

## **In the Heartland Giving Our Lives**

**By Bishop Richard Pates  
Bishop of Des Moines**

A young man whom I had come to know in his high school years recently contacted me. He had been selected to attend a college which was very prestigious. It enhanced his reputation as a gifted young man.

Much of the motivation for attending such an institution was based on idealism – a call to service. He wants to give his life in a manner that truly helps others and develops authentic community. His values certainly merit admiration.

Like so many who experience initial separation from family and that which is familiar he suffered withdrawal and loss early on. He questioned as to whether this new step was advisable. He seemed to be giving up so much with little in return.

As time passed, he also realized that he was being initiated into a routine that was gradually taking over and in a sense was causing the emptying of himself. It was discipline and rigor that were preparing him to be fully receptive to a way of life that the leaders of the school wanted him to eventually be fully committed to and instinctively responsive to.

While this discipline was taking hold he began to grapple with the question: Is this truly what I want to give my life to? In other words, the achievement of the proposed career required the total investment of himself. In the end, would his heart be there when he would finally be ensconced in this way of life?

His thinking has led him to embrace a realization. Yes, he needs discipline, he needs sacrifice in order for him to achieve what he feels would be a rich fulfillment of his heart's yearning. But is

the career before him able to attain that? He is wrestling with the question, is this where I want to place on the line all that I am? Is the outcome worthy of the heavy investment? In his young, idealistic mind the one word that surfaces is love. In the Christian tradition love involves giving of oneself for the sake of others, somewhat of an anomaly in a culture that hangs by the dictum “Me first.”

I pray for my friend and naturally encourage him to pursue the direction of his heart. His situation, without extensive stretch, can also apply to us in our journey of Lent – which we are now in the midst of.

We know that in the achievement of something personally significant we need to have discipline and intense focus based on an outcome that truly motivates – which moves us beyond our lethargy. The season of Lent with its practices of penance, prayer and almsgiving contributes to our getting in shape and opening our eventual empty selves to be filled with the Lord in order to spur us to lead a more meaningful and value laden life, a life of love.

This empty receptacle, our individual life, needs to be intentionally filled with that which gives our lives high purpose and direction. Like my young friend, what he desires to do needs to be an expression of love – taking on the life of Jesus in which this very love reaches its highest expression.

Easter is four or so weeks away. You owe it to yourself to use this preparatory time to continue the Lenten disciplines you have undertaken. Such make you free to receive and live that new life which Jesus comes to share with us. The ultimate purpose and meaning in our lives are thereby experienced.