

Reflections



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

A Newsletter from the Vocation Office

September 2003

Spirituality and vocation in the later years: A Golden Opportunity

*Master, now you are letting your servant
go in peace, just as you promised;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence
of all peoples... (Luke 2:29-31)*

Simeon was a man nearing the end of his life when he offered this prayer upon seeing the Christ child presented in the temple. What a gift to come to the end of life filled with such peace and gratitude.

There is a continual need for the enthusiasm, idealism and energy of youth bringing new life and vibrancy to the Church. Our Diocese is blessed with many active Catholic young people dedicated to their faith, and in particular, we have a good group of new young candidates entering the seminary this year.

But let's not forget that God continues to call us at every age and stage of our lives. This edition of *Reflections* focuses on spirituality and vocation in the later years. The ordination of 53-year-old Robert Love this past May is one example within our own Diocese of the significant increase in second career or 'later' vocations to the priesthood. Men called at a later time in life have unique challenges and obstacles in responding to the call, while also bringing their own gifts and experiences to the ordained ministry.

*Robert Love at
his ordination
ceremony with
Bishop Tonnos.*

Just as mothers and fathers never "retire" from being parents, priests never "retire" from that unique sacramental relationship they have with Jesus and the Church – they are priests forever. This edition looks at how two of our priests live and minister in retirement.

Our profile of Teresa Woods illustrates the great opportunity the Church finds in the large number of retired Catholic women and men. After years dedicated to family or career pursuits, they often put their talents and energy to other areas, such as parish or community service.

In thinking about spirituality in the later years, we're reminded that listening for the voice of God calling us in our life never comes to an end. Who knows what surprising ways God may be planning to work through you!

Included with this edition is an annual report from the Vocation Office, outlining the activities of the past year. I welcome your questions and comments about the newsletter and the annual report.

Fr. Mark Gatto,
Vocation Director, Diocese of Hamilton



Former Computer Expert *Ordained as Priest*

Fifty-three-year-old Robert Love fulfilled a decades-long interest in joining the priesthood on Saturday, May 3, 2003.

On that sunny spring morning, at Cathedral of Christ the King in Hamilton, he donned the traditional white robe and gold stole, and was called forward by Bishop Anthony Tonnos for his ordination as a priest.

A native of Kitchener-Waterloo, Robert worked as a computer programmer and

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Older Ordinations a Distinct Trend

About Blessed John XXIII Seminary

The "second career seminary," located just outside of Boston, Massachusetts, was the first North American seminary established for the formation of older (e.g. 30 to 60) men answering the call to priesthood. The seminary was established in 1964.

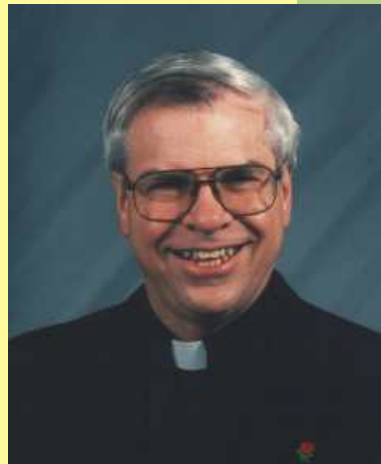
"Some of our seminarians who are older choose to go to Massachusetts because they feel more at home with men their own age," says vocation director Fr. Mark Gatto. "This year we have a 47-year-old man from our Diocese entering this seminary for his first year of study."

The 'greying' of North American ordained clergy is a trend affecting many religions, including the United Church, where new ministers are an average age of 54, and the Catholic Church, where Canadian seminarians are six times more likely to be over the age of 30 than they were in the 1960s.

The Diocese of Hamilton saw 25 ordinations from 1990 to 2003. Of those, 15 men were 30 or over at the time of ordination, including two in their 40s, three in their 50s and the oldest at 61.

"Both older and younger seminarians have something unique to give to the priesthood," says Father Mark Gatto, vocation director for the Diocese of Hamilton. "Younger seminarians have their idealism and energy, while older seminarians bring the advantage of their wisdom and experience. Our seminarians range in age, but it is definitely more common today to have men entering seminary who are older and are leaving well-developed careers in another field."

Father Wallace Metcalfe, pastor at Regina Mundi Parish in Hamilton, not only came to the priesthood late in life, he didn't even become a Catholic until he was 41. "I guess you could say that I don't do things by halves," he laughs. "I was raised as a Baptist and about 10 years before converting I would have even called myself an agnostic."



Fr. Wallace Metcalfe

Fr. Wallace says his career (he was a secondary school teacher in the public system) was his religion until he realized his spiritual life needed more time and attention. A few years after converting to Catholicism he entered Blessed John XXIII in Massachusetts, known as the "second career seminary." He was ordained in 1988 at the age of 47.

Fr. Wallace maintains his age has been an advantage. "I found it didn't hurt to have a little bit of life experience," Fr. Wallace says. "Especially in this day and age, when priests are pretty much on their own in parishes – there are only a few parishes in the whole Diocese that have more than one priest. The experience of living on my own, with all of the responsibilities involved, put me in pretty good stead for the life I'm living today."

experience of "working, earning a living and meeting all sorts of people" is useful for a priest. "I knew what I was getting into and it was greatly valuable to have had that experience. When you're older you don't tend to run the risk of being too idealistic, and then facing disillusion. You're more realistic about things."

Father Robert Love, ordained in May 2003 (see story, page 1), found it particularly helpful to attend the "second career seminary" in Massachusetts.

"I went there so I could be with seminarians in my own age group and because the program reflects the greater life experience students have – it's more pastoral in nature as opposed to academic," Fr. Robert says. "The men in my class included a medical doctor who was chief of surgery at a major Boston hospital, a former U.S. Army colonel and more than one secondary school principal. We had people from every walk of life.

"I think older men have the potential to bring a lot to the priesthood because of their life experiences and perhaps they are more prepared for the commitment. A person in his 50s has more spiritual history."

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Fr. Robert Love

Father Phil Cook, pastor at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Freelton, agrees. Fr. Phil was ordained in 1994 at the age of 55. A high school teacher for 27 years, he believes the

Teresa Finds Joy in Community Service

Retired from a career in parish ministry, Teresa Woods now sees community service as her vocation. "I can't imagine what my life would be like if I wasn't doing things like community service or church work. How do I grow as a person if I'm not reaching out to others?"

Teresa, 70, is a regular driver for Hamilton's Cancer Assistance Program, ferrying cancer patients to and from medical appointments. She also drives for Meals on Wheels, serves food at the Good Shepherd Centre and helps out at the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which helps low-income families with clothing and household goods. "When I retired from my work I wanted to be busy doing something," she explains. "I think it's great."

Originally from New Brunswick, she moved to Ontario in 1961 to work as a teacher and then religion consultant for the Huron Perth Separate School Board, and from there moved to parish ministry in the Hamilton area. She retired from St. Ann's in Ancaster in 1997.

Teresa believes that faith can often intensify with age and experience. "When I was growing up, I had a sense of obligation about church – it was something you had to do. As I got older I took more ownership of my religious beliefs and now I enjoy it tremendously. It's great to be able to reach out to others in faith, and even in retirement I'm still able to do it. I see community service as my vocation – this is what the Lord wanted me to do. For me, the more you get in touch with who God is, the more there's an invitation to share it with others."

Gratitude, Humility part of Mature Relationship with God

After 25 years of acting as spiritual director to men and women from a variety of faiths and cultures, Sister Anne McLoughlin has observed that older people often have a deeper appreciation of both their gifts and their limitations.

"When we're younger we think we can do it all," she says. "As we get older there's a little more balance and realism – 'I can give of myself to others but I can also receive.' Receiving from others also recognizes the gifts that others have."

A member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton, Sr. Anne emphasizes that each person's spirituality is unique in his or her relationship with God, and that doesn't change in the latter half of life. "What does change is that there is a greater acceptance of who you are as a person. It comes with the experience of life, and I think there's a deeper trust in God that goes along with that experience. As you look back you can see how God has always been there, even in difficult times."

Sr. Anne believes that a more mature relationship with God "has a lot to do with gratitude... prayer is more centred on gratitude than 'here are the things I need.'"

"In the second half of our lives, there's a shift from 'doing' to 'being.' It allows more time for prayer and reflection. And I think at an older age we have a deeper sense of working with God instead of working for God... we're more aware of God working through us and with us."

On the Calendar

St. Peter's Seminary in London will hold a **Come and See Weekend** on **November 28 to 30, 2003**.

The weekend is an opportunity for men who may be considering a priestly vocation to visit the seminary and meet seminarians and faculty.

For more information, please contact Fr. Mark Gatto, vocation director, at (905) 528-7988, or frmark@vocationinfo.ca.

The next issue of *Reflections* will be published in early December, 2003. The theme is vocations and youth.

Love, in fact, is the vocation which includes all others.

St. Therese of Lisieux



Retired Priests

Enjoy Time for Contemplation

As long as you live, keep learning how to live.

Seneca

sum up the time for introspection and reflection that retired priests enjoy.

Fr. Charlie, who will be 74 this year, retired four years ago and now lives at the rectory at St. Clement's in Cambridge. His retirement is a good illustration of the special role that priests play when they step down from active duty.

"Every Sunday I take a mass at St. Clement's and help Father Phil Sherlock, the pastor, with confessions, especially children's confessions. This coming weekend I'm going to be at Holy Rosary in Burlington, filling in for Father Ron Cote. So I lead Mass and then I hand the parish back and relax... let's put it this way, I know how it feels to be a grandparent. Grandparents love their grandchildren and look after them for a day or two and then hand them back. It's like that for me."

When he's not filling in for priests who are ill or on vacation, Fr. Charlie plays golf, visits his 97-year-old mother

"I'm sitting here with a cup of coffee, overlooking the lake," says Father Charlie Schefter, and his words

and spends time at a cottage in the Cambridge area that he jointly owns with another priest. And he relishes the additional time he has for personal reflection.

"You don't have any excuses, when you're retired, to keep you away from spiritual things. Priests can be workaholics. The demands can be very heavy. But retirement is a relaxed time in your life. I think you're more in touch with your spirituality because your mind isn't all cluttered with stress. One of the privileges of living in a rectory (in retirement) is that you can enhance your personal relationship with the Lord, but at the same time you're not isolated."

Father Gerald Mulhall is new to retirement – he stepped down in June, 2003 from his role as pastor at St. Mary's in Mount Forest and now lives at the rectory at St. Joseph's Parish in Guelph. "I've been retired such a short time that I'm still determining what it's like," he says. "I do feel a bit like a fish out of water."



Fr. Gerald Mulhall

"Someone asked me, are you really retiring? Well, of course you don't really retire from the priesthood. I expect to fill in, because I don't want to sit on the shelf. Nowadays you can always help out when people need an extra hand, or are away."

One aspect of retirement he expects to enjoy is the freedom from administrative duties. "I think many people find that it's nice to be free of that responsibility and then the spiritual element comes more to the forefront. I expect to have more time for the spiritual reading I'd like to do, although of course I'll maintain a natural interest in what the parish is doing."

Former Computer Expert Ordained as Priest – continued from page 1

taught computer skills for Conestoga College prior to entering Blessed John XXIII Seminary in Weston, Massachusetts.

"Entering the priesthood was always at the back of my mind," Robert said prior to his ordination. "I grew up attending church, belonged to a prayer group in Kitchener and was involved in the Serra Club and the local Right to Life organization."

He even entered St. Augustine's Seminary in Toronto in his 30s, but decided "the timing wasn't right" and left the program.

"There was no one thing that helped me make the decision to re-enter seminary. It's not that simple. It's just the layers of life building on each other to the point where you say, 'now is the time.'"

Father Robert Love is now associate pastor at St. Francis Xavier Parish in Stoney Creek, working with Father Don Wilhelm.

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