

Spiritual Adoption

by Bishop Paul Dudley, Episcopal Moderator of Worldwide Marriage Encounter
(Excepted from Winter 1995 Volume 9, Issue 1 *Matrimony* magazine)

Shortly before Christmas, I received two letters that touched me deeply. Both were from young adults from different parishes. They informed me that they were "Spiritually Adopting" me and promising to pray daily for me and my ministry. I also received a lovely Christmas greeting from an elderly nun, Sr. Marcella Schuller. It was the 18th year in which I have received a message from her that she is still "Spiritually Adopting" me. She first made this commitment in 1976, when I was ordained Bishop. Each year I heard from her several times, assuring me of her love and prayers. It is impossible for me to fully describe the support and comfort I have experienced from this dedicated religious, as well as the young adults.

Because of such personal experiences, some years ago, I invited our Marriage Encounter Couples to consider "Spiritually Adopting" one of our seminarians. Many have done this through the years. The words of one of these young men, now ordained, Fr. Joseph H. Vogel, best expresses the marvelous grace this has been to the seminarians and the family.

"While I was in the seminary a young married couple, Wayne & Jeannine Stueve, 'Spiritually Adopted' me. They and their small children promised to pray for me each day in their family prayers. I always found it beneficial to know that I was being prayed for by families in our diocese. It has been enjoyable to get to know this family with whom I still keep in contact. We have shared many things about both our vocations and about the reality of raising a family. We have become good friends and for this I thank God!"

What do we mean by "Spiritual Adoption" of a Bishop, Priest, or Seminarian? It simply means that you and your family will pray specifically for this person perhaps at Holy Mass, family prayer or at meal time. You might have a photo of this person in your home as a reminder. You could drop him a note at Christmas, his birthday or on other occasions during the year. Seminarians do not get much mail. Such a note could be a great boost for him. You could even invite him to your family for a visit.

The gift of celibate priesthood is not appreciated as much in our sex-saturated society as it was years ago. Furthermore, some of the scandalous and painful conduct of a very, very few disturbed priests, have tarnished the priesthood. The media love to broadcast such deviant behavior of a sick and tiny minority of our clergy. Such publicity surely affects the morale of many priests and seminarians. How I pray that our Marriage Encounter families take leadership in affirming and praying for Bishops, priests, and Seminarians. Needless to say, this can easily (and should) be applied to religious women and men.

Our Lord prayed for his first priests, the apostles, the night before he died (John 17). Please make time to read this beautiful chapter of St. John's Gospel. May you continue our Lord's prayer today by praying for the successors of these apostles and our future priests.