

New St. Thomas rector to fish for seminarians

By DAVID MYERS

Father Dennis Martin, who officially was installed as the new president/rector at St. Thomas Theological Seminary Sept. 27, has a new vision for the seminary.

He wants to see "a more vibrant faith community which provides the atmosphere for everything that we do here."

He explained: "What you and I do here will be empowered by attempting to 'put on ...Jesus Christ' (Romans 13:14).

"St. Vincent de Paul was convinced of this: '(Our work, yours and mine) is the continuation of the occupation of Jesus Christ, and therefore human industry can do nothing...unless God is involved in it.'"

One of his proposed programs involves "distance learning," a plan designed to include individuals who otherwise may live too far from a seminary or pastoral center to receive instruction.

Students may go on to receive a master of arts degree in pastoral ministry.

"Many dioceses are interested in doing this sort of thing," Father Martin said. But to do so, "We must have a strong core here."

Father Martin also intends to contact bishops across the nation, encouraging them to send seminarians to St. Thomas. He explained that a portion of the donations which the seminary receives will be used for grants to help cover tuition.

Father Martin comes to the seminary with the "advantage of comparing experiences of 25 years ago and today," he said.

In 1968, he served as director of seminarians at St. Thomas. In a statement issued to the Register for an article last April, Father Martin described the seminary of 1968 as barely having enough room for all the candidates.

"Twenty-five years ago, we had an enrollment of 265

seminarians...on both the college and graduate theology levels," he explained.

Today, the average number of seminarians studying for the priesthood is 40, due largely to the seminary eliminating the college level department.

In 1968, the average seminarian was middle-class and educated in Catholic grade and high schools, while today they come from a more varied background.

Many enter the seminary from the business world "five to 15 years out of college," their previous education more from public schools than Catholic, Father Martin explained.

And today, he added, it's more from a personal conviction that they enter the seminary than at the urging of family.

A problem not contended with 25 years ago was that of pedophilia in the priesthood, one which Father Dennis Martin does not intend to ignore.

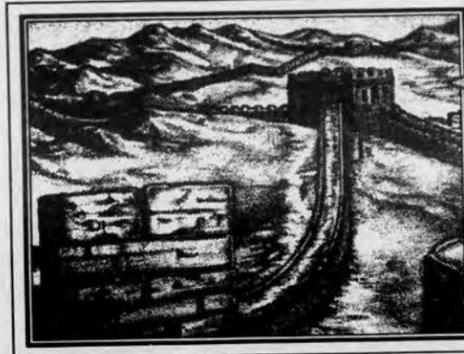
"We will continue to emphasize the value of celibacy, commitment and fidelity..." Father Martin said, adding that he intends to utilize noted guest speakers to discuss the subject.

"Times change; however, the mission of the Catholic Church remains the same: preaching the Kingdom of God as Jesus did," he said.

"My 31 years of being a priest have been devoted to seminary and ministry preparation work. I am happy to take on this responsibility of president/rector."



FATHER Dennis Martin and former president of St. Thomas Father John Rybolt. James Baca/DCR Photo



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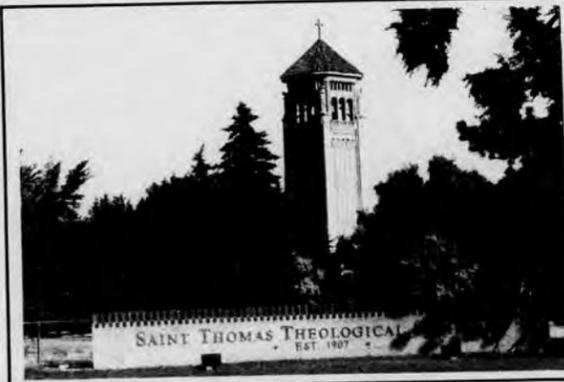
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