

Reflections

by the
Most Reverend Thomas J. Murphy



Vocations To The Priesthood - Where Are They?

As a Catholic faith community of Eastern Montana, we have many responsibilities. One responsibility is to look to the future and prepare now for the Church of tomorrow. A critical need for the Church of tomorrow is an ever increasing number of young men to consider a vocation to the priesthood.

We have been blessed with men who have shared priesthood with us from our own communities as well as others who have come from different parts of the world and our country. In addition to religious communities who serve our Diocese in countless ways. However, we are at a point in history where we are unable to presume a priest will be present or available for existing or future parish communities and diocesan service unless we encourage and develop vocations to the priesthood to serve our own Diocese and religious communities.

Where are the vocations to the priesthood today? I believe they are among us and around us in young men from high school age through college and in the various professions in which young men are engaged. A vocation to priesthood is a gift from God, but it is the duty of the Christian community to foster vocations, especially families, teachers, and in a special way priests themselves.

What qualities should a young man have if he is interested in priesthood? He should be single, mature, possess a good moral character, be able to relate to people well, be willing to serve the Church as a celibate person, and especially be a man of faith and prayer. As a high school student, how does a young man respond to what he believes is a vocation to priesthood? He has the option to apply to a college seminary or to a house of formation usually attached to a Catholic college to begin his formation and education for priesthood.

Sometimes, and more and more today, young men in college or after college begin to think about priesthood as vocational option. If so, they either transfer to a college seminary program or prepare to enter a theologate or graduate school which offers the final four years of preparation for priesthood. Entrance into a theologate involves interviews and a screening process by the Diocese and the Seminary which becomes a positive help for the man himself.

Entrance into a seminary program at a college or graduate level does not mean the young man will be ordained as a priest. Rather, the seminary has the responsibility along with the Diocese not only to help candidates prepare for ordination, but also to help some candidates consider and discern another way in which he might share his gifts with the Christian community. We are blessed in this Diocese to have the prayerful and financial support which people have offered and still do offer of providing financial aid needed to assist young men in their preparation for priesthood.

Are there young men in high schools and colleges today or working in various occupations in Eastern Montana who might be interested in becoming a priest? I believe there are - and I believe such young men are in our midst. I would encourage each of us to approach young men with the direct question of whether they would be interested in considering the vocational option of priesthood.

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Please share this column with anyone who might be interested in priesthood and have them talk to their parish priest or to Reverend Edward Zabrocki, who is the Director of Recruitment for vocations. His address is St. Patrick's Church, Box 1751, Billings, Montana 59103. Or I myself would enjoy hearing from any young man who might be interested in priesthood.

In my own life as a priest, it has happened that a simple invitation to a young man to consider priesthood received a positive response. One such man on the day of ordination, as I asked for his first blessing, remarked to me, "Thanks for asking!" You know, I believe there are countless young men in Eastern Montana waiting to be asked to consider priesthood as a vocation. Why don't you ask one?

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This week, our country is celebrating Catholic Schools Week, a time to be aware of the great contribution Catholic education has offered to our Church and our communities. I will be speaking in Great Falls this Thursday evening about Catholic education to all those who are interested. I would ask your prayers for the continued success and growth of Catholic education in Eastern Montana.

The last weekend in January involved the celebration of the Funeral Liturgy for Mr. Ralph Dimke at St. Ann's Cathedral. After an extended illness, Mr. Dimke, father of Reverend John Dimke of our diocese, was called by God to his eternal reward. May God grant him peace, rest and joy ... This week involves hopscotching from Forsyth and Ashland to Great Falls and back to Billings where next week the Presbyteral Meeting will be held. I look forward this coming weekend to joining the people of St. Dennis Parish on the Crow Reservation for the Celebration of Liturgy. I would ask your prayers for the success of the Presbyteral meeting of the priests of the Diocese whose coming together will be an opportunity for mutual support, prayer and growth in the ministry shared with the people of our diocese. Have a good week.