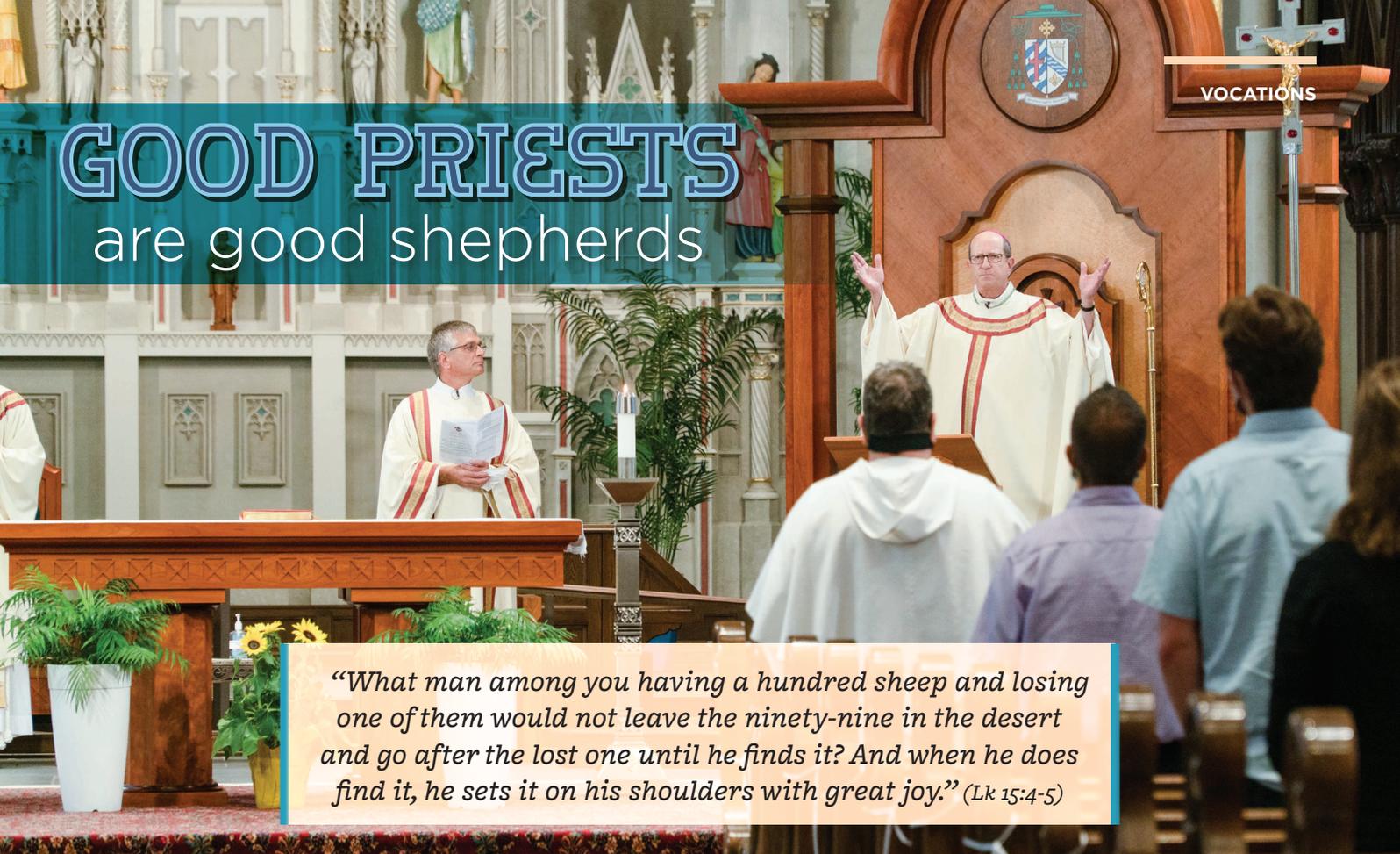


GOOD PRIESTS are good shepherds



“What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy.” (Lk 15:4-5)

I love this Scripture passage because it says so much about who God is. So many people in our world are looking for something. They are looking for meaning – and many times, in all the wrong places. This passage from Luke reminds us that *God is looking for us*. God created the world, and us, for love and friendship. And love and friendship are authentically experienced when they are mutual. It wasn't just that God desired our love and friendship. The impetus for God's creative work was that he desired to love us and befriend us.

COVID has been difficult for many of us. But we have also seen some very heartwarming moments of humanity's goodness over the past year. I witnessed one of those moments with Father Len Sudlik, pastor of St. Robert of Newminster Parish in Ada. About a month into the pandemic, Father Len and I had developed a routine. We would meet at the parish office around 11 a.m. for Mass. One day after Mass, he said to me, "I have some parishioners to call." This piqued my interest and I asked, "What's going on? Anyone I should keep in prayer?" He responded, "No, no. I am calling some of our elderly parishioners who are alone to check in on them and see how they are doing." Wow. In that moment, my love, respect and admiration for Father Len grew tremendously. This was a man

who loved his people – who loved his flock! I thought to myself, "This is what pastors do. This is what priests who imitate Christ the shepherd do. They seek out their flock and look for the ones who may be struggling, hurting or lost in order to bring God's love during difficult times."

Priests imitate Christ's search for humanity. Sometimes, it is a phone call. Sometimes, it is a friendly email to check in. Most times, however, it simply is remembering. It is remembering that the people in our parishes are going through some difficult moments. It is remembering to say after Mass, "Hey, I'm still praying for you." These are signs that these members of our flock aren't forgotten. They aren't suffering alone. They have a pastor and priest remembering them in prayer. This is what Father Len does so well. This is what priests do as imitators of Christ the shepherd.

And so maybe the important encouragement for us is to stop looking. Stop looking for meaning in social media. Stop looking for love and affirmation from unhealthy or superficial things of this world. Stop looking. Instead, maybe what Christ wants us to do is to let ourselves be found – by the God who is seeking us and pursuing us, the God who desires love and friendship with us. †

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FATHER STEPHEN DURKEE
is director of priestly vocations for the Catholic Diocese of Grand Rapids.