

EVANGELIZATION

Sowing seeds for Gospel of life priest's ministry

Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk a familiar face to Catholics who hear him speak on bioethics

By Sean Gallagher

Diocesan priests ordinarily serve in parishes, hospitals or schools.

You won't normally see them traveling around the country as a specialist on both the scientific and moral concerns swirling around today's hot-button bioethical issues, testifying before legislative committees, speaking on university roundtable discussions or making the rounds on radio and television shows.

Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk, however, is no ordinary diocesan priest.

When he affiliated as a seminarian with the Diocese of Fall River, Mass., in 1995, he had in hand a doctorate in neuroscience from Yale University and had just completed three years of post-doctoral work at Harvard Medical School.

Yet, his response to God's call wasn't a sudden change in his life. He knew for years that God was calling him to be a priest. Before he entered seminary, however, he already felt that his call was out of the ordinary and involved learning the "languages" of both science and faith.

"Science is a language of its own," said Father Pacholczyk, the director of education for the Philadelphia-based National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC).

"It entails an entire vocabulary and an entire way of reasoning and thinking. And I really felt, because it is so influential in our society as an authoritative form of language, that I had to learn that language in addition to the language of faith."

Responding to a need

While at Yale, Father Pacholczyk was troubled when some colleagues became involved in testing a treatment for



Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk CNS PHOTO BY

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Parkinson's disease that involved implanting cells from aborted babies into patients' brains.

"There was huge pressure to do this," he said. "There were editorials in The New York Times and all the major newspapers saying that this could be the cure of Parkinson's and we needed to get federal government funding for this."

More troubling developments in bioethics emerged when Father Pacholczyk was a seminarian in Rome.

The announcement to the world of the cloning of Dolly the sheep was a trigger that led him to studying bioethics at Rome's Lateran University.

Almost as soon as he returned to the United States in 2000, Father Pacholczyk started speaking on bioethical issues.

"Every time I would give a talk, I would get an invitation for another talk or two," Father Pacholczyk said. "And before I knew it, I was doing this almost full time."

Finally, in 2003, John Haas, president of the NCBC, asked him to be a part of its staff. After receiving permission from his bishop, Father Pacholczyk accepted the invitation and has ministered in the organization ever since.

Preaching life

Father Pacholczyk greatly enjoys his ministry, even though he "never could have predicted" this is where he would end up. In addition to his many speaking engagements, he helps train clergy, religious and lay members of hospital ethics committees and organizes the NCBC's bian-

nual bishops' workshop.

He sees his ministry as prophetic and part of the Church's mission of evangelization.

"It's part of preaching the Gospel of life, which is ... sorely in need of clear articulation in a very, very confused culture," the priest told Our Sunday Visitor. "All the rest of what we preach doesn't have meaning if life itself is not given its due place.

Proclaiming the Gospel is often likened to Jesus' parable of the sower of the seed. "I see my work as an invitation from the Lord to cast seed far and wide," he said. "I really hope that some of that seed will fall on fertile ground, but I don't look for the results myself.

"I trust that God knows what he is doing, and if I'm faithful to what he is calling me to, then those who need to hear it, will hear it and perhaps be activated, perhaps be stimulated to be more courageous and more forthright in engaging some of these major issues of the day."

Sean Gallagher writes from Indiana.