

# Minister to the Men: Renew the Church

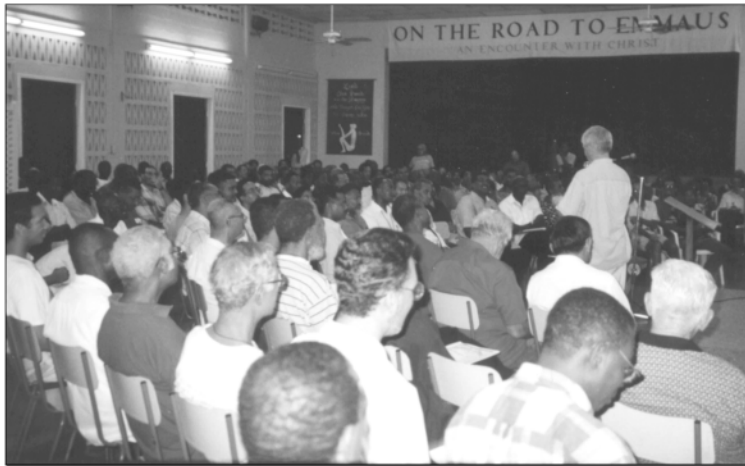
By Fr. Dwight Merrick

While there is a deluge of initiatives and literature seeking to renew the Catholic Church, little recognition has been given to the insights that Catholic men's ministry can offer. Furthermore, it seems so much effort at present is wasted in attempts to renew, re-evangelize or simply recapture the interest of lapsed Catholic men.

These efforts are wasted and doomed to very limited success, if only for this one reason: strategies requiring discussion and feedback by all, often assume that men respond as well as women in mixed-gender groups. Many men feel inhibited in such groups, but most women are in their element—chatty, spontaneous, open and expressive. Any serious effort at reaching out to men therefore, must appreciate this phenomenon and plan accordingly. It is hardly surprising that our assemblies and gatherings usually show a ratio of five women to one man. Give the guys their own space with preferably male presenters at least initially.

Other important insights concern the requirements, roles

and needs of the men. Just think boys. Has anyone noticed that boys just want to be like men? They respond much better to male than to female presenters and imitate whatever they see their adult males



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do—for better or worse.

So much attention in renewal efforts is always paid to the youth. Good! But when these youth happen to be made up of just as many males as females, then it becomes very important to understand, that getting the boys' attention and effecting change among them, is best served by the physical presence, active involvement, mentoring and modeling of grown men.

What about young girls? Do they need their menfolk in particular

ways? Most certainly! How many mothers and female teachers find it difficult to impress upon adolescent girls what messages their outfits communicate to males? On the other hand, when men, especially fathers, speak and say the same things, girls tend to listen. Men know how boys think.

What about the average church gatherings? Does anyone notice how young men, in particular, just do not seem comfortable sitting still and listening for long periods? Well just ask many of them who have dropped out of church, how it feels to be relegated to passive observer at best and dumb sheep at worst. How about the need to see one's time spent productively? Does this have a greater importance to men than to women? It sure does.

While women seem more at ease with contemplation and reflection, and often find talkshops meaningful in themselves, men generally need to see tangible results for their efforts. This is apparently not just a biological phenomenon but a psychological one as well. Women naturally produce from within, it is said,

*...continued on page 3*

# Dear Friends of the Priesthood

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Newsletter material from all Fraternity members is gratefully accepted!

**W**e are quickly moving from Ordinary Time to the holy season of Lent (again!). The upcoming “forty days” always challenges us to plunge deeper into the unfathomable depths of our Father’s unconditional love for us by striving to “turn away from sin and believe the Good News.”

Lent challenges us to honestly and fearlessly assess our response to Christ, especially in the way we live day to day. The reason we fast and do penance is to say “no” to ourselves (when most of the year we say “yes”), so as to better say “yes” to Christ. We are asked to focus not on us but on what God has done for our salvation, the price that was paid to buy us back as sons and daughters of our magnificent Father.

The minute I start thinking and praying along these lines two senses come to me: 1) how incredibly loved and blessed I am! 2) how incredibly unworthy I am due to my lack of response and my sin. The first point is a freely given reality of which I am the beneficiary—my Father loves me! I do not deserve it, I can never pay back or merit it; it is God’s gift to me (Hallelujah!).

In dealing with the second point, I am forced to look at and evaluate my response to Christ’s call on my life. There are two Scripture passages ringing in my ears, the first is a message of encouragement, the second is a message of hope.

Mk 6:47-51 is the passage where Jesus is walking on the waters of a rough and agitated sea towards the storm-tossed boat of His disciples, and they begin to scream thinking He is a ghost. Jesus simply says, “Take heart, it is I; have no fear.” When the awareness of my lack of response to Christ and personal sin begins to make the sea of my life stormy, and when guilt and shame scare me like a ghost, Jesus’ timeless words of courage ring in my ears, “Take heart, it is I; have no fear.”

The second passage is from St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans 8:35-39 (especially v.37). This is where St. Paul asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

He then lists a host of possible dangers and perils, followed by a bombastic “NOTHING! In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” Nothing can separate us, a b s o l u t e l y nothing!

My question is, how can one be more than a conqueror? If something is conquered it is conquered, isn’t it? Yet in Christ we do more than

conquer, as one translation puts it, “we conquer overwhelmingly” (NAB). No matter what issues I have, what sin I have difficulty in shaking, what darkness haunts me, In Christ I can conquer overwhelmingly. I no longer need to fear or dread anything, I am loved by God and in that love I have power—Christ in me conquers. As Paul goes on to say in Phil 4:13, “I can do all things in him who strengthens me.”

In this light, Lent need not be a “downer”, but a season of challenge and hope that draws me ever so much deeper into the arms of my Father who waits for me to come home, day in and day out. What a blessed people we are!

To you, brothers and sisters, our intercessors and donors, we of the Fraternity of Priests wish a happy and holy Lent. May this time of purification through penance change your lives in a real way. Do not be afraid, be encouraged. In Christ we conquer overwhelmingly.

Again we thank you for your prayers and generosity over the years. Please know how much you are appreciated. I leave you with a brief Latin exhortation: *Oremus pro invicem* (Let us pray for each other).

In Christ,



Fr. John



*continued from page 1...*

while men produce outside of themselves.

There is so much to be done in our Church; can't we find ways to capitalize on the gifts of Catholic men so they see their efforts appreciated and making a difference? Why not introduce seminars and a forum where men can actually see their suggestions taken seriously and implemented?

Give us pastors and shepherds who are unafraid to work with laymen and all their strong-headedness, endless arguing, yet playful bantering and sparring. The Church is eagerly awaiting a true revival here in many parts of the world. We still persist with ineffective and inept ways of "being church". All the while, in many businesses, at corporate, managerial, and every level of the workforce, Catholic men, brimming with potential, gifts and talents, are transforming the world. Why are we ignoring our men?

Might I suggest that just maybe, one fundamental resource for transforming and renewing our Church has always been with us; our menfolk. A Church that is open to letting the contributions of Catholic laymen permeate its life, may be just what is needed. We have been looking for better ways to renew the Church. Maybe God is waiting for the Church to find better ways of helping laymen to breathe new life into the Body of Christ!

## Fr. Bob DeGrandis Leads New Jersey Retreat



Fr. Bob DeGrandis, S.S.J.

On Epiphany night, 15 members of the New Jersey Fraternity and several guest priests and seminarians drove through a snow storm to Gladstone in western Jersey for their annual retreat. Fr Bob DeGrandis, S.S.J., a member of the Washington DC Fraternity and a well-known speaker at charismatic conferences and retreats was the retreat master for the five days together.

The brothers had prepared for the retreat by sharing on their own use of the gifts of the Spirit in their life and ministry but nothing could have prepared them for the movement of the Spirit in their days together.

Fr Bob taught on the graces and uses of the different gifts and then had the brothers pray for a greater openness to the particular gift and had them exercise it in ministry with one another. Brothers who had never been open to particular gifts before were encouraged to use the gifts and the Lord honored their openness with a fresh outpouring of the Spirit.

As present as the Spirit was in the various gifts of tongues, prophecy, wisdom, healing and other gifts he was even more perceptible in the experiences of peace and joy that filled the hearts of the brothers.

At the end of the retreat there was a word of knowledge that many of the priests were experiencing a deeper joy or peace that they had ever known in their lives. Based upon the sharings of the retreatants afterwards that is exactly how the Spirit worked.

The Holy Spirit is still being poured out upon the Fraternity of Priests!

## Annual Fraternity Conference News!

The annual international Fraternity Conference will take place from Sunday, August 3<sup>rd</sup> to Friday, August 8<sup>th</sup> at Cardinal Spellman Retreat House in Riverdale, New York. The retreat house has a splendid view of the Hudson River and is just minutes from New York City. This year's conference is being co-hosted by the New York and New Jersey Fraternities. More details will follow. Brothers, mark your calendars now!



Please send us your prayer intentions: \_\_\_\_\_

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# THANK YOU FOR PRAYING FOR A PRIEST EACH DAY!

## A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

*Jesus, Eternal High Priest, live in (name of priest), act in him, speak in and through him. Think your thoughts in his mind, love through his heart. Give him your own disposition and feelings. Teach, lead and guide him always. Correct, enlighten and expand his thoughts and behavior. Possess his soul, take over his entire personality and life. Replace him with yourself. Incline him to constant adoration and thanksgiving; pray in and through him. Let him live in you and keep him in this intimate union always.*

*Mary, Immaculate Conception, Mother of Jesus and Mother of priests, pray and intercede for (.....). Amen.*

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