

A WHIRLWIND OF HOPE

The Vocations Directors from Canada's five Ukrainian Catholic eparchies and two major religious orders met in Ottawa for a two-day meeting to share experiences and set plans for immediate future. From the invocation to the Holy Spirit at the opening session at our Seminary that bears His name to the closing prayer in the small inner-city church of the Annunciation the next evening, the meeting was an intense whirlwind of meetings, discussions, visits and prayer. By all assessments – a hopeful new beginning.

The conference was organized at the behest of the Ukrainian Catholic bishops of Canada who recognized the need for such a meeting during their annual seminary visit on 27 September 2008. Part of their inspiration, besides the obvious need for more young men to come forward in this country to serve the Lord in priestly ministry, was the decision of the Ukrainian Synod of Bishops in Lviv earlier that month to declare 2009 as a second year dedicated to “the Christian Vocation with a particular accent on priestly vocations”.

The ten participants of the March 5-6 meeting included Fr. Dmytro Dnistrian for the Redemptorist Fathers, Fr. Gabriel Haber for the Basilian Fathers and the following Vocations Directors from their respective eparchies – Fr. Emil Kardasinec (Winnipeg), Frs. Zenon Walnycky and Roman Galadza (Toronto), Fr. Ivan Nahachewsky (Saskatoon), Fr. Myron Pyszcz (Edmonton) and Fr. Theo Machinski (New Westminster). The host and organizer of the conference, respectively were Fr. Andrei Kachur, Seminary Rector and Fr. Michael Kwiatkowski, Spiritual Director.

After the participants all prayed, inviting the Holy Spirit to pervade every moment of their encounter, Fr. Kachur welcomed the participants to the Seminary while referring to “You, O Man of God”, the recent 2009 Encyclical of the Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, His Beatitude Lubomyr (Husar). Fr. Kwiatkowski read a message of greeting and encouragement from Metropolitan Lawrence and opened the conference with a brief presentation of a wide range of factors that need to be taken into account when considering the work of promoting and nourishing vocations to the priesthood.

Over the two days (actually three or more days for those who were able to come earlier before the actual conference) every possible theme in the field of vocations was discussed. A comprehensive report will be submitted to the bishops who requested the meeting. When discussing “how a vocation is recognized” many thought that a person who showed himself to be a man of prayer, who attends Liturgies and participates in the life of the parish could be possible candidate. Sometimes a candidate will come forward himself or his

unique spirit might be recognized by his friends, family or parish priest. It was agreed, however, that it is important that parishioners also express their views to a potential candidate, letting the young man and/or his parish priest know that someone out there thinks that he just might have the makings of a good priest.

A fair amount of attention was given to what might be the best way of “processing” an individual who, one way or another, comes to the attention of a Vocations Director. The general consensus was that each individual needs to be regarded as such – a unique individual! His particular circumstances and qualities (age, studies, family situation, life experience, special charisms etc.) need to be taken into consideration. In all situations, due attention is given to helping the individual bring to fruition that calling he is experiencing within his soul – whatever it may lead to.

Sometime the discussion became somewhat technical when debating the actual formation programs – academic, pastoral etc. It was wondered whether things needed to change or could change and if various options shouldn’t be explored. One of the longer discussions dealt with the reality of married men also requesting to be included in programs of formation. Practical matters were pondered such as the difficult question of support for wives and children during the formation years.

The two representatives of the religious orders that were present (the delegate from the Studite Fathers was unable to attend) made a great contribution to the proceedings especially by their unique insights and determined willingness to fully collaborate with any efforts that would be commonly developed.

Some of the actual efforts to promote vocations among the Faithful of Canada were also discussed. This included obvious materials such as pamphlets and posters. A discernment weekend and a “vocations drive” tour were also considered and will be explored. It came forward, however, that what was really needed was the development of a “culture of vocations” in our parishes and eparchies where all the Faithful would understand the need to promote, support and especially pray for vocations and, yes, step forward...

It seemed that no eparchial program presently included a method of inquiry directed toward those who at one time had wanted to study or had studied in a formation program and for one reason or another drifted away. However, this was only one of many possible ideas suggested to cover all possibilities for the enhancement of the numbers and quality of our priestly ministers.

Some of the highlights of the meeting included a lunch at the Apostolic Nunciature with Archbishop Luigi Ventura and his staff... a sometimes passionate open forum with almost all the Ukrainian catholic clergy of Nation’s capital (16 priests and 2 deacons in the living room

of Fr. Stephen Wojichowsky, the director of the Sheptytsky Institute)... Deacon Danylo Kuc's (Edmonton) doctoral defence at St. Paul University and... an evening of supper and prayer with the directors and students of the various formations communities (seminaries and religious orders) in Ottawa.

It was a very full two days and everyone left for their respective parishes with a great deal of inspiration and a wealth of ideas to share and develop. By the grace of God - the Lord of the Harvest - and through the earnest prayer of all our faithful in Canada, we will surely see great things happening on the vocations front here in Canada in the near future.

Contact your local Vocations Office – eparchial or religious - and ask how you can get involved! As the old Knights of Columbus vocations slogan so rightly declared... “Vocations are Everybody’s Business”!

Attached pictures

1. (2220) The Vocations Meeting participants and clergy from the Ottawa region discuss the question of vocations to the Priesthood – problems and possible solutions.

2. (2235) An informal lunch with the Apostolic Nuncio to Canada, Archbishop Luigi Ventura. [From the left: Fr. Michael Kwiatkowski (Seminary Spiritual Director), Fr. Theo Machinski (New Westminster), Fr. Andrei Kachur (Seminary Rector), Mons. Lucca Lorusso, Archbishop Luigi Ventura, Fr. Dmytro Dnistrian (Redemptorists), Fr. Ivan Nahachewsky (Saskatoon), Fr. Myron Pyszcz (Edmonton), Fr. Emil Kardasinec (Winnipeg), Mons. Serge Poitras]