

Retreat helps men discern calling to priesthood

As David Tolar sat in the sun-filled lobby of St. Mary's Seminary and University, Roland Park, the son of a Baptist father and Lutheran-baptized mother reflected on how far he has come in his journey to Catholicism and possibly the priesthood.

Mr. Tolar joined three other men chosen by their pastors and pastoral life directors to attend the annual Discernment Retreat on Diocesan Priesthood Dec. 28-29 at the seminary.

During the invitation-only event begun by Cardinal William H. Keeler 10 years ago, the men have the opportunity to get to know seminarians, Father Gerard Francik, director of vocations for the archdiocese and the cardinal on a one-on-one basis as they seriously consider their call to the priesthood.

During a Mass celebrating the feast of St. Thomas Beckett, Cardinal Keeler encouraged the men to follow Jesus and take up their cross as Jesus' disciples once did.

On the retreat, the men celebrated Mass, meals and prayers with the cardinal and heard him speak about the joys and possibilities of priesthood, the priesthood today and in the future in the Archdiocese and what brings men to consider the priesthood.

"This retreat gives me an opportunity to meet those who have been thinking about the priesthood, to really pray about it and to meet the seminarians," said Father Francik. "This retreat helps them to know they aren't alone."

Three seminarians, a transitional deacon and a man in the college candidacy program spoke to the men about what brought them to their discernment.

For Mr. Tolar, an only child, it was seminarian John Boyle's story that he could most relate to. Mr. Boyle's mother was not Catholic and he too is an only child. Mr. Boyle said when he told his mother he wanted to be a priest she took it well; she just

wanted him to be happy. Mr. Boyle earned a degree, got a job working with computers, a house all his own and a dog, but gave it all up to follow the Lord's call.

In Mr. Tolar's case, his mother and grandmother were confused about his decision to become Catholic but "they feel whatever will be, will be," recalled the tall, blond, cleanly shaven 28-year-old.

His father was not as understanding; he felt he didn't know the man that Mr. Tolar had become. Eventually Mr. Tolar's father came to understand his son's decision to be Catholic and both parents were accepting to what God has planned for their son.

"When you find yourself at peace it's when you know it's right," said Mr. Tolar whose blue eyes beamed with a sense of peace and happiness. "I'm open to whatever the good Lord wants me to do."

Rev. Mr. Michael Triplett began his presentation, as the men looked at him with anticipation, with the statement, "I didn't necessarily want to be a priest but I wanted to be a hero."

While attending Sacred Heart, Glyndon, Rev. Mr. Triplett saw the priests as role models and started considering the priesthood in high school. He had a great love to serve people.