

From German Shepherds to shepherding Germans (and many others)

Meet Our Priests

This week's featured priest:

Father
Jim Dieker

YEAR FOR PRIESTS



What was it that made you want to be a priest?

It was a growing consciousness of the possibility of becoming this particular instrument of God's grace that began with the young vibrant pastor of my parish at the time of my First Communion, Father Robert Pflumm. It was being part of a large Catholic family that gave importance to participation in the Church and respect for the priest. It was the experience of life that revealed the hunger and thirst for more than just the material. It was the powerful presence of Pope John Paul II as Vicar of Christ for the majority of my adult life.

Was there a particular individual who inspired you to become a priest?

Father John Lavrih was a very seasoned and dedicated pastor who was my pastor in my early days of practicing the profession of Veterinary Medicine. As a refugee, his life story was impelling, but his charismatic faith was intoxicating. He prayed for vocations constantly. I went to him on a whim to learn German. We never got around to studying German, but discovered my real search was for faith and direction in my personal life.

Who were people who encouraged you in your vocation?

Ironically, I never felt much support from the Catholic Community. It seemed in general, the Catholic faithful were more comfortable with the Veterinarian profession as a value than the priesthood. It was a friendship with

an elderly Christian Church member, who as a child had not been allowed to even associate with Catholics, that I was challenged to own my faith. It was a discernment that involved dating a non-Catholic who was very strong in her non-Catholic faith. It was a non-Catholic client on hearing of my decision who noted St. Paul's discernment of his celibacy and encouraged me in the willingness to leave practice to go to seminary.

What do you like most about being a priest?

The powerful freedom of priesthood to be with people at the most spiritual moments of their lives is the great wonder and blessing of priesthood. It is being an instrument of communion with God and with one another.

What has been one of the greatest challenges you face in your ministry?

The greatest challenge is the constant grumbling and complaining about really petty differences and human insecurities within the local church. It is a great sadness to lose the practice of the faith in Jesus Christ over a few words said or left unsaid, or a gesture misinterpreted or simple dislike of someone or something in the Church.

What has been one of the highlights, so far, of your priesthood?

Every Sunday Mass is a highlight, but I remember and still am affected greatly by the opportunity to pilgrimage to Rome during the Jubilee Year of 2000. This was a gift of a good friend

and mentor, Father Ken Schuckman. I was so impressed with at once the smallness, and at the same time, the greatness of the Roman Catholic Church.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I like to garden, to cycle (that is without a motor), to go to the farm, to watch movies, to do small handyman projects, to read.

If you could take a vacation anywhere in the world, where would you go?

I have tried twice to instigate pilgrimages to the Holy Land and to Greece and Turkey, but both times the trips have been cancelled for various reasons. And yet, I really feel more interiorly drawn to know the third world countries of Africa and South and Central America. For economy, a good week working outdoors on a Kansas farm without the responsibilities of the priesthood is always attractive.

What are your hobbies?

I find it hard to commit consistently to quality time reading books, but I have greatly enjoyed listening to books on tapes as I drive more than 30,000 miles a year, most of them alone. I am currently listening to *The Heart of a Soldier, A True Story of Love, War and Sacrifice* by Capt. Kate Blaise recording her and her husband's experience in serving in the military in Iraq from their small town Missouri roots. I like fooling around with digital pictures and find the technology an astounding way to create images.