

Report of the Vocations Director to the 110th Convention of the Diocese of Northern Indiana

About six years ago, Bishop Little asked me to serve as vocations director. He wanted someone to assist him in the oversight of the increasing number of postulants and candidates for the diaconate and priesthood, especially those in our local formation program. It has been an honor and privilege to work with Bishop, the Commission on Ministry, and the Diocesan Board of Examining Chaplains in doing this ministry. I am grateful to him for the opportunity, and to my other colleagues for their support and encouragement.

Part of Bishop's vision was to create customized programs for those who had to be formed for ordained ministry locally instead of going to one of the Church's residential seminaries. This was the start of the Northern Indiana School of Theology, known by the acronym, NI SoT. (It's pronounced "knee-so" by those of Gallic sensibilities and pronounced "nigh-sot" by those whose sensibilities are Teutonic. In less earnest company, I like to call it 'Bishop Little's College of Theological Knowledge, the Right Rev'd Edward Stuart Little II, DD, President'.) The curriculum of NI SoT is based on the canonical areas of learning required for the priesthood; *qv*, III.8.5. Some of the courses come from a program originated by Trinity School for the Ministry in Ambridge PA; some of the courses I designed. The poor victim... postulants and candidates who have been through NI SoT can tell you that the curriculum is in a constant state of – they may say chaos, but I prefer to call it "instructional evolution."

One of the other important areas of the local training program is the Formation Group, which is convened by Fr Ted Neidlinger. The postulants and candidates meet periodically to explore the spiritual life. This is an especially important area of diaconal and priestly formation; and Fr William Forrest OSB, a Benedictine monk of St Gregory's Abbey in Three Rivers MI, provides meaty insight and instruction from the larder of his monastic experience. I'm grateful to them, along with some other of our colleagues, for sharing their time and experience with our postulants and candidates in local formation.

When the candidates have completed their theological educations, they sit for a canonical examination which is designed, administered, and reviewed by the Diocesan Board of Examining Chaplains. Our other examining chaplains are: Fr Jim Warnock, Fr Dan Martins, and Dr Christopher Wells. The examining chaplains also review the General Ordination Examinations which our candidates in seminary take in January of the senior year.

Essentially, I work as a diocesan bureaucrat in the great paper chase of the ordination process, as a tutor to help the postulants and candidates stay on track in their studies for the diaconate or priesthood, and as coordinator of the work of the Diocesan Board of Examining Chaplains. Just between us though, I think one of the more important things I do is pray, offering thanksgiving for the postulants and candidates who have been moved by the Holy Spirit to offer themselves for ordained ministry in service to the Lord Jesus and his holy Church. We are very blessed in this Diocese to have the postulants and candidates we have had over the years.

For a diocese of our size, the number of individuals at various stages in the ordination process now is notable. Now we have six people preparing for the priesthood, and two for the diaconate. There are six more in formal discernment, and they should be ready to enter the ranks of our postulants and candidates within the next year. No doubt, there will be more

coming along in due season. If the projection holds, we will have three postulants at seminary, and the other ten in the program of local formation, at this time next year.

In a way, each postulant in NI SoT has a customized program. For instance, we have one postulant who is entering a masters program at the University of Notre Dame, and those studies will be supplemented with additional reading projects in Anglican topics. In the past, we have had a postulant at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart for a focus in biblical studies. Each individual begins the program of study upon admission to postulancy, no matter when that occurs. This means usually that no two postulants are at the same stage of study at any given time.

The tutorial work I do is reading and commenting on the written work of the postulants. Our postulants are diligent and responsible in their theological studies. They engage the materials with commitment, enthusiasm, and curiosity, looking forward to the day when they will take this learning into the experience of service to Christ and Church as deacons and priests. In the words of the Psalmist, they apply their hearts to wisdom. I am grateful for the initiative they take in their work.

The bureaucratic work I do in tracking the canonical paperwork of the ordination process seems sometimes utterly byzantine! The ordination process has undergone some canonical changes over the last six years, making it a much different process than the one through which I went thirty-five years ago. We make every effort to simplify it, fulfilling all canonical righteousness as possible.

As noted above, this participation in the nurture of future ordained servants for the life of this Diocese and the greater Church is a privilege. I am grateful to the many colleagues, with whom I work, and our postulants and candidates for Holy Orders. Seeing vocations flourish in this time and place in the life of the Church is a great joy.

Faithfully submitted,

Fr Henry G Randolph Jr
Vocations Director