

40th Anniversary of Ordination to the Priesthood

The Very Rev. Dr. Samuel Henry Hartman

Two weeks ago, Sam and I were on our way to Lexington, Kentucky to participate in a priesthood ordination. During the uneventful trip, we had plenty of time to read, sleep, talk, and read some more.

Sam had his crossword puzzle and a book. I had a book entitled *'In Search of Belief'* by Joan Chittister. It is an examination of the Apostles Creed.

In the section that describes the life of Jesus, it says:

“He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.”

I found a sentence that has stayed with me, It read:

“Christmas is a feast without finish, a call to begin once more the journey to human joy and holy meaning.”

Of course it was a few days before Christmas, the idea of ordination was still on my mind – Paul’s, Bridget’s, and Sam’s. So I came up with a paraphrase of this particular sentence that goes like this:

Priesthood is a call to journey through life, bringing human joy and holy meaning to others in the name of Jesus Christ.

The words – CALL, JOURNEY, BRING, HUMAN JOY, and HOLY MEANING all pertain to why we are gathered together this night.

The 40th Anniversary of your ordination has been a call answered, and a journey that continues and has truly brought joy and meaning to others in the name of Jesus Christ.

Sam answered the call, a call which began in Maine, bounced across the Atlantic to the Convocation of Churches in Europe, and back to our Diocese – and for half of your ordained ministry, has been an opportunity to live out your call to ministry.

You have not only lived it out, but overseen the process for others to discern their calling in life through your leadership in the parishes you have served. Through the work of the Commission on Ministry in our Diocese, and the gifts you have shared with countless members of God's children in word and sacrament.

The journey continues because this anniversary is after all a time of RENEWAL, and a time of REAFFIRMATION. It is NOT a time of RETIREMENT, nor is it a time of RELAXATION.

It IS a time of RE-ENERGIZING your ministry to continuously bring human joy to people and assist human beings in finding holy meaning to their lives.

If our world ever needed joy, it is now. The ministry that you participate in is an opportunity to allow God's source of joy, Jesus Christ, to enter our existence and the fruits of being a Christian.

The joy of being a Christian is lived out in a variety of ways – two of which Jesus himself described.

Loving God

Loving Neighbor

These have been part of your ministry, of your mission in life and of your existence.

In 1969, at your ordination, your bishop, Frederick Wolf described priesthood in these terms in the service for Ordering Priests. He reminded you of how “weighty an office and charge you were called to.” He then said, “that is to say, to be Messenger, Watchman, and Steward of the Lord.

-to teach and to admonish

-to feed and provide for the Lord’s family

-to seek for Christ’s sheep that are dispersed abroad

-and for children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved, through Christ forever.

Pretty heavy words – but there in lies the JOY of servanthood, the JOY of being Christ’s messenger, to use the words of the ordinal to God’s children who are “in the midst of this naughty world.”

Another dimension of the priesthood is that of bringing holy meaning to others in the name of Jesus Christ.

Holy Meaning – Epiphany

- Magi's gifts were filled with holy meaning
- Their presence and their exit brought meaning to the Christian message

The celebration of the Eucharist, one of the primary responsibilities of a priest, takes the basic elements of bread and wine and through the words of Jesus became the body and blood of our Lord –

- which make communion holy
- which gives new life to those seeking restoration
- which gives healing to those whose lives are broken
- which give nourishment to the weary
- which sustains those who need to be revitalized
- and which gives blessing to those in need of the Holy in their lives.

This is what priesthood is all about. Sam this is what your priesthood has been about.

I thank Sam for your friendship, your collegiality and leadership, and your wisdom. I thank you for your CALL to journey through life, bringing human joy and holy meaning to me, and to so many others in the name of Christ.

AMEN