

# Catholic Church needs more seekers, servers

WHEN I WAS 14-years-old I saw Bing Crosby portray Father Charles O'Malley, a fictional inner-city priest, in the 1944 movie, "Going My Way." O'Malley befriended at-risk kids, appealing to their love of sports and popular music. In one, especially gripping scene, after catching some local gang members stealing, he forgave them and let bygones be bygones by taking them to a baseball game.

Father O'Malley was quite different from the priests I knew in my own parish. They were distant from the youngsters, focusing their energies on the politics of the church, raising money, and delivering the "Word of the Lord," as if they were the only intermediaries between man and God. I'm certain that they were devoted to their calling, but they seemed to be too busy projecting sainthood instead of showing us how to live our faith.

While O'Malley was a fictional character, he at least showed me that the priesthood was about much more than saying Mass or hearing confessions. It's about caring for people — especially young people — in everyday life.

It's about being a seeker after the Lord and serving his creatures with the understanding that faith is a constantly unfolding journey; not a destination. To be sure, these are difficult times for the Catholic Church. Revelations of pe-

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## COMMENTARY

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dophilia have tarnished the credibility of the priesthood and raised questions about the integrity of a clerical hierarchy that has paid hush money to the victims. At the same time, we seem to forget about the truly dedicated priests — the seekers after the Lord — who have committed their lives to the honorable work of the Catholic Church, individuals like Father Michael Quinnan, a pastor of St. Mary's and St. Adalbert's in Newport Township.

Quinnan arrived in the Wyoming Valley just over a year ago with the unenviable task of closing down three of the five churches in his parish, something that has become too common because of the nationwide shortage of Catholic priests. It would have been easy to act arbitrarily, ignoring the concerns of his parishioners. But Father Quinnan involved them in the process, listening patiently to their concerns, and earning their trust and respect through the compassionate manner in which he accomplished an extremely difficult task.

Having recently attended one of his Masses, I was moved to see Father Quinnan extend the invitation to the children to join him at the altar for the Eucharis-

tic celebration. Many did. Afterwards, he shook the hand of each child, a simple gesture of peace. Earlier, during his sermon, he admitted to being "concerned" about going out in public dressed as a cleric in the wake of the church's sex scandal, and whether he should remain in the priesthood because of the popular suspicions attached to it.

Instead, he has re-dedicated himself to the work of the Church in this small, economically depressed community. It is the work of cultivating faith, not only in God but in the Catholic Church. It is the work of building a quality program of religious instruction for the young. And it is the work of innovative fund-raising to keep the parish on a firm financial footing.

Now that the merger has been completed, his parishioners worry that he will be transferred elsewhere. I share their concern. Priests like Father Quinnan are exceptional. Like the clerics who joined the French labor force to rebuild that country after World War II, he is a "worker priest" committed to the service of God through his ministry to the parishioners, especially the poor and the children. He represents all that is good about the Catholic Church. That is why I will pray for Father Quinnan and for his success as his journey unfolds.

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WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2002