

## **From the Pastor—EXTRA—June 2, 2019**

**Ordinations, 2019** Lots of beauty unfolded before my eyes last weekend as our Diocese celebrated the Ordinations of new deacons and priests. The beauty was also experienced by the ordinary, but extraordinary, serving of you at St. Mary's and St. Joseph's as we gathered for the Sixth Sunday of Easter.

It has been on my heart to reflect upon with you the demographics of our diocese's priestly vocations. I am more aware of this demographic because I was blessed to serve two years in our Vocations Office, 1996-1998. Going back to my seminary entrance in 1991 until now, my viewpoint is unofficial and informal. Remembering, as Bishop Conley says often, that the family is the seedbed of vocations, it is interesting to see in which communities those families are living their Christian lives.

From 1991-2019, here are mailing addresses of Nebraska towns that I have known our priests to call home: David City, Valparaiso, Columbus, Long Pine, Gretna, Superior, Gordon, Lincoln, Doniphan, Cedar Rapids, Omaha, Hastings, Blue Springs, Clarkson, Schuyler, Newcastle, Millard, York, Ravenna, Carroll, Pawnee City, Bartlett, Petersburg, Holdrege, Seward, McCook, Falls City, McCool Junction, Peru, Osceola, Auburn, North Bend, Eagle, Humphrey, Friend, Nebraska City, Bellevue, Elmwood, St. Edward, Kearney, Orleans, Cortland, and Heartwell. Some of these towns have had multiple priests, including Lincoln, David City, Superior, Omaha, Hastings, York, McCook, Falls City, Nebraska City, Cortland, and York. Other States/Territories/Nations represented in these years are Guam, Mexico, Colorado, California, Wisconsin, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Maryland, Virginia, Texas, Iowa, South Dakota, Kentucky, and Ohio.

This is a fallible, but impressive, list. I feel it to be an accurate geography of priestly vocations from my seminary days until now.

Part of what I want you, dear reader, to reflect upon with me is the frequency of priestly vocations from various places. For myself, it has been a fast-paced 23 years since I was ordained (and by God's grace, only by His grace, I remain a priest of Jesus Christ). I account myself as from Beatrice, although my home mailing address is Blue Springs and my high school was Wymore Southern. Throw in my mother's hometown of Odell, and a wide swath of Gage County is "home" to me! In the past 23 years, I can think of only two other young men from this area entering seminary to discern a vocation. Does this make my family superbly unique and holy? No; that is not my point. (My family can tell you that they were surprised by my vocation!) Before me, for a time, Msgr. Jim Reinert (currently of St. Joseph's in York) and his family called Beatrice home. But before me and then Monsignor, Beatrice goes back decades to find another priest originating from its population.

I am sort of "picking" on my home area to prove a point. If a certain town in Nebraska has not, from my seminary days until now, had a priest come from there, why is that? This very question has entered my mind many a time about towns that I have served as pastor. I love the people in all the places I have been pastor. Technically, I have lived in four rectories as pastor, but the towns and rural population within those assignments are vast and account for at least 20 zip codes of the US Postal Service. I am accountable to these towns and rural populations for any lack of young men entering seminary. I have served as pastor the Catholics in Dwight, Bee, Staplehurst, Lawrence, Deweese, Plattsmouth,

Beaver Lake, Cedar Creek, Murray, Aurora, Hampton, Marquette, Phillips, and Giltner. I can think of two men, in my years of pastor, from these places, who have entered the seminary to discern a vocation. But it is not just me, as other pastors who have been assigned to these places have also sought to nurture priestly vocations through their shepherding of these beautiful people. It has been said that St. John Bosco, who died in 1888, prayerfully taught in his time that **one in four** Catholic boys is called to the priesthood. For towns to go through a "vocation drought" lasting decades, therefore, seems to indicate many young men missing the call.

What can we do? I read a statistic that of the 480+ priests being ordained this year in the United States, 41% went to seminary because somebody suggested that they ought to. Part of the burden for lack of priestly vocations, it seems, falls upon anyone who has never suggested seminary to a young man for serious consideration.

A plentitude of **laudable** careers are out there: farming, ranching, veterinarians, doctors, nurses, lawyers, law enforcement, astronauts, fire fighters, medical first responders, government positions, elected positions of service, auto mechanics, research in the sciences, engineering, architecture, railroading, truck drivers, grocery industry, professional sports, mental health, social services, commerce and sales, computer technology, construction/carpentry, highways and bridges construction and repair, pilots, and, certainly, those men and women who serve in the Armed Forces or in peace-time deployments. Whole strands of other careers from the above sampling would make this long list longer. While young men frequently consider the above ways to live their lives, do Catholic young men of ages 8, 10, 14, 18, 22, or 30 consider in a serious way that they could be priests? Far too few of them do, in my opinion (and I don't intend to sound denigrating toward them). Bishop Bruskewitz has said that if the number of our priests or the holiness of our priests is not what we would hope, could it be because of our lack of prayer (and, I would add, our lack of suggestion and promotion of the priesthood)? Be clear, too, that anyone called to spiritual fatherhood as a priest would necessarily have the qualities and gifts to be a father of a family and a holy spouse to his wife in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

With our diocese's glorious ordinations last weekend, with many of my brother priests later this month moving to serve new flocks, with the crucial hunger for God that our world has (perhaps without even realizing it), now more than ever a young man should have on his "bucket list" for career discernment the holy vocation to the priesthood. If a young man in your life has not considered becoming a priest, you can do your part by talking to him about it. As Bishop Flavin told me when accepting me to the seminary, the priesthood is "a great life." Take me back to my pre-priesthood days, and give me the option of entering seminary, and I would, without equivocation, 100% choose again to **re-begin** this journey. Thank you, kind Jesus, for calling me. And please, pray Mother Mary, be a mother to me and to all young men for whom priesthood is the greatest way they can live happily in this life and populate eternal life in heaven with more souls, including their own.

**God Bless You!**

**Father Grell**