for prayer and encouragement for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, there is sometimes the reaction that the church does not appreciate the vocation of the laity. This is far from true. Rather, prayers for vocations to priesthood and religious life are a commitment to preserve a gift that is essential for the life of the church.

It would be contrary to the whole concept of vocation if priests or religious did not value and support the ministry of the laity. Likewise, I can not comprehend how lay ministers – professional and volunteer – are not among the primary people who support and encourage vocations to priesthood and the religious life. It is part and parcel of the public ministry they exercise in the name of the church.

The gift of religious life

The history of the Church in Western Washington is the story of religious women and men who were among the first to come to this area and preach and live the Good News of the Gospel. We are still the beneficiaries of the tremendous ministry that religious women and men share with us through their commitment to education and healthcare, pastoral ministry and service to the poor. In so many ways, religious women and men continue to live out the charism of their religious community by the invaluable ministry they share with all of us.

[Continued on next page](#)

Who will minister to us in the future?

Pope John Paul II tells us, "In many young people, disorientated by consumerism and by the crisis in ideals, the search for an authentic lifestyle can mature, if it is sustained by a coherent witness of the Christian community in its openness to listen to the cry of a world thirsting for truth and justice. In this case, it is easy for the heart to open itself to welcome with generosity the gift of a consecrated vocation."

As a Christian community, we need to help young people open their hearts to consider a vocation to religious life. We do this best through prayer and personal encouragement.

Priesthood

Priesthood is essential to the church. In all our efforts to promote the life of the Christian community, we must give a priority to the encouragement of vocations to the priesthood. Yes, there is the expectation that candidates for priesthood make a lifetime commitment to celibacy and service to God's people.

Is this a challenge in today's world? Yes, it is. Yet, it is a challenge to be faithful to any vocation to which God calls people today, whether it is marriage, the single life, priesthood or religious life.

In the closing paragraph of his pastoral message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope John Paul II speaks to young people. He says, "I wish, finally, to address you, dear young people, and to repeat these words to you with affection: be generous in giving your life to the Lord. Do not be afraid! You have nothing to fear, because God is the Lord of History and of the universe.

"Let grow in you the desire for great and noble projects. Nourish a sense of solidarity: these are the sign of the divine action in your hearts. Place at the use of your communities the talents which Providence has lavished on you. The more ready you are to give yourselves to God and to others, the more you will discover the authentic meaning of life. God expects much of you."

The need for prayer

I pray that the Catholic community in Western Washington will recognize its responsibility to pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life in a special way. I pray that we may find ways for young people to hear the challenge that Pope John Paul II offers to them. I pray that we might encourage young people to consider a vocation by raising this question with them by being present to them in their discernment, and by encouraging them to such service of God and God's people.

"Who will minister to us in the future?" This is a question that haunts many people today. I believe we can answer this question when we give a priority to the encouragement of vocations to all ministries in the church today by our witness, prayer and example. May we have the faith and courage to do so. May God's gifts of grace and peace be yours.