

Reflections

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Future priest allows God to use his hands, mind and heart

Jerzy Tomon loves playing sports, making music and doing electrical repairs. At one time, he was studying in college while doing electrical work and playing piano in a band. He was doing what he loved yet something was missing, he says. "I had kind of a hole in my heart."

Today, as a 29-year-old transitional deacon on the threshold of ordination as a priest, Jerzy (pronounced Yer-je) is no longer plagued by that inner emptiness. He still makes music but now also finds joy and peace in service. "It's something that is very close to me," he says of following God's call to become a priest. "I feel I'm doing the right thing."

Jerzy, to be ordained May 6 at the Cathedral of Christ the King in Hamilton, is a student at St. Peter's Seminary in London. He had already studied theology in his home country of Poland before beginning studies at St. Peter's in September 2001.

Jerzy began his time at St. Peter's with a year of training in English as a second language, then took three semesters of theology before completing a pastoral year at Holy Cross Parish in Georgetown. Now he's wrapping up his final year of theological studies, with graduation set for the end of April.

"The internship at Holy Cross was an excellent time for me," he says. "I learned a lot there. I had an opportunity to do almost everything I'll be doing in the future," from preaching, visiting the sick and working with children to participating in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) process.

The fact that English isn't Jerzy's mother tongue brought an extra layer of challenge to his internship experience. Still, he very much enjoyed working in the field, he says. "I really love to do the priestly service. I love to be with the people, especially those who need the priest to come and bring them what they need."

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*Deus Caritas Est
(God is Love)*

Read Fr. Mark Gatto's message on page 2

PHOTO:

Jerzy Tomon (right)



MESSAGE

From the
Vocation Director

Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)

With Pope Benedict's first encyclical letter, we see that love is the foundation of all vocations.

The heart of this encyclical is that all love is a gift of God, but it must be "purified" into agape, or self-giving love. This is expressed as service to one's neighbour, especially the poor and vulnerable, and is the basis for Catholic charitable work. It is also the way that each of us is asked to express our personal vocations.

The encyclical consists of two parts: a spiritual meditation on love, followed by reflections on the work done by Catholic charitable organizations. Here the Pope argues that charitable works are as essential to the church's life as liturgy and the sacraments.

In this edition of Reflections we're exploring how God's love is expressed in the life and vocations of various people in our Diocese. Jerzy Tomon and Charles Fernandes are both approaching ordinations, to the priesthood and permanent diaconate respectively. Sister Carol Graf is reflecting on her 50th anniversary as a Sister of St. Joseph. We'll also feature a volunteer with the well-known Catholic charitable organization, the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

God is love, and each one of us is called to reflect that love in our lives.

Fr. Mark Gatto



A vocation awareness campaign from the Diocese of Hamilton's Vocation Office has won a prestigious award from the Canadian Public Relations Society (Hamilton chapter).

Posters with the message "A special kind of person – A special kind of service" were distributed in spring 2005 to parishes and Catholic secondary schools throughout the Diocese. The vocation web site (www.vocationinfo.ca) and this newsletter were also updated in 2005 as part of the new campaign.

The campaign was developed by Hellingman Communications of Hamilton, working with Father Mark Gatto, Vocation Director. The award was announced on March 30 at a gala awards event held in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

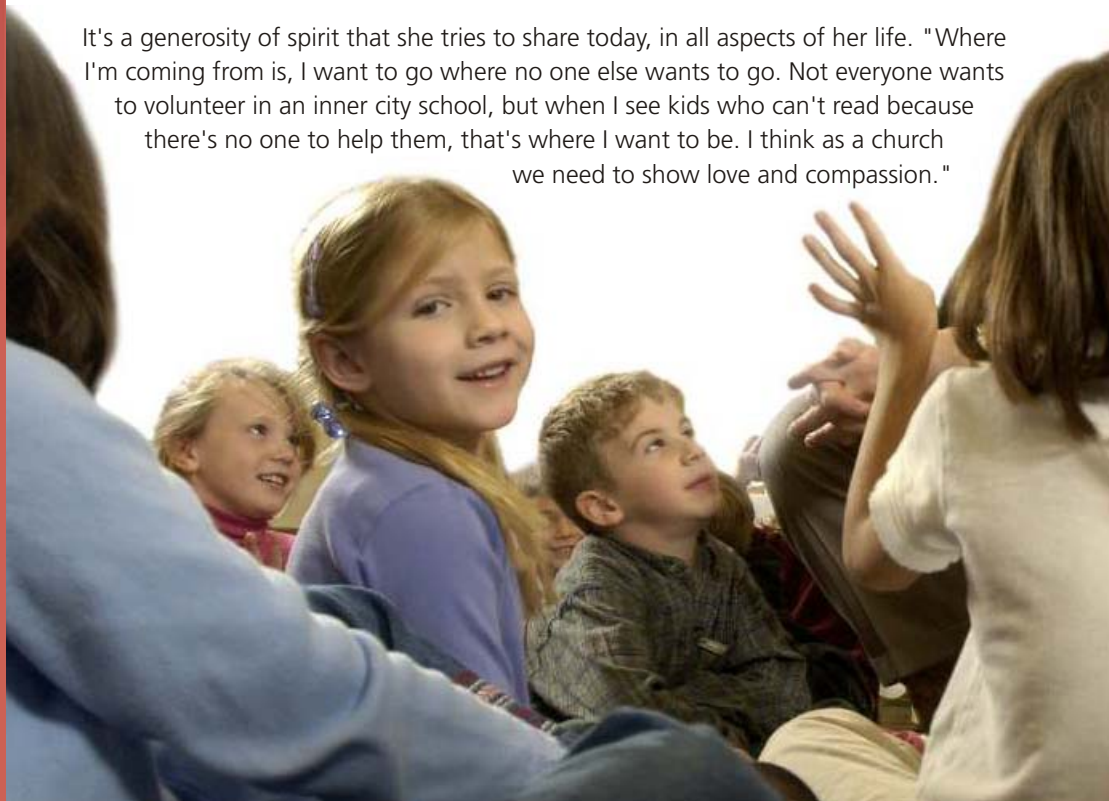
"I want to go where no one else wants to go"

Sister Carol Graf, CSJ, claims she's not retired - she's "re-treaded." The former nurse, teacher and high school chaplain regards her current phase of service to be just as vital as her formal "working" years.

Now 68 and celebrating her 50th year as a Sister of the Congregation of St. Joseph, Sister Carol volunteers in a number of capacities. She leads courses for teachers, sings in the Hamilton Diocesan choir, helps teach children to read at two local elementary schools, and makes and serves food to homeless people at a downtown church. Sister Carol lives alone in an apartment in east Hamilton, but keeps in close contact with others in her religious community, including daily e-mails and regular visits.

Growing up, Sister Carol was influenced by her three aunts who were religious sisters and provided a strong and consistent example of God's love. Sister Carol recalls them always bringing a lot of love and laughter with them when they came to visit. "They seemed to be so friendly and having a lot of fun – and I thought, this looks like a darn good life. And for me, it has been. I have not regretted one day, and that's a great blessing."

It's a generosity of spirit that she tries to share today, in all aspects of her life. "Where I'm coming from is, I want to go where no one else wants to go. Not everyone wants to volunteer in an inner city school, but when I see kids who can't read because there's no one to help them, that's where I want to be. I think as a church we need to show love and compassion."



Oakville parish answers needs

For many parishes, having a St. Vincent de Paul Society is a visible, tangible reminder of agape, or self-giving love. It's a tradition that dates back to the 1800s and is one of the oldest Catholic lay organizations in North America.



Chris Dohan

Chris Dohan, a 56-year-old sales manager at Vanguard Steel, is part of St. Matthew Parish in Oakville, where a St. Vincent de Paul Society was formed four years ago. He says one myth to overcome is that affluent Oakville, where residents enjoy one of the highest per-capita personal income levels in the country, still needs the charitable focus of an organization like St. Vincent de Paul.

"Most of the families we help are single moms and some have spent time in the women's shelter in Burlington. They come out of the shelter and have absolutely nothing. We try to help them start over."

St. Matthew Parish keeps a cupboard stocked with non-perishable food donated by parishioners, augmented by coupons for fresh foods. They have regular clothing drives and even furniture collections if the need is there. About 20 calls for help are received each month, and Chris works with a team of 18 parishioners to answer the needs.

"I've been with it from the start in our parish because the scriptures tell us to have love and compassion for others," Chris explains. "God has called each of us to live for a cause greater than ourselves, which gives us the power to achieve things we might not have thought possible. This is something I can do for Him and there's no better feeling."

FUTURE PRIEST ALLOWS GOD TO USE HIS HANDS, MIND AND HEART – continued from page 1

Expressing the love of God through service is a recurring theme for Jerzy, who came to Canada with the sense that God was calling him to work with people of other cultures. By living a celibate life, priests witness God's kingdom, he says. And by serving, priests represent God's love. God invites people, through the work of priests, "to experience His love as something real, as something that is present today."

As a child, Jerzy thought about becoming a priest but the idea diminished in importance until age 16 or 17, when he came to know and respect the priests working in his home parish. It wasn't until age 21, however, that Jerzy decided to go to seminary.

Now that he's met the diverse challenges of seminary training in a foreign country, Jerzy is keenly aware of the challenges he has yet to face: those that will come to him as part of the priestly role. Yet he trusts in God, knowing that God will act through him, he says. "I just need to be open and allow Him to use my hands, mind and heart."

Later on the same day of his ordination May 6, Jerzy will say his first Mass at Holy Cross Parish. Then, before starting his parish duties, he'll travel to Poland where he'll say his first Mass at his home parish in Kroszno Wyzne.

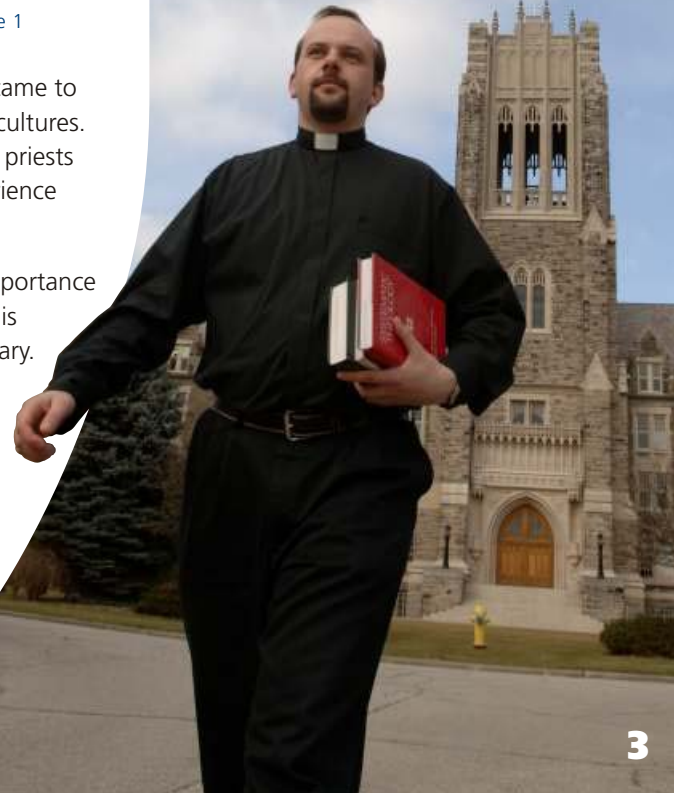
FINAL PREPARATION FOR PRIESTLY ORDINATION

Along with preaching engagements and an intensive year of theological studies, prayer and reflection are an important part of the final preparations for priesthood, Fr. Bill McGrattan says.

Fr. McGrattan is rector of St. Peter's Seminary in London, which has 53 students in its formation program to become priests. A seven-day directed retreat before ordination encourages the seminary's future priests to engage in prayer and reflection about their vocation, he says.

The retreat provides recognition that the priesthood "is not just a human ministry but a spiritual and divinely supported one," Fr. McGrattan says. "The grace, consolation and strength received in prayer and times of retreat are very important for the priestly ministry."

Tying in with God is Love, the theme of Pope Benedict's first encyclical, Fr. McGrattan says the priesthood is "accepted and lived as an invitation to loving service." Just as spouses give themselves fully to one another, so priests give themselves fully to the people they serve, he says.



NEWS AND EVENTS

- **Congratulations to: Bishop Peter Hundt, who was ordained Auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of Toronto on April 25.** Bishop Hundt was parish priest at Holy Cross Parish in Georgetown. He is originally from a farming community near Hanover, Ontario.
- **Thank you to: The Serra Clubs of Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo, for organizing the hugely successful, third annual "Celebration of the Priesthood and Religious Life" dinner.** The event was held on April 27 in Hamilton. Congratulations to the following priests and sisters celebrating 50 years of service: Sister Mary Eileen Brunton, CSSF; Sister Carol Graf, CSJ; Sister Carole Anne Guay, CSJ; Sister Bernardine Smith, CSJ; Sister Jude Marie Sweeney, SSND; Fr. David Mowat, CR; Fr. William Clarke, SJ; Msgr. Harvey Roach, and Fr. Charles Scheffer.
- **Ordination to the Priesthood: Everyone is welcome to attend the ordination of Jerzy Tomon on Saturday, May 6 at 11 a.m. at the Cathedral of Christ the King.**
- **The Diocesan Vocation Mass: This annual event will be held on Sunday, September 24, 2006 at 3 p.m. at the Cathedral of Christ the King.** The Mass is sponsored by the Catholic Women's League, Knights of Columbus and Serra Clubs.

Permanent deacon's role to help those suffering

Charles Fernandes will experience two life milestones this spring: he'll turn 40 in May, and on June 10 he'll be one of 16 men ordained as permanent deacons for the Diocese of Hamilton.

The first milestone makes him a bit of a curiosity in his diaconate study group, where most of the men are in their 50s or early 60s. But the second is something that he sees as a big and important step in his life-long faith journey.

Becoming a permanent deacon involves four years of intensive study and formation, culminating in an ordination ceremony where the men receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The role of a permanent deacon is three-fold: to assist at the Eucharist and other sacramental events such as baptism and marriage; to preach the word of God; and to minister to those who are suffering, poor and marginalized.

"I think the third part is really distinctive," Charles says. "I think of the deacon as the visible link between the sacrifice of Christ and the suffering of the people of God."

"It's sacrificial. It's being present to those who are suffering and to help them connect

to God's love even at the very difficult times of their lives."

Born in Pakistan, Charles grew up in Brampton and Waterloo but now lives on his wife's family farm in Grey County in the far northern corner of the Diocese. His 'day job' is facilitator for the youth retreats that Catholic grade 8 and secondary school students go on throughout the school year, at a retreat centre outside of Orangeville.



Charles Fernandes

Being a permanent deacon is an unpaid ministry, albeit one with enormous responsibilities and time commitments. Because of this, Charles' wife, along with the wives of other men in the study group, will be asked to provide written consent at the time of ordination.

Charles sees a link between his work as a youth retreat facilitator and his forthcoming role as a permanent deacon. "Youth are often set aside in our society; we feel uncomfortable with them and some of the extreme ways they express themselves. I think the gift of the diaconate is that we get to experience how wonderful these people are that most people turn their heads from."

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www.vocationinfo.ca



The title 'permanent deacon' isn't widely known, but is used to differentiate men who become deacons as an end in itself, as opposed to seminarians who are ordained "transitional deacons" prior to becoming priests.

There are five permanent deacons in the Diocese of Hamilton who have been trained in other dioceses; they will soon be joined by 16 new recruits who have completed a training program begun in the Diocese in 2002.