

September 27, 2009

The Year for Priests, proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI, is an opportunity for those of us who are ordained priests to identify ourselves more completely with Jesus, the Good Shepherd. We pray that we might pastor God's holy people after God's heart, and we strive to be evermore faithful in proclaiming God's Word and administering the Sacraments, the two pillars of our priestly mission.

The Year for Priests is also an occasion for all of the faithful to encourage your priests, love them, pray for them, and pray that more young men will overcome the loud and distracting messages of our popular culture to hear the whispers of God calling them to priestly ministry.

Ordained priests have always been and will continue to be essential to the future of the Church. The Church is centered on the Eucharist and there can be no Eucharist without ordained priests.

Nonetheless, vibrant parishes are successful because of the faith and commitment of every parishioner. The Second Vatican Council reminds us that everyone is baptized "for mission." The Lord has chosen to depend upon all of us to build the Body of Christ in our parishes and to make our world more just, peaceful, and loving.

While we have fewer priests than at any time in the 52-year history of our diocese, we have more vibrant ministries in our parishes than ever before. Our ordained priests and deacons are doing an excellent job of sharing their responsibilities, leadership and servant roles with the faithful, and the faithful are responding in a generous fashion.

I would like to see more attention focused on involving our youth and young adults in the myriad ministries within our vibrant parishes. From their youngest years, we need to show them how they can contribute their gifts to

enrich our ministries. For our part, we adults must have the courage to open our hearts and ears to hear the suggestion and welcome the participation of our youth and young adults.

As adolescents, our young people are still learning how to belong: how to fit in their schools, on athletic teams, in their neighborhoods. Do youth feel like they truly belong in our parishes?

A number of parishes have youth representatives on their Parish Pastoral Councils and Commissions. I applaud those parishes, and strongly encourage other parishes to do the same.

The Diocesan Office for Youth & Young Adults coordinates a Diocesan Youth Council, a representative body of high school-aged teens from around the diocese. Each parish is able to designate up to two representatives. The DYC assists in the planning and promotion of diocesan youth events, serves as an additional level of cross-parish networking, support, and idea-sharing, and also spends significant time forming their Christian leadership skills.

One recent DYC project that some parishes have utilized in their outreach to youth is the “Statement on Youth Evangelization.” In that document, the teens wrote, in reference to Parish Life, “Youth need to know they are needed and wanted in the community, and that they have a part...We want to feel that we’re all in this together, and we, too, want a better parish community.”

Anyone who has ever taught Catholic school or religious education knows how difficult it is to get young people to listen to what we have to say. It is even harder to get *ourselves* to listen to what *they* have to say! But if we wish to empower our young people to be a part of the future leadership of our evolving parish communities, we have to plant those seeds and cultivate them now.

May those seeds bear much fruit!