



## Hearing God's Call

Tommy Shultz succeeded David O'Neil as Diocesan Director of Youth Ministry about a year ago and soon got to know the roads that lead to Catholic parishes in Eastern Oregon. All that driving gave Tommy time to think, and he thought a lot about whether he should become a priest. When the thought wouldn't go away, he began to talk about it—with me, with his home diocese of Kalamazoo, Michigan, and with the Franciscan Fathers he knew well at Steubenville University. After months of reflection and discussion (and no small amount of prayer) Tommy decided to follow in the footsteps of St. Francis; he will enter the Franciscan order this fall. Grateful to have been able to assist Tommy's discernment of his priestly calling, we wish him all the best as he pursues it.

Tommy's story reminds me of the joy that is mine as bishop when, along with Father Rick Fischer, I get to lend a hand to our seminarians as they make their way toward the priesthood. For Victor Mena the end of that journey is just a year away. On 26 May of this year, Victor will be ordained deacon at St. Pius X Church in Klamath Falls. Looking on with anticipation will be his fellow seminarian at Mount Angel, Marco Serna, who will begin his final year of college this fall. In their years at Mount Angel Seminary Victor and Marco have faced the dual challenge of learning English and adapting to the Church in America. The opportunity to follow their progress in detail comes each spring with the seminarian

evaluations at Mount Angel, where I have been deeply impressed by the sincerity, humility, and dedication that have brought both of them so far so fast. Next year they'll be joined by Caleb Cunningham, the son of Ron and Nancy Cunningham of Jordan Valley, who will graduate from Steubenville University this spring.

Mount Angel enjoys a well-deserved reputation for its high-quality formation program, which guides each seminarian through the spiritual, academic, pastoral, and human dimensions of preparation for priesthood. These four "pillars" of formation are the focus of the evaluation sessions. Each year I come away from them with renewed confidence in the guidance our men receive—even when it results in a decision to leave the seminary, as it did for two of our seminarians this year. David Jones is back in La Grande, getting in shape for hoped-for entrance into the Navy this fall. Nicholas Paige-Schneider will return to Bend after graduation in May before setting off for post-graduate studies.

In my view, the decisions of these fine young men to discontinue their studies for the priesthood mark the *success* of their years in seminary formation. The whole point of a seminary is to provide a carefully structured environment conducive to in-depth consideration of a calling from God. Seminary formation helps a man decide whether the priesthood is for him. If he concludes in good conscience that it is not, then withdrawing from the seminary, far from being a failure, is simply the right thing to do; and it is the task of the seminary to respect and support such a decision.

It can happen that withdrawal from the seminary is not the last word in the story, however. With the passage and time and the accumulation of life experience, men can decide to return. I did. After a "leave of absence" that lasted 18 years I went back, confident of my calling and eager to follow it through to the end. Because both David and Nicholas still feel an attraction to the priesthood, I've asked them to remember God's patience with me in getting me where He wanted me to go. Perhaps His call will come back to them too. I would not be surprised if it does.