

# Priests Helping Priests

## The Catholic Review

Earlier this month, the Holy Father concluded the “Year for Priests” with the celebration of a series of events held in Rome in the presence of some 15,000 priests from 97 countries.

At one of these events, Cardinal Claudio Hummes O.F.M., prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, told the Pope, in the presence of the same throng of priests, “We would like the Year for Priests never to end; that is, we would like our striving towards sanctity, each in his own identity, never to end, and on this journey we may always be comforted and supported, as we have been this Year.”

Here in our own Archdiocese, our priests frequently report of the support they enjoy for their priestly ministry, something I’ve observed on many occasions. Such support comes in many forms and from many sources, including not only from our generous lay people, but also their brother priests. This was surely the case at our Cathedral of Mary our Queen last weekend, when Deacon Greg Rapisarda became Father Rapisarda—the newest priest of Jesus Christ serving in our local Church. In spite of only one man being ordained, the Cathedral hosted hundreds of enthusiastic supporters from all the Archdiocese.

That support shown to Father Rapisarda and other newly ordained priests does not end at their ordination. In fact, it is needed just as much, if not more, as he begins and carries out his years of priestly ministry. In this period of our Church’s history—when we are asking more of our priests, especially those recently ordained—they are in need of even greater assistance.

One way the Archdiocese is seeking to promote this is through the development of a program that would help orient new pastors by tapping into the reflections and knowledge of our more “veteran” priests. Gratefully, Mrs. Anne Buening is leading the effort and ably so. She now serves as Pastoral Associate to Bishop Mitch Rozanski, and is as a former Pastoral Life Director with experience leading a parish

community. She is the mother of Father Matt Buening, pastor of St. Paul, Ellicott City.

Anne has shared with me some of the responses she has received from our self-less priests who, not surprisingly, have responded to her request for aid with typical zeal and thoughtfulness.

With so many priests, new and not-so-new, preparing to begin new pastorates this summer, I thought it especially appropriate to share the following priest-to-brother-priest advice:

- “Most parish people will come to know you from the liturgy. Make and take time to celebrate well, especially in your preaching. Remember that the laity are the best educated U.S. Catholics ever. They are eager to serve.”
- “Take excellent care of your staff. Without their dedication, we could do very little. Be good to them in
- “I am a new pastor and never realized how much there was to learn. Thank God there is a wonderful staff at my new parish that has been welcoming and very supportive.”
- “How much people appreciate you just being present at a meeting, gathering, etc.; it’s very affirming for many.
- “You can dot every ‘I’ and cross every ‘T’ and seem very successful in a ‘business’ mode of thinking, yet still be failing as a pastor if you do not love your people in the parish and take time out to pray and strengthen your love relationship with God.”
- “The first thing that I did when I became a pastor was to say a prayer asking God to help me be mindful of one thing: that one day I would be leaving and to help me be ready for that day. I said that prayer alone in the church before I met anyone. That has helped me in three ways:
  - It made me accountable for what I do. I had to keep focusing on what I could contribute to the parish.
  - Secondly, it helped me to realize I wasn’t a permanent fixture in the parish. The congregation was there before me and will be there when I leave. It isn’t about you; it’s about them.
  - Finally, it had an effect on my spiritual life. I see St. Paul and his

letters in a very different light. His struggles as a pastor called from one place to another seem much more relevant to me and a source of wisdom in what kind of pastor I could be.”

Finally, these from our late Archbishop, William Borders, who offered these recommendations for priests in 2000:

- Be good to yourself. Exercise, eat properly, and learn to relax, provide some space for yourself. You then will be more capable of living your vocation.
- Remember, we are called to serve, not be served.
- In priesthood, the kind of person we are—spiritual, pastoral—is more important than what we do.
- We must learn to live within ourselves—i.e. know your strengths and limitations.
- Always be conscious of the spiritual reality that the Eucharistic celebration has not only a holding on the central place in the life of your parishioners, but also in your own life.

Having just celebrated Father’s Day, I could not help but thank the Lord for the spiritual fathers in our midst, generating the Divine Life that makes us one in Christ.