

Fr. Perozich comments —

This is a long article. The first part gives a personal testimony of a Fr. James Gould of the diocese of Arlington, VA in his journey to priesthood and work as vocations director.

The work unfolds in clear hard facts below, some of which is so foreign to the current western culture that it almost seems unreasonable.

Yet it is the truth and, and it is the formula for a holy priesthood with the four marks of prayer, generosity, hard work, and sacrifice.

The obstacles which cannot coexist with priesthood are the vices of sloth in prayer and work, selfishness, narcissism, unchastity in disposition and deed.

The director needs to encourage those who demonstrate the virtues and to weed out those who are prone to the vices.

A certain disposition to prayer, generosity, hard work, sacrifice must already exist in the candidate at the time of acceptance without the vices that suck the life out of the priest and of his vocation.

The Four Marks of a Vocation

THE VOCATIONS DROUGHT THAT NEED NOT BE

By Michael S. Rose | November 2003

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Father James Gould is best known for being one of the most successful vocations directors in the U.S. since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). For 15 years, from 1985 until 2000, he was charged primarily with promoting

and fostering vocations to the priesthood for the Diocese of Arlington under Bishop John Keating. During that time, the relatively small diocese of 65 parishes in northern Virginia produced an average of eight new priests each year. By the year 2000 the average age of priests in Arlington was 42, twenty years below the national average! What makes these statistics even more impressive is that this was accomplished during a time known throughout much of the Western world as a vocations drought.

The formula for his success? Says Fr. Gould: **“Unswerving allegiance to the Pope and magisterial teaching; perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in parishes, with an emphasis on praying for vocations; and the strong effort by a significant number of diocesan priests who extend themselves to help young men remain open to the Lord’s will in their lives.”**

Some vocations offices over the past three or four decades have tried to implement **very complicated programs in order to attract men to the priesthood.** But not in the Diocese of Arlington under Fr. Gould’s watch. **There was no “vocations team”** involved with the Diocese’s Office of Vocations while he was director. **“Teams tend to be a bureaucratic burden,”** he explains, **“with all sorts of agendas that cost great amounts of money. Simplicity, as much as generosity, is a virtue for vocations directors.”**

Rather than spending his time with “paper projects” that always seem a bit disconnected from reality, Fr. Gould

preferred to travel to parishes to preach about priestly vocations at Sunday Masses, as well as to groups at schools, colleges, Scout retreats, Knights of Columbus councils, even at military bases. This, he says, gave him a chance to look into the eyes of parishioners and talk directly to them about fostering and promoting vocations to the priesthood.

The Diocese of Arlington had very concrete goals regarding vocations during his tenure. Each year, he explains, “we looked for ten new priesthood candidates, rather than ten percent increases. ‘Ten men’ is a concrete goal and every priest plays a part in achieving this goal.” Only in a couple of years during his time as Vocations Director did the Diocese fall short of achieving that goal. But one year Arlington had 22 new men entering seminary — more than enough to make up for the “shortage” in other years. Consequently, after such remarkable success during those 15 years, the Diocese of Arlington has no “priest shortage” as other American dioceses increasingly do.

Fr. Gould also attributes the vocations success in Arlington to the presence of the Poor Clares Monastery in Alexandria where the sisters constantly pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. “They are very dear to the heart and soul of the Diocese,” he says. The spiritual aspect must always be present, he adds, if any success in vocations is ever to be expected or even hoped for.

Another reason for **the success of vocations in northern Virginia was the presence of two good bishops.** The first was Bishop Thomas Welch, himself

once a seminary rector. Said Fr. Gould of Bishop Welch: “He expected the priests to be men of prayer who could preach with courage, teach with clarity, and serve with charity.” It was Bishop Welch, later the Bishop of Allentown, Pennsylvania, who invited the Poor Clares into the Diocese. The Bishop’s goal was to synthesize the academic, social, and spiritual dimensions of his parishioners, which was the same goal he had for his seminarians. The second bishop was John Keating, who, says **Fr. Gould, actively sought out men who demonstrated prayer, hard work, generosity, and sacrifice.** Fr. Gould calls these qualities the “four marks of a vocation” and stresses how important they are for both priests and seminarians.

Fr. Gould was first introduced to the “four marks” by his uncle, Fr. Dudley Day, an Augustinian priest from Chicago and one-time Vocations Director for his order. For the candidate in seminary, prayer comes first. “He has to develop a solid prayer life — going to Mass every day, saying a daily Rosary, and he should pick a saint who is clearly an advocate for him,” suggests Fr. Gould, who as a child picked St. Joseph, figuring he wasn’t busy since everyone was talking to the Blessed Virgin.

Without prayer, the ordained priest cannot even hope to partake properly in the source and summit of the Catholic priesthood, the Holy Mass. “It’s the most important part of the day. Every intention I have for each day goes into that Mass. If you’re going to represent the Lord in persona Christi, you’ve got to be able to talk to Him, and

you have to want to talk to Him. For the priest, preaching, teaching, and sanctifying is rooted in the Catholic Mass.” Prayer is the absolute bare minimum prerequisite.

Hard work is the second mark. “I always said I’d like to send every seminarian to a hardware store to work for a summer. In a hardware store you not only learn the practical skills of plumbing, electricity, and mechanics, but you also learn personalities. You learn about people from those who come in. You learn something about the business world. You interact with people. You’re always talking. And you’re always service-oriented.”

“The greatest malady in the priesthood today,” adds Fr. Gould, is “laziness and indifference. In this age of ‘collaborative ministry’ with the laity, many priests may have slipped away from the meaning of hard work. They don’t do house calls. They don’t teach CCD. They don’t visit the grammar school, and they don’t teach RCIA — and that’s a problem.”

Generosity comes next, he says. “The candidate has to be able to answer the question: **what are you going to give these people?** That’s what generosity involves.” Fr. Gould recalls, “When I was a kid, my Father was in a motorcycle accident. During the year and a half that he was out of work, the Gould kids — there were eight of us at the time — weren’t able to enjoy a lot of things we normally did.” His great aunt, Helen McGonigle, however, made a lasting impression on him. She put up money for all the children to continue at the Catholic grammar

school. Looking back on those difficult times he thinks the parish could have cut his parents a little slack on the school tuition — but it didn't. Worse, he adds, was that during the whole time that his Dad was out of work, the parish priest only came to the Gould house once. "I never forgot that," he says. "I thought that if I were ever a priest I'd show up a little more often. It's another important aspect of generosity."

In his own priesthood, Fr. Gould has realized the necessity of generosity many times over. One particularly remarkable incident came when he was made Pastor of St. Raymond's in Alexandria, Virginia. He was charged with the tremendous task of building a church building, school, and rectory for this recently founded parish. Part and parcel of building a new parish from the ground up is the daunting and often unpopular task of fundraising. Fr. Gould's task at St. Raymond's should have been even more difficult than most priests put in that position: His predecessor was discovered to have been embezzling church funds on a rather grand scale and was swiftly dismissed from the Diocese. Many Catholics in the parish who had trusted the former Pastor to be a good steward of their donations — something they likely expected of any Catholic priest — were crushed.

In an effort to restore trust in the parish, Fr. Gould was primarily concerned with exercising the virtue of generosity. "I came in and told the parishioners on my second weekend that I was going to give a year's salary to the church building project. And then the next year, after completing the pledge for a year's salary, I called the

parish finance committee together and said I was going to give \$10,000 over the next five years. In doing that, the people in the parish ‘came out of nowhere’ with generosity and raised \$2 million almost overnight.”

The virtue of generosity is intimately connected with sacrifice, the last of the four marks of a vocation. Many people think that this should be first, but it should come last, Fr. Gould says. And what exactly ought aspiring priests be sacrificing? The first thing that comes to mind for most people is giving up marriage and family life. “Everyone wants to talk about sacrifice first,” he adds. “But **without prayer, without hard work, without generosity, sacrifice would be meaningless in the life of a priest or anyone else.**” **Prayer, hard work, generosity, and sacrifice played a significant role in the development of his own vocation,** attests Fr. Gould. “Generosity was definitely a hallmark of both my parents and my childhood,” he says. Fr. Gould was one of eight children born to James and Alice Gould, and each child was born in a different city, covering eight homes in seven different states. His Father was a member of the Army Medical Corps and his Mother a nurse. The whole family grew up moving wherever they were assigned, so they were no strangers to change. In an obvious display of the virtue of generosity, James and Alice Gould had eight children of their own when they decided to adopt a ninth child from Korea. “People would always ask my parents why they wanted to adopt a ninth child when they already had

eight,” he remembers. “And my Dad would always answer: ‘We had a fertility problem.’”

Prayer was also an important part of Fr. Gould’s upbringing. “We were on our knees every night before we went to bed. Every child said a ‘Hail Mary,’ and Dad would start with an ‘Our Father’ and Mom would end with a ‘Glory Be.’”

His parents, he says, explicitly lived out, day-to-day, the **model of prayer, hard work, generosity, and sacrifice. The “four marks” were active in his family life before they imbued his priesthood.** And that points to the wisdom of Fr. Gould’s favorite maxim: The true vocations directors are at home, and not in the chancery offices. “I was never blind to that fact,” he says. “As a Vocations Director, I always said, I’m just the gatekeeper: I’m the one who helps get them in, and I’m the one who helps throw them out if need be. **But the real vocations directors are the parents.**”

“Parents, if they want the answer to vocations, I counsel them to follow the standards of prayer, hard work, generosity, and sacrifice. It doesn’t matter if they go to Mass one day a week or seven days a week — as long as the kids can see that the prayer life of their parents is credible, hard work that is credible, reaching out to kids and expecting things of the kids, then you are going to find vocations coming.”

Fr. Gould believes that’s why he felt his call to the priesthood as early as seven years old. He remembers telling his Father of his calling to the priesthood during the

second grade. “My classmates in both grammar school and in high school all knew that I’d be a priest some day. Upon graduation from high school, the school newspaper listed the colleges the students would attend except for mine. With my name was the word ‘priesthood.’”

Fr. Gould attended Niagara University in Niagara Falls, New York, fresh out of high school. His years there gave him the opportunity to quietly discern his vocation while studying philosophy, which he knew would help him prepare for studies in seminary. He distinctly remembers one April morning during his Junior year when, after the daily Mass, he walked confidently over to the classroom building, picked up the pay phone, and called his Mother. Since it was a Tuesday, in the middle of the day, she thought something was wrong, but instead he just told her that “it was time to go.”

“Go where?” his Mother asked him.

“To seminary,” he replied.

There was a long pause on the other end of the phone, and then she said, “I’ll tell your Father.” All those years of quiet expectation erupted in that simple conversation, the decision had been made.

That memorable phone call was preceded by an equally memorable event. On the previous Christmas vacation when he was home with his parents, in a reflective moment, if such can be found in a house of nine children, he was looking out the window at an Iowa blizzard when his Mother walked into the room.

“What are you thinking about?” she asked.

“I’m thinking about the time when I won’t come back here again,” he responded. He had no idea why he said that to her just then. He had always planned to come back to Iowa where his parents eventually put down roots. At the same time he knew that Iowa just didn’t seem like home to him. The son who could never leave the yard as a child would soon be leaving.

Once he decided to apply for seminary, he told the Vincentian priest who was President of Niagara University at the time. Fr. Kenneth Slattery was ecstatic, he remembers. “He didn’t try to sign me up for the Vincentians, but he was a great support. And when I would see him in the classroom — he taught ethics — or when I saw him at Mass or anywhere else on campus, he would pull me aside and ask how I was doing. His attention was encouraging. I had a great admiration for Fr. Slattery as he rejected the state funding from New York, known as the Bundy Money, so that the University would not have to compromise its Catholic identity by taking state funds.”

That Easter he returned to Iowa where he had spent his high school years. **“The priests in my home parish there were the real heroes in my life,”** says Fr. Gould. His Pastor, Fr. Charles Phelan, would have teenagers lined up against the wall to go to confession. “You could go tell Fr. Phelan and confess that you shot your mother or that you robbed the local bank, and he would say, ‘Glory be to God you’re here. Glad to hear you confess it. That’s great.’ **It didn’t matter what sin it was, he would always say, ‘Glory be to God.’**” The other priest, Fr. Frank Nugent, his high school religion

teacher and spiritual director, was an **inspiring role model as a teacher and preacher in the classroom and in the pulpit.**

As it turned out, though, Fr. Gould didn't apply for seminary back in Iowa. There was an unsettling thought of a greater need in Virginia. He and his family had once lived in Alexandria, Virginia, in what is now known as the Diocese of Arlington. He also had several friends who were attending the newly founded Christendom College in Front Royal. He stayed with renowned Church historian Prof. Warren Carroll when he visited the Diocese to take a look around.

When Fr. Gould went to Mass at the local parish on the first day of his visit, he told the priest there that he was thinking about the priesthood, and was looking to apply to seminary the following year. He still remembers being impressed with the enthusiasm of the priest's response. Again, this was more encouragement for his vocation.

Then he went to visit the first priest he had ever known. That was Msgr. Martin Quinn at Blessed Sacrament Church in Alexandria, where Fr. Gould had attended grammar school for a few years. "I called him up and told him that I was thinking about priesthood. I explained that I was a student in New York, and that my parents were living in Iowa, but that I had attended Blessed Sacrament grammar school and hadn't been back in 13 years." So Msgr. Quinn invited him over, sat him down, and fed him potato chips, a ham sandwich, and a soda. He then proceeded to tell the future Fr. Gould everything that had happened in his parish over the past

13 years since the Goulds had moved away. “It was like he was my own grandfather,” he says. “I even stopped at the old neighborhood and some of the folks treated me like I came home from the war. They recalled the time my Father was teaching me how to ride my first bicycle out on the front walk. I knew I was home.”

The upshot of his visit to northern Virginia was that he felt he would be wanted and needed as a priest there. “I had dropped into a Diocese where there was obviously a collective interest in vocations,” he says. “I happened into a swirling pool of activity for promoting vocations, and Bishop Thomas Welch, who had founded the young Diocese, was churning the waters.”

Consequently, the Diocese of Arlington is where Fr. Gould stayed. He was sent to St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia, and was ordained by Bishop Welch on May 9, 1981. The question that often comes up for Fr. Gould is: How did you get to this point in your life? He answers that “God always seems to put me into places where I didn’t expect to be. He placed me in a great family, and I went to great schools, a great college, and a great seminary. I was ordained into a great Diocese, serving with heroic priests, and I worked under great bishops.”

Bishop John Keating, who succeeded Bishop Welch as the Bishop of Arlington, was another of Fr. Gould’s real-life heroes. “He was easy to work for because he always had a great interest in promoting and supporting vocations,” he says. And he believes that Bishop Keating’s prayer, hard work, generosity, and sacrifice are manifest in the lives of so many priests in northern Virginia, and that

vocations are encouraged by their good example. “It’s like in business, if you have something good to sell, people will invest in it.” And as Vocations Director, Fr. Gould has long had a vested interest in seeing that he’s got a good “product to sell” to young men discerning the vocations call.

Another important aspect in the life of any vocations director is the selection process of candidates for the priesthood. Fr. Gould readily admits that for the past four decades **some vocations directors have not faithfully fulfilled their duty in selecting the proper candidates: “Working in vocations is a two-way street. There are candidates to be avoided, and those to be promoted. In the topsy-turvy world of the last four decades someone switched the street signs. Vice became virtue and virtue vice.”**

In fact, **there have been plenty of highly suitable good men, he says, who have been turned away simply for embracing the teachings of the Church, especially about the nature of the priesthood and issues of sexual morality. The rejection of good candidates has helped cause the artificial shortage of vocations in America.** For Fr. Gould, however, acceptance of the Church’s teachings was a prerequisite for admission to a seminary as a candidate for the Diocese of Arlington.

The interview process is very important, says Gould: “In an interview with candidates, these are the questions I would ask. Where are you from? Where did you go to

school? What were your grades? What is your home background? Do you have any relatives who are priests or religious? Are your parents still living, and are they supportive of what you are doing? How many siblings do you have? What is your faith background? What is your parish? Do you know any priests? Will they write letters for you?

“Then I go on to the harder stuff. Have you ever co-habitated with anyone? Are there any [babies] out there who look like you? And then I would say, I have to ask you this, and I apologize for having to do it, but ‘what is your sexual attraction?’ That’s the way I phrased it back in 1985, when I first started interviewing candidates. And almost every guy, about 99 percent of them, would say, ‘Father, I understand why you’re asking the question,’ and they all knew homosexuality in the priesthood and in the seminaries was a problem, even back then. Most of them said no, they weren’t homosexual, didn’t have same-sex attractions. If they said yes, I had to tell them I couldn’t accept them into Arlington.”

Back in the mid-80s, explains Fr. Gould, one of the Diocese’s primary concerns was that the “gay” activists in the Washington, D.C., area might publicly “out” homosexually inclined seminarians or priests. There were a couple of incidents around that time in which priests were “outed” by activists in Arlington as “payback.”

Fr. Gould relates a case in point: A priest in the neighboring Archdiocese of Washington connected with a local Catholic homosexual group was successfully baited by a young “gay” man who was put up to the task by

activists bent on “punishing” James Cardinal Hickey for preventing the formation of a “gay club” at Georgetown University, which is, of course, a prominent Catholic institution. The activists set up sound equipment and video cameras in an Arlington hotel in order to expose the priest giving into his vice.

Fr. Gould admits that this isn’t the highest motive for rejecting homosexually inclined candidates to seminary. Long before the end of Fr. Gould’s 15-year tenure, he says, he realized well enough that homosexuals don’t belong in all-male, celibate seminaries. “There were a few cases where homosexuals were aggressively after others in the seminary,” he remembers, “and had to be dismissed. Some of them would get past me during the interview process and once or twice we had to dismiss a candidate because of homosexual activity.”

It is instructive to note, he adds, that no psychological test proves homosexuality: “You pretty much have to take the candidate’s word for it. **Most of the time the homosexual’s psychiatric profile will say, ‘narcissistic.’ And that’s telling. He often exhibits a very strong interest in the self**” — **something not conducive to the ministry of the priesthood.**

“The other thing that will sometimes surprise people,” he says, is that “in the American experience we may find that the active homosexual cleric or seminarian is not always a ‘liberal,’ that is, with libertarian attitudes in sexuality. He may have a great devotion to the Blessed Mother, as well as other saints. He may sometimes preach or teach some very traditional lines, and yet he practices

the homosexual lifestyle on the outside. **It is a psychological disorder; that's the only way that I can describe it. To be fair, there are a lot of homosexuals in the ranks who are chaste homosexuals. With the weakening of the cultural mores, their life in chastity must be extremely difficult.**"

Sadly, the issue of homosexuality has come to dominate discussion about the priesthood in recent years, especially during the great media blowup in 2002 over clerical sex abuse of minors. The vast majority of the priests involved in these scandals were self-professed homosexuals who acted out on young men or adolescent boys. "It's more than obvious that homosexuality in the priesthood is a serious problem. It's the elephant in the living room. The Church has reached a point where it can no longer ignore this."

Fr. Gould has been called upon frequently to comment publicly upon the mushrooming scandals in the Catholic Church. In his commentaries on EWTN he says he is careful to first properly identify the **different "players" involved in the scandals. He says they fall into four categories: seminarians, priests who sexually abuse minors, homosexual and heterosexual priests** who are sexually active with adults, and "the average Joe."

First, he explains, the Church must be concerned with the seminarians, many of whom will one day be our future Catholic priests. **"If we don't identify homosexuals in the seminary as being a serious issue, then we risk**

continuing to face big problems later on. We've got to make some hard-line decisions at this particular time in history," he says of admitting homosexuals to seminary, a topic that the Vatican has taken up amid the scandal-charged atmosphere in the U.S. and elsewhere. "The majority of the scandals that have come to light do not involve pedophiles.... The majority of the \$1.3 billion that was lost on litigation went for homosexual activity and ephebophilia — sexual attraction to post-pubescent minors. It's not an issue of a passion for an individual, which is fleeting. We're talking more about an appetite, where a seriously disordered attitude lingers. So you've got to identify and weed out these candidates from the very beginning, and ask for candidates who are stable in their psychological and mental health, who are in good physical health, and who are free from habitual serious sin, habitual mortal sin."

As an aside, he adds that the **one category never identified in the Church abuse scandals regards the number of those men who entered the seminary and soon after resigned, within 18 months, because they were scandalized by the immoral behavior of their fellows candidates or formation leaders, or both.**

The second type of "player" is **the priest who sexually abuses minors. This is the type who needs to be dismissed — and swiftly,** he says. "There's no room anywhere in the priesthood for a man who sexually abuses minors."

The **third group** has been more neglected and ignored, and yet needs to be challenged, says Fr. Gould. These are **the priests who are sexually active, whether homosexual or heterosexual.** It is instructive to note that during the watershed meeting of U.S. bishops held in Dallas in June 2002, the bishops indicated that they were only interested in cases involving minors. “This was tantamount to giving a carte blanche to all those involved in other slips in modesty, chastity, and celibacy,” he points out. “It’s become much more of a problem because more and more priests feel isolated due to the priest shortage in most areas of the country. He’s living alone and nobody seems to notice the behavior and the lifestyle. The Church needs to reach in and go after the pornography on the computers and on the television, after the subtleties of sexuality, because their **priests’ strength is slipping away in their compromises concerning chastity — and not only chastity but modesty too. And we’ve got to go in and challenge the guys who are completely off the mark. You have to bring them back in line or let them go. The scandals to the innocent ones far exceed keeping the perpetrator or the activist around.**”

This third group, says Fr. Gould, has to be challenged by a philosophy and agenda that is thoroughly Catholic, and this challenge needs to begin the day each man enters seminary, and continue his entire priesthood. It is, in fact, the responsibility of the superiors to see to this. In the priesthood, those who cannot or will not maintain the vow of celibacy need to be identified, investigated, assigned to a

therapy program, such as the one offered by the Sisters of Mercy in Alma, Michigan. Failing this, he suggests, they should be suspended. “God knows we can no longer morally or financially afford to ignore or cover up these problems. We need to once again address our concerns to the salvation of the souls of our clergy.”

Fr. Gould is careful to make a distinction between active heterosexual priests and active homosexual priests. **The heterosexuals are typically driven by a fleeting passion for an individual woman, he says, while homosexuals are more often driven by a disordered appetite that they seek to satisfy with anyone who can be used, even if it means preying upon the innocent and defenseless.** It’s a controversial position to take, he knows, but in his experience the evidence bears it out. That’s why it’s important to understand what has come to be known as the **“gay subculture” within the Catholic priesthood and among the activist Catholic laity.** As with all subcultures, those within them tend to **“promote their own” while discriminating against those who don’t support their particular agenda.** In the case of a “gay” subculture, he says, it only follows that this exacerbates the problem.

The fourth group consists of what Fr. Gould calls the “average Joe,” the priest who works diligently, hears confessions, says his Mass, prays his Rosary, and tries to teach the authentic teachings of the Church. “But if you don’t go after the third group,” he warns, “don’t be surprised to find that **members of the fourth group**

are going to wobble into the third group. Because they're going to reason that it really doesn't seem to matter much anymore."

The problem in the ranks of the priesthood involves faith and morals. **"Wherever there's a faith problem, there's a moral problem. Wherever there is a moral problem, there is a faith problem.** That's a rule of the confessional," says Fr. Gould. "The two always walk hand-in-hand." And that points to the accompanying problem of dissent. **Dissent from the teachings and disciplines of the Catholic Church is an issue that is directly related to the moral problem.** That has to be openly recognized by everyone in the Church, he stresses.

After all, he adds, **the duty of a priest is to raise people to a higher standard of holiness, to enhance the consciences of all — believers and nonbelievers — to understand that virtues will always attract, and vices will always divide.** "We're called to save souls — and we should never lose sight of that." And, despite all obstacles, Fr. Gould is very optimistic about the future of the Catholic priesthood in the U.S. There have always, in every era, been problems in the priesthood, but these problems, as serious as they have been, have always been overcome by the grace of God and with fidelity and obedience to God's will by clergy and laity alike. It's no different now, Fr. Gould believes, as long as we don't fall prey to denial, one of the worst enemies of the priesthood and the Catholic Church in recent times.