

# “Pray and Sacrifice for More Priests”

by Bishop John M. LeVoir

In this column, I would like to address the need for more priests in the Diocese of New Ulm. In visiting the parishes of the diocese, I have developed an appreciation for the amount of work done by our priests. They have extended themselves in many ways to serve the parishes of our diocese. They devote their lives to the celebration of the Eucharist, some traveling many miles on any given weekend. They know that “. . . if the Eucharist is the center and summit of the life of the Church, likewise it is the center of priestly ministry” (John Paul II, “Ecclesia de Eucharistia,” n. 31). They are good priests.

What concerns me most right now is the advanced age of many of our priests and the number of priests. Presently, there are 41 priests who are active in parish ministry. Of that number, eight are retirement age (70 years of age or older). At the present time, there are eight young men in various stages of seminary formation. Given a reasonable rate of retirement from priestly ministry and a reasonable number of ordinations, the diocese projects that there will be 31 priests in active ministry in the year 2019. Yet, there are 76 parishes in the diocese. At present, there are four priests who serve as pastor of four parishes each.

Yet, despite the low priest-per-parish ratio, priests tell me that some of their parishioners do not seem to realize how thinly they are stretched as they struggle to celebrate the Eucharist for them. For example, when Mass times have to be changed due to the limitations of the priest, there are some who are upset with the priest. As one priest told me, the discussion about Mass times can go on and on forever. He has been asking his parishioners to concentrate not so much on Mass times as their relationship to Jesus Christ, whom they meet in the celebration of the Eucharist no matter what the Mass schedule.

As can be seen, the diocese needs more priests to serve in the parishes as pastors, associates, and sacramental ministers. What are we to do? There are a number of proposals that have been suggested to increase the number of active ordained ministers in the Church. For example, some have suggested eliminating the discipline of priestly celibacy and allowing priests to be married. Others have suggested inviting priests who have left ministry (both married and unmarried) to return to active ministry.

Whether people agree with these proposals or not, I do not foresee either of them being implemented in the Church on a large-scale basis. However, some of this has taken place on a case-by-case basis. For example, Protestant clergy who are married have sought to be ordained to the Catholic priesthood and remained married. This has happened in a number of cases. Also, there are priests who have left ministry and have asked to return. In a number of cases, this has been allowed.

Another proposal is to ordain women to the priesthood. This topic has been discussed often in the Church. However, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "Only a baptized man (vir) validly receives sacred ordination. The Lord Jesus chose men (viri) to form the college of the 12 apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry. . . . The Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible" (CCC, no. 1577).

I know that there are people who are upset about the decisions that the Church has made about these proposals. But these are the decisions that have been made and by which we live as Catholics. Given that, what are we to do? I believe that the answer is given by Our Lord: "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" (Mt 9:38). In other words, we are called to pray regularly that more young men will answer God's call to the priesthood. Also, we are called upon to invite young men to consider whether or not they have a calling to be a priest.

Having traveled around the diocese, I have met many very fine young people. Some of these, I am sure, have the calling to the priesthood. I believe that God is calling a sufficient number of them to the priesthood. They only need prayer and a little encouragement to give the seminary a try.

Consequently, I am asking every parish to continue to pray each weekend for an increase in those answering the call to the priesthood. I am sending a guideline to priests and pastoral administrators on how to call forth young men to the priesthood. I am asking that each of us pray every day for Our Lord ". . . to send out laborers for his harvest." I am also asking people to join me in making some sacrifice every Friday for priestly vocations. For example, Archbishop John C. Nienstedt, to this day, makes a sacrifice each Friday for an increase in vocations.

There are hopeful signs that there are many priestly vocations. Some seminaries are full or nearly full. For example, The St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul has more seminarians than it has had for the past 30 years (Samuel Wagner from our diocese attends The St. Paul Seminary). St. John Vianney Seminary on the campus of the University of St. Thomas has rented an additional building to house the large number of seminarians (Garrett Ahlers, Andrew Illikman, and Alex Rabaey from our diocese attend St. John Vianney Seminary).

On October 18, 2010, Pope Benedict wrote a Letter to Seminarians. In it, he said: "Anyone who wishes to become a priest must be first and foremost a 'man of God,' to use the expression of Saint Paul (1 Tim 6:11)." Let us pray and sacrifice on a regular basis, asking God to send "men of God" to "labor for his harvest" in the Diocese of New Ulm.

# Oración y Sacrificio por más Sacerdotes

por Obispo John M. LeVoir

En esta columna, me gustaría abordar el tema de la necesidad de más sacerdotes en la Diócesis de New Ulm. Al visitar las parroquias de la diócesis, he desarrollado una estimación por la labor realizada por parte de nuestros sacerdotes. Los sacerdotes dedican su vida por la celebración de la Eucaristía, hasta incluso algunos tienen que manejar muchas millas en un determinado fin de semana. Ellos saben que "...si la Eucaristía es el centro y la cumbre de la vida de la Iglesia, también es el centro del ministerio sacerdotal" (John Paul II, *Ecclesiae de Eucharistia*, n. 31). Ellos son buenos sacerdotes.

Lo que me preocupa en estos momentos es la avanzada edad de muchos de nuestros sacerdotes y el número de sacerdotes. En la actualidad, hay cuarenta y un sacerdotes que trabajan tiempo completo en el ministerio de la parroquia. De ese número, ocho están en edad de jubilación (70 años de edad o mayor). En la actualidad, hay ocho hombres jóvenes en diversas etapas de formación en el seminario. Dada una taza razonable de retiro del ministerio sacerdotal y un número razonable de ordenaciones, se proyecta que para el 2019 contaremos con treinta y un sacerdotes en el ministerio activo. Sin embargo la diócesis cuenta con setenta y seis parroquias. En la actualidad, tenemos cuatro sacerdotes para cuatro parroquias.

Sin embargo, a pesar de la baja proporción de sacerdotes por parroquia, los sacerdotes me cuentan que algunos de sus feligreses no parecen darse cuenta que ellos luchan para extender su tiempo lo más posible para celebrar la Eucaristía con ellos.

Por ejemplo, cuando el horario de la Misa se tiene que modificar debido a las limitaciones del sacerdote, hay algunos que se molestan con el párroco. Como me dijo un sacerdote, el debate sobre el horario de Misas puede tomar bastante tiempo. El párroco les pide a sus feligreses no concentrarse tanto en el horario de la Misa como su relación con Jesucristo, quien se encuentra en la celebración de la Eucaristía sin importar el horario de la Misa.

Como podemos ver, la diócesis necesita más sacerdotes para servir en las parroquias como párrocos, párrocos asociados, ministros sacramentales. ¿Qué podemos hacer? Yo creo que la respuesta está dada por nuestro Señor: "Ciertamente la cosecha es mucha, pero los trabajadores son pocos. Por eso, pidan ustedes al dueño de la cosecha que mande trabajadores a recogerla." (Mt 9:38). En otras palabras, somos llamados a orar regularmente para que más hombres jóvenes puedan contestar al llamado de Dios y por ende al sacerdocio. También, somos llamados para invitarlos a considerar o no si tienen una vocación sacerdotal.

Por lo tanto, le pido a cada parroquia que continúe orando cada fin de semana por el aumento de seminaristas y por aquellos que responden al llamado sacerdotal. Estoy enviando una directriz a los sacerdotes y administradores pastorales sobre como inspirar a hombres jóvenes al sacerdocio. Pido que cada uno de nosotros ore todos los días a

nuestro Señor "...mande trabajadores a su cosecha." También le pido a los feligreses a unirse a mí en hacer algún sacrificio todos los viernes por las vocaciones sacerdotales.

El 18 de octubre del 2010, el Papa Benedicto XVI escribió una carta a los seminaristas. En él, dijo: "quien desea convertirse en un sacerdote debe ser, ante todo, un "hombre de Dios, "para utilizar la expresión de San Pablo (1 Tim 6:11)." Permítanos orar y sacrificar regularmente, pidiendo a Dios enviar a "hombres de Dios" a "trabajar para su cosecha" en la Diócesis de New Ulm.