

‘Year for Priests’ should be a time of encouragement

St. John Mary Baptist Vianney was canonized by Pope Pius XI in 1925. The same pope made him principal patron-saint of the parochial clergy throughout the world in 1929.

It was only 70 years earlier, Aug. 4, 1859, amid a storm of thunder and lightning, that the early life of the “Curé of Ars” came to a gentle end. To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the death of this model for priesthood, Pope Benedict XVI designated June 19, 2009, through June 19, 2010, as the Year for Priests.

This yearlong celebration began on the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a day on which we pray for the sanctification of all priests. Celebrations will close during a world meeting of priests in St. Peter’s Square June 19, 2010. The Holy Father has likewise made the decision to declare St. John Vianney the universal patron of all priests. At present he is considered the patron saint of parish priests.

These 365 days provide a wonderful opportunity to offer encouragement and prayer for our priests. It should be a year of encouragement and future anticipation in which the Church says to her priests, as well as to the faithful society, that she is proud

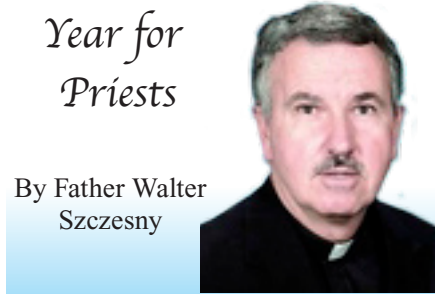
of her priests, loves them, honors them, admires them and recognizes with gratitude their ministerial work and the witness of their lives. It is the hope of Pope Benedict that our efforts on the national and diocesan levels might bolster our brother priests in the calling they have received from the Lord and the laying on of hands.

The Diocese of Buffalo, like dioceses throughout the world, has been busy planning how best to commemorate this special year. Priests and seminarians will gather for a Mass with Bishop Edward U. Kmiec on Aug. 4 in the St. John Vianney Chapel at Christ the King Seminary in East Aurora. The Chrism Mass on March 30, 2010, will be a Mass of added significance at St. Joseph Cathedral as priests of the diocese will renew their commitment and promises of ordination. Throughout the year there will be Holy Hours, conferences, theological seminars and days of recollection, reflecting on the extraordinary definition of the vocation and mission of priests within the Church and society.

As the director of Vocations for our diocese, this Year for Priests will be a constant theme as I visit parishes to talk about vocations during Mass,

Year for Priests

By Father Walter Szczesny



discuss this topic on college and high school campus visitations, and bring this message to the men who gather monthly at our high school and college-age discernment groups. I would encourage every parish in our diocese to use their many creative talents to determine how best they can express the Year for Priests in their own vicariate and their own parish.

Personally, I will make an extra effort to find more quiet time to reflect on my 19 years of ordained ministry as a priest, which have been the happiest years of my life. I will reflect on the many baptisms, weddings, funerals, sermons, penance services, anointings, counseling sessions, and most importantly, the celebrations of Eucharist that I have been privileged to celebrate.

I thank the people who have supported me with their prayers and kind words of encouragement. I thank my God, who helped me discern a call and gave me the courage to answer that call. Every priest in our Diocese of Buffalo will be encouraged to do the same this year.

Determine how best to honor our diocesan priests in your own parish. Please keep them in your prayers. Please tell them that you love them.

For those who are discerning the call to priesthood, ask a priest to tell you his story. It will be a story filled with long hours, stress, pain, discouragement and lonely moments. But, it will also be a story overflowing with the joy and satisfaction of serving others and God through sacrament and ministry ... a story of tremendous fulfillment. It will be a life they would surely wish upon a loved one.

Time always passes too quickly. Before this Year for Priests enters our history books and fades into memory, make a conscious effort to thank God for the gift of the priesthood and thank those who serve so faithfully and constantly.

Father Walter Szczesny is director of Vocations.

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