

Why, oh why?



» Father Ron Hutchinson is director of priestly vocations for the Catholic Diocese of Grand Rapids.

It is not that I want to dig up the pain associated with the sexual abuse crisis, although I don't believe this pain is buried too deeply. And, let's admit it, the days leading up to Holy Week only reminded us that this sad reality still exists within the church and society at large. Sadly, the sexual abuse crisis, has in some people's minds, cemented the belief that priesthood, as we've known it, is no longer a viable or preferable vocation for young men today. Whether it is said out loud or not, many outside the church, as well as within, are asking the question: "Why would a young man choose priesthood today?"

I could just answer "Why not?" and leave it at that. Doing so wouldn't be a satisfactory answer for you or for me. After speaking with men discerning whether they are called to the priesthood and the men who have been ordained in the last five years, I have found that, in many ways, the answer to this question isn't really any different than at any other time in the church's history.

Men choosing to attend the seminary still sense that they are being called by God to serve the church, its members and the wider community. And despite their best efforts to ignore or deny this call, the nagging sense that God is hounding them will not go away. In their own way, they voice to me that to ignore this tug at their hearts would be like turning their backs on God. They cannot do that. For these men, the call of God that they sense means that their lives are no longer going to be their own and that giving themselves over to this call will mean that they are going to have to be willing to go places and do things they may not have chosen for themselves. They know that, although the life to which God may be calling them will be filled with many challenges, it also will be filled with far greater blessings.

The men who come to me expressing a desire to be a priest understand they are choosing a life of self-sacrifice and unselfish service to God and God's people, as well as a strong desire to be so intimately united to Christ and his mission entrusted to the apostles. With full understanding that they are choosing a life which is completely counter-cultural, these men are coming forward to meet the challenges of today's church. Where others see only gloom and doom, they see opportunities for evangelization, outreach and service. I have to admit that their energy and enthusiasm are quite contagious. Granted, they haven't been "to the front lines" yet, but their positive attitude is just what many dioceses need today.



Although others may not agree with me, I come to see their enthusiasm and energy are not due to naiveté, but rather the result of being on fire with a desire to give God their all and their finest. They seem to wish to throw themselves completely into the "fire" and do what they can to bring greater glory to God.

It is the enthusiasm of the men in our diocese who are discerning a call to the priesthood, as well as those who were recently ordained, that has made me ask the question: "Why wouldn't a young man choose the priesthood today?"

NEW priestly vocation Web site

» The Catholic Diocese of Grand Rapids has launched a new Web site, gripriests.org, that focuses on priestly vocations. The site includes sections labeled The Calling (discernment), Education, Current Seminarians, The Priesthood and Taking the First Step (in becoming a priest). The Calling, Education and Priesthood sections also feature a Q&A and links to other resources.

