

Parish work helped priest recognize calling

Jumping into parish life at Ss. Philip and James in Baltimore helped convince Father Joseph Cosgrove he might be called to the priesthood.

Whether it was bringing communion to the sick and shut-ins, serving on the pastoral council, reading the scriptures as a lector or reaching out to the poor through the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Father Cosgrove said he felt drawn to the priestly life. The personal relationships he cultivated in his ministry also helped steer him in the direction of the seminary, he said.

“You begin to realize it’s something God’s calling you to and God will help you through it,” said Father Cosgrove, pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Edgewater. “I think there’s a point when you feel that this is the right thing. I realized that that was the kind of work that gave me happiness.”

A Boston native who earned a master’s degree in history from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Father Cosgrove entered St. Mary’s Seminary in Roland Park when he was 39. His background in mediaeval history exposed him to the great thinkers of the church and the role of the church in the development of civilization, he said.

“I think the calling to the priesthood comes from prayer,” said Father Cosgrove, former pastor of St. Peter in Hancock and St. Patrick in Little Orleans. “But I think it’s also very important that others encourage you.”

The example of several priests, including Bishop William C. Newman, Monsignor Martin R. Strempeck and Monsignor Charles F. Meisel inspired him, Father

Cosgrove said.

Many men who consider the priesthood go into it focused on what they can offer, said Father Cosgrove. They sometimes forget that there is also much to gain in the ordained life.

“I say to anyone thinking of becoming a priest that great friendships await them in the priesthood,” said Father Cosgrove, a former altar boy who called it a “great privilege” to celebrate Mass and minister to people.

“Priesthood is one way of getting closer to Christ,” he said.

For those considering religious life, Father Cosgrove said it is important “not to be bashful” and to get involved in parish life as a way of testing their possible vocation.

“It’s hard to know all the wonderful things until you experience them,” he said. “Give it a try.”