

any part of the country can be reversed by people who share enthusiastically in the agenda of the Church. We have to learn from the dioceses and communities who are experiencing an increase in vocations.

If we are not willing to recognize and accept the reasons for their success and incorporate them into our own local efforts, then we allow ourselves to become supporters of a self-fulfilling prophesy about the shortage of vocations because we fail to take advantage of the opportunities that we have for increasing the number of candidates for the priesthood and vowed religious life.

Young people do not want to commit themselves to dioceses or communities that permit or simply ignore dissent from Church doctrine. They do not want to be associated with people who are angry at the Church's leadership or reject magisterial teaching. They do not want to be battered by agendas that are not the Church's, and radical movements that disparage their desire to be priests, Religious or loyal lay leaders in the Church.

Basic orthodoxy

The dioceses and religious communities that promote orthodoxy and loyalty to the Church; the ones that mobilize priests and people to call young men to the ordained priesthood despite the opposition of those who rail against a male, celibate priesthood; the ones that want their members to be real churchmen and churchwomen that are committed to prayer and holiness as a primary requisite—these are the dioceses and communities that will enjoy increasing numbers of candidates

and will disprove the forecasts of decline in vocations everywhere in the Church because of their successes locally.

The need today is for strong leadership in vocation ministry: bishops willing and able to confront dissent that weakens support for vocations; vocation directors and teams loyal to the magisterial teaching of the Church regarding ordained priesthood and vowed religious life; presbyterates and religious communities willing to call forth candidates who share their loyalty to the Pope and bishops and the agenda of the Church; faithful lay people willing to constantly pray for vocations and support them at every turn.

When this formula, based on total fidelity to Church teaching, is followed in dioceses and religious communities, then vocations will increase. Present statistics support this premise. This is the reason there will be dioceses and religious communities that will have adequate numbers of priests and Religious in the future.

Vocations are out there for those who will collaborate together to personally invite candidates for the right reasons and with unabashed fidelity to the magisterial teaching of the Church.

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Crisis in Vocations? What Crisis?

Archbishop Elden Curtis

There is much media hype these days about the present and projected shortage of priests and its effect on the sacramental life of the Church. It is time to pay close attention to the dioceses and religious communities reporting increasing numbers of candidates. There have to be reasons for these increases that bear objective analysis from which some conclusions can be drawn.

I personally think the vocation "crisis" in this country is more artificial and contrived than many people realize. When dioceses and religious communities are unambiguous about ordained priesthood and vowed religious life as the Church defines these calls; when there is strong support for vocations, and a minimum of dissent about the male celibate priesthood and religious life loyal to the magisterium; when bishop, priests, Religious and lay people are united in vocation ministry—then there are documented increases in the numbers of candidates who respond to the call.

It seems to me that the vocation "crisis" is precipitated and continued by people who want to change the Church's agenda, by people who do not support orthodox candidates loyal to the magisterial teaching of the Pope and bishops, and by people who actually discourage viable candidates from seeking priesthood and vowed religious life as the Church defines the ministries.

I am personally aware of certain vocation directors, vocation teams and evaluation boards who turn away candidates who do not support the possibility of ordaining women or who defend the Church's teaching about artificial birth control, or who exhibit a strong piety toward certain devotions, such as the Rosary.

When there is a determined effort to discourage orthodox candidates from priesthood and religious life, then the vocation shortage which results is caused not by a lack of vocations but by deliberate attitudes and policies that deter certain viable candidates. And the same people who precipitate a decline in vocations by their negative actions call for the ordination of married men and women to replace the vocations they have discouraged. They have a death wish for ordained priesthood and vowed religious life as the Church defines them. They undermine the vocation ministry they are supposed to champion.

An article in the Catholic World Report (May 1995), by Michael Flach, analyzes the remarkable increase in vocations to priesthood in the Arlington, VA, diocese.

Father James Gould, diocesan vocation director, explains the reasons for their success: unswerving allegiance to the Pope and magisterial teaching; perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in parishes, with an emphasis on praying for vocations; and the strong effort by a significant number of diocesan priests who extend themselves to help young men and women remain open to the Lord's will in their lives.

I see this formula for success in vocation ministry in our neighboring Diocese of Lincoln, NE, which has 45 seminarians preparing for the priesthood and a significant number of young priests at work in a largely rural diocese with 84,000 Catholics.

In the Archdiocese of Omaha, I am encouraged by the dynamic thrust for vocations to the priesthood and religious life that is present. We will have at least 36 seminarians, 28 in pre-theology and theology, with clear indications of increases in the coming years.

Our vocation strategy is drawn from successful ones in other dioceses: a strong orthodox base that promotes loyalty to the Pope and bishop; a vocation director and team who clearly support a male, celibate priesthood and religious communities loyal to magisterial teaching; a presbyterate that takes personal ownership of vocation ministry in the archdiocese; two large Serra clubs in Omaha that constantly program outreach efforts to touch potential candidates; more and more parents who encourage their children to consider a vocation to priesthood

and religious life; eucharistic devotion in parishes with an emphasis on prayer for vocations, and vocation committees in most of our parishes that focus on personally inviting and nourishing vocations.

Positive response

I find young people everywhere in the archdiocese who want to be Church with Pope John Paul. They want to know what the Church teaches through its magisterium. They want to be part of the unity of the Church and not caught up in dissent and disunity. They are willing to listen to the call to the priesthood, religious life and lay ministry in the Church, and they want to be supported by people in their response to that call.

A recent work in the sociology of religion by Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, "The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy," makes the point that the more a religious organization compromises with society and the world, blurring its identity and modifying its teaching and ethics, the more it will decline.

"Religious organizations are stronger to the degree that they impose significant costs in terms of sacrifice and even stigma upon their members", it was found. If these findings are true for religion in general, they are certainly true for vocations to the priesthood and religious life in particular.

I am convinced that shortages of vocations in