

Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



“I will take the chalice of salvation and call on the name of the Lord” (Psalm 116:13)

These words are taken from the Psalm Response most often chosen for the Ritual Mass with the Ordination of priests. In fact, it was these very words we prayed this year during the ordination of our three new priests! These words express the sentiments of the psalmist who prays in thanksgiving that the Lord has heard his prayers and supplications. He writes: “Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.” In the Ordination Mass, as we pray these words, we thank the Lord for all he has done for us in the gift of new priests, we thank the Lord for all he has done for us in shedding his blood to save us, and we thank the Lord that our priests live to pour themselves out for us as did Jesus himself.

Just two years ago I wrote that the Eucharist and the Priesthood are inseparable and highlighted our great need for diocesan priests in the July 2023 *Leading the Flock* column. At that time, we introduced a new initiative for the Diocese of Toledo which invited everyone in our Diocese to pray one Hail Mary each day for an increase in priestly vocations, and to do some fasting or abstinence for the same intention. There is no doubt that your prayers and intentional fasting and abstinence are bearing fruit. Over a three-year period we’ve accepted 1, then last year 4, now this year 6 new seminarians! And more are coming!

Two years ago I observed: “While the challenges we face may seem daunting, I ask that you approach your prayer and fasting/penance for priestly vocations with **hope**. Just think, if every parish in our diocese sent just one man to the seminary every ten years, we would have 122 seminarians over a ten-year period. If just half of them were ordained priests, we would be ordaining an average of over 6 men per year! This would be a huge shift from our current 20-year average of less than 2 ordinations per year. Dare we hope?” Now, we find ourselves in this Jubilee Year of Hope, called to

be Pilgrims of Hope, and recognizing signs of hope! Please join with me in renewed prayer and renewed hope for priestly vocations!



As with our Diocesan Prayer, we are committed to praying for all holy vocations, conscious in particular of the need for deacons and consecrated women religious. Pope Saint John Paul II reminds us: “There can be no Eucharist without the priesthood.” So in these final days of the month of July, dedicated to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus, I am renewing my call that *every* person in our diocese continue or begin to offer a daily Hail Mary, along with some weekly Friday observance of fast or abstinence, for the intention of priestly vocations for our diocese. We need men who are ready and willing to take up the chalice of self-sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord, and to offer the Body and Blood of our Lord at Mass. We need men who are ready and willing to make present the Lord’s

Paschal Mystery both at the altar and in their very persons. We need more priests who are happy, holy, humble, healthy, and honest. We need more priests, and with God’s grace and your prayers, more priestly vocations will come.

With that in mind, this month we are launching a new initiative in sending out, over time, to all our 122 parishes, two traveling “chalices” provided by our Knights of Columbus, for the purpose of inspiring prayers for vocations, in particular priestly vocations. These are actually replicas of chalices, with an artistic representation of the body and blood. One chalice will travel through the northern counties and the other chalice will travel through the southern counties of our 19 county diocese. My intention with this

effort is to till the soil of our diocese with deep prayer asking, or better, begging the Lord to send more priests to serve in our local Church. Each chalice will spend one month on display in a prominent place in the parish church as a visible reminder for the parishioners intentionally to pray for holy vocations, with a particular emphasis on praying for priestly vocations. It may result that parishes and schools may take the initiative of having their own traveling “chalice,” which could go from family to family and classroom to classroom, to pray for an increase in priestly vocations. I know some have started this already. May it continue!

It is so encouraging that we have 6 new seminarians for the Diocese of Toledo this year – the largest number of new seminarians in a decade! That raises our total number of seminarians to 14. We are already seeing the fruit of our intentional prayer, fasting and abstinence!

And where do such young men come from you might ask? They come most often from families and parishes that are striving for holiness; from families and parishes that encourage the young to serve the Church. You will find such young men at daily Mass, praying quietly in the church, attending Eucharistic adoration, stopping in for confession, or selflessly serving their neighbors. A daily habit of listening and talking with the Lord after reading from the Gospel of the day allows them to hear the voice of God, to more closely attend to the Will of God for their lives, and to act with courage and conviction.

In the recent 2025 CARA report on newly ordained priests from around our country, we find the following insightful information:

- 89% said they were encouraged by someone to consider the call to the priesthood
- 78% of them spent time in Eucharistic Adoration before entering seminary
- 73% attended Catholic School, either elementary, high school, or college, before entering seminary
- 72% were servers at Mass growing up
- 72% said they pray the rosary
- 66% of the newly ordained priests said it was a priest specifically who encouraged them to consider the priesthood
- 66% of the new priests were in full time employment before entering seminary
- 50% attended public school, either elementary or high school
- 46% said they served as lectors at Mass
- 15% were homeschooled
- 6% were in the military prior to entering seminary

That report also shares that the loudest voice of discouragement for a man considering the call to the priesthood can be a family member. I want to reassure all our families that it is a source of joy and grace to have a priest in the family because the priest son or brother can be,



The Diocese of Toledo's seminarians who are completing their Propaedeutic year pictured here with the traveling chalices.

removed from the Church, a genuine bridge to God. One of the most significant ways a family can support a young man considering the call to the priesthood is to promote the habit of daily prayer and openness to whatever God has in store for him, even if that may be different than what you might expect or desire for him. Openness of family members to welcome a priestly vocation may well be critical in a young man's discerning his vocation. Because God's plan is always the best plan for all our lives.

To any young man reading this column, I want to encourage you and assure you that being a priest is an amazing and rewarding life! It is a full life, a blessed life, and a life deep with meaning and purpose. Yes, you should have a natural desire for marriage and children, but if God is calling you to the priesthood, He will give you the grace to live out joyfully the life of chaste celibacy, obedience, and prayer. Quite simply, priesthood is a heroic adventure of selfless service in the person of Christ Jesus! I am confident more and more men are coming to see it as such! The same qualities that would make for a great husband and father are the same qualities we are looking for in candidates for the priesthood – loving, selfless and self-possessed, kind, prudent and sensitive, strong, faithful, dedicated to the poor and those in need, prayerful, patient, joyful, and courageous! Above all, we need men who are serious about their spiritual lives and about prayer, which brings interior peace and an abiding sense of God's presence.

Please join me in welcoming the traveling chalices throughout our diocese. May each parish take in the replica of the chalice of salvation, and may parishioners call on the name of the Lord. I am confident that these chalices will prompt us to pray for more young men who are ready and willing to respond to a priestly vocation, to take the chalice of salvation, and to call on the name of the Lord!

+ Daniel E. Thomas

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