

# Love in the heart of Jesus

Last spring, our Holy Father announced the designation of a Year for Priests (June 19, 2009 to June 19, 2010), a time, he said, “to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a stronger and more incisive witness to the Gospel in today’s world.”

Each month of this Year for Priests, The Catholic Review has published a thoughtful column by a respected member of the clergy – whether from our Archdiocese or beyond it – on various issues related to the priesthood.

I am grateful to those priests who have shared their insights and perspectives on aspects of their priesthood, such as the role of priests as spiritual fathers, the life of priests outside of the “workplace” and the universality of the priesthood.

Pope Benedict XVI chose to inaugurate the Year for Priests to coincide with the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of St. John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests.

St. John Vianney, referred to as the saintly Curé of Ars, often said, “The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus,” a beautiful expression that typifies the generous service I have come to personally witness on the part of so many of the priests serving here in our Archdiocese.

It was this service that led me to recommend those 10 of our priests who received the honors recently conferred upon them by our Holy Father as reported last week in The Review. How fortunate we are to have so many dedicated priests who, in the Holy Father’s words, “quietly present Christ’s words and actions each day to the faithful ... striving to be one with the Lord.”

To Monsignors Armstrong, Bozzelli, Collins, Cummings, Hannon, Jarboe, O’Connor, Miller, Murphy and Schenning, thank you for your witness and for modeling Christ’s service so closely for the benefit of the faithful you serve. You join the ranks of other priests from our local Church who have been so honored by the Pope and by many other of your brothers who are equally deserving of such recognition.

More important than garnering the grateful praise of our Holy Father, however, is the impact of the cheerful service of our priests on those considering a life of service in the Church, most especially as priests.

Indeed, I have spoken to so many young people during my past two-plus years here who were inspired to consider the priesthood because of the example and encouragement of parish priests the likes of Msgrs. John Dietzenbach, Art Valenzano and Joe Luca – who, I think holds the record for recent vocations from his parish. As a result, we now have nearly 40 men in various stages of preparation for a life of service to the Church as priests. Of course, we hope and pray for many more such vocations.

Pope Benedict expressed a similar experience with his own priestly discernment. “I still treasure the memory of the first parish priest at whose side I exercised my ministry as a young priest: he left me an example of unreserved devotion to his pastoral duties,” he recalled.

So, as we mark National Vocation Awareness Week in our nation Jan. 10-16, let each of us be mindful of our own responsibility to encourage those young people in our lives whose minds and hearts are stirring with thoughts of serving God and His Church. We owe it to them and we owe it to our Church.