CONSIDER YOURSELF ONE OF THE FAMILY

In the musical *Oliver!* (1960), Fagin welcomes young Oliver to his gang of youthful pickpockets by singing:

Consider yourself at home.
Consider yourself one of the family.
We’ve taken you so strong,
It’s clear we’re going to get along.

He even invites Oliver to become so relaxed as to consider himself “part of the furniture.”

Despite the criminal overtones of Fagin’s character and his gang of young thieves, this scene, welcoming an abandoned and frightened child into an existing community, has endeared itself to generations of theater- and movie-goers (and television and video watchers).

It could serve as well as an important reminder of a new task to be taken up by Catholic clergy in this country: welcoming new members of the presbyterate who have come to the United States from other nations. Whether newly ordained or involved in ministry for several years, priests born outside the United States comprise an increasingly larger percentage of our nation’s clergy. Some of these priests have lived in the United States, at least for a few years, but many others—called “international priests”—have not been in the United States until they arrive to complete their seminary formation or to take up their ministry.

Consider the numbers: In 2003, the Diocese of Tucson welcomed five newly ordained priests—all of them from Mexico. And in 2004, that diocese welcomed three new priests—all of them from Nigeria and all from a religious order that prepares African priests for “missionary” work in the United States. These three brought the total number of African priests serving in Tucson to thirteen—twelve percent of the total number of priests serving parishes in the diocese. This year, on May 17, eleven new priests were ordained for the Archdiocese of Chicago. None of them was born in the United States. Five came from Poland, graduates of a program developed to prepare Polish priests specifically for service in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Four more (two from Mexico and one each from Ecuador and Colombia) came through a similar program for Spanish-speaking seminarians; and two came from Tanzania, formed initially in a program for African and African-American seminarians at Chicago’s St. Joseph College Seminary. Reporting on this 2008 group of ordinands, Catholic News Service observed (May 19) that the Archdiocese of Chicago has made a special effort to welcome “foreign-born priests with open arms—and [to invest] time and money in helping them learn about American culture, the American church, and American English,” but despite such efforts, “they won’t have the familiarity with the people of many native-born priests, according to priests who work with them and with native-born Catholics who are considering the priesthood.”

**ONE-THIRD**

Tucson and Chicago are the tip of the iceberg. In a survey titled “The Class of 2008: Survey of Ordinands to the Priesthood,” the Center for Applied Research on the Apostolate (CARA) reports that fully one-third of those ordained for the U.S. Catholic Church this year are foreign-born—a percentage that has remained the same for two years now, up from thirty-one percent in 2004 and twenty-two percent in 1999. The largest numbers this year, as in previous years in this century, have come from Mexico, Vietnam, Poland, and the Philippines, but newly ordained priests responding to the CARA survey identified a total of thirty-one countries of origin.

Many of these foreign-born and international priests are older men, whose cultural and ecclesial expectations have become somewhat fixed, and who are unlikely to be able to adapt easily to new social situations, a somewhat different ecclesiology, and a different approach to pastoral ministry than they might be used to. For example, five of the ordinands this year are age sixty-five or older (the oldest is seventy-six). One of the Vietnam-born priests is forty-six. The average age of this year’s ordination class is thirty-six for diocesan priests and thirty-nine for priests in religious orders; more than one-third of those ordained are in their thirties.

In addition to the problems they face in adapting to American culture
in general and Catholicism in the United States, many of these priests will be serving communities with cultural backgrounds that differ markedly from their own. For example, some of them will probably be working in Hispanic/Latino communities, since the percentage of priests with a Hispanic/Latino background ordained this year (sixteen percent of those responding to the CARA survey) is far too small to serve the Hispanic/Latino Catholics in the United States (thirty-five percent of U.S. adult Catholics). And many of the priests from Asian, Pacific Islander, or native Hawaiian backgrounds (twelve percent of ordinands responding to the CARA survey) will probably not be needed by parishioners with a similar background, who represent only three percent of U.S. Catholics.

HELPING THEM ADAPT

One of the first introductions to the U.S. Church that many foreign priests and seminarians meet is considerably less palatable than others might be and makes them feel immediately suspect: a criminal background check on any priest who plans to serve in a diocese, as required by the Dallas Charter on clergy sexual abuse. The Diocese of Richmond, like other dioceses, also requires letters of recommendation from the local bishop or religious superior of foreign priests and from a priest’s peers. But once a seminarian or an international priest is accepted for service, he participates in a program, offered by at least some dioceses, to help such priests adapt more quickly to service in U.S. parishes. These inculturation seminars are offered at several seminaries and centers in the United States. Seminar topics include Church structure, the roles of clergy and lay people in the parish, time management, language, attitudes toward women, collegiality, and money management. Other dioceses, such as the Diocese of Dallas, Texas, offer “accent reduction” classes, in which language teachers help foreign-born priests learn “how to talk like an American,” according to The Dallas Morning News (June 16, 2007). One of the priests in that class said: “I need to be understood. Being a missionary, the primary task is to preach and to bring the Gospel of Christ to the people.”

Despite such inculturation programs, many priests feel that they’ve been thrown into the water of ministry and told to sink or swim. In an article in the National Catholic Reporter (February 24, 2006), Patricia Lefevere quoted one Polish-born priest in his forties: “Nobody told us about the situation here or how to function. It was like, ‘OK, we’ll send you and try to do the best you can… If you swim, fine. If you don’t, you die.’” His story, like those of other international priests serving the Catholic Church in this country, is found in Dean R. Hoge and Aniedi Okure, op. International Priests in America (The Liturgical Press, 2006)—a groundbreaking sociological study of these priests. Hoge and Okure make the point that sixteen percent of the priests serving in the United States since 1985 are foreign-born, and the number is rising. But many Americans, they report, prefer not to have these priests in their churches, saying the language and cultural differences are too great, and some lay people, native-born priests, and diocesan officials believe that the screening of such priests isn’t adequate before they arrive for service in the United States.

Aniedi Okure told Lefevere about the dislocation felt by many international priests. Like all expatriates, they suffer disconnection from family, friends, support systems, and peers. They abandon a familiar culture and have to adapt quickly to a new one. In addition, he said: “The new priest comes into a new church, and in a few weeks he has to learn a new liturgy and a new theology, but he also has to learn where to catch the train, how to get a driver’s license, use the phone, do his laundry, maybe cook, and how much he should tip. Even the light switch may be all new to him.”

ONE OF THE FAMILY

Native-born priests and priests who have been in the United States for some time are often the ones who must help a foreign-born newly ordained priest or an international priest adapt to parish ministry here. It is not enough to rely on diocesan inculturation programs to do the job. We have the responsibility, of course, to make sure that these priests understand “how we do things around here” in terms of pastoral ministry, liturgical practice, and other ecclesial matters. We also have to help many of these priests adapt to the roles played by lay people in general—and women in particular—in the Catholic Church in the United States, and we have to help some of them abandon an overweening clericalism that would set them apart from lay people and their daily interests and concerns.
More than that, we need to help these priests feel that they are, indeed, part of the family, and to do that, we may need to learn about the culture in which the newly ordained or newly arrived priest grew up. Some international priests come from highly structured cultures, in which a young man is not allowed to take action or join a group unless given permission either by the oldest person involved or by the person with the senior role. Such a cultural background might keep a young priest, for example, from joining other clergy and staff to watch the evening news, if the pastor doesn’t invite him into the room, or from joining a group at a clergy retreat, if the oldest priest in the group doesn’t make him feel welcome. But if we’re unaware of cultural expectations, we may be unprepared to assist a brother priest’s transition to a new culture. At our recent NPM Eastern Regional Convention (East Brunswick, New Jersey, June 30–July 3), one of the plenum speakers mentioned that she had worked with pastors who were so sensitive to the problem of cultural transition faced by their parishioners that they visited the home countries of growing cultural communities in their parishes, in order to learn more about the expectations, attitudes, family structures, and even the staple foods of their parishioners. We may not be able to make such visits to learn about these matters as they affect a new priest, but we can certainly do what we can to learn about his culture in order to make him more welcome as a brother.

Because these priests may feel embarrassed about their lack of familiarity with American culture and mores, we may need to find ways to inculcate them that will preserve their personal dignity. So instead of simply showing them how to get to the train station, we might invite them to join us on a trip to the city, or we might want to ask them to join us for a concert or a movie, rather than merely showing them the list of cultural events going on in town. We might want to make them our partner for parish events (even bingo), walking with them as older brothers, rather than presuming that they will be able to interact with parishioners on their own.

In other words, we need to take seriously our talk about the “brotherhood of the priesthood” and put it into practice in very routine ways. Our invitation and willingness to be brothers to the priests who are now serving in the United States and to help them experience aspects of life that we take for granted can open opportunities to build the kinds of relationships that invite dialogue and awareness in less threatening ways. After all, it’s hard to deal with ecclesiastical expectations of cooperative ministry if a priest feels uncomfortable, alienated, and embarrassed because he doesn’t know how to work the rectory’s washing machine.

**Dual Unity?**

Cardinal Lubomyr Husar of Kiev, the major archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Church—the largest of the Eastern Catholic Churches—has proposed a system of “dual unity” in which Eastern Catholic churches would be in full communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople as well as with Rome. Patriarch Bartholomew I, the Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople, responded favorably to this suggestion in an interview with the magazine *Cyril and Methodius*, according to the Religious Information Service of Ukraine (RISU). The patriarch acknowledged that such a restoration of unity would require study, and important differences would have to be overcome, but he affirmed that “the mother Church of Constantinople holds the doors open for the return of all her former sons and daughters.”

Such unity might come about through a suggestion that Cardinal Husar has been making for years: the creation of a unified patriarchate for Ukraine for Catholics as well as Orthodox Christians. Both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict have expressed some interest in that suggestion, though the Vatican has not yet taken any practical steps in exploring the possibility.

**Training Seminarians Musically**

Dr. Paul F. Ford, who is on the faculty at St. John Seminary in Camarillo, California, teaches practical courses on music and the liturgy for all candidates for priesthood and the diaconate. What follows is his description of the basic musical training that all seminarians and deacon candidates receive. For more information, consult Paul’s website at http://www.pford.stjohnsem.edu/ford/index.htm.

All priesthood students fill out a music background questionnaire and go through a basic pitch matching, range finding, and posture and breathing assessment. First-year students get thirteen hours of solfeggio and basic sight reading as well as the principles of liturgical music (soon to be based on the USCCB document *Sing to the Lord*) and some hands-on music planning as part of the four-unit Introduction to Liturgy course.

Last-year students get another thirteen hours of rehearsal (as part of the three-unit presiding course) for singing as deacons and priests as well as singing and planning for the Triduum and their Mass of Thanksgiving. They are expected to sing when they preside at the liturgy of the hours and at Eucharistic benediction; and they have to present a video recording of themselves singing Mass in order to get credit for the course.
All students are expected to offer their musical abilities in chapel at least as a co-cantor; and the students have formed seven groups (among them Vietnamese, Spanish, Ugandan) which lead music at daily Mass. In addition, there is a seminary choir for special events, and the schola, which sings one Mass a week.

His greatest reward, Paul says, is when a newly ordained class returns in the fall to celebrate their first seminary Mass as priests, and they sing the Eucharistic Prayer, using one of the chants in the Roman Missal (Sacramentary).

WE WERE THERE

More than one hundred clergy members and friends of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians participated in this year’s three NPM regional conventions. The largest clergy group—nearly fifty priests and deacons—was at the Central Regional Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. More than forty clergy members registered for the Eastern Regional Convention in East Brunswick, New Jersey, and as we go to press we expect about thirty-six clergy participants at the Western Regional Convention in Los Angeles, California.

Watch future issues of Clergy Update for information about special clergy programs at the 2009 NPM National Convention in Chicago (Rosemont), Illinois, July 6–10.