

Emphasizing the human, caring face of the Church

"People feel that the Church has become more compassionate, the structures are not so imposing and people feel more free to come to the Church with their problems": Father Mark Buckley

By Eileen Argyris

Roman Catholics today see their church as a more compassionate and understanding entity than in the past.

Father Mark Buckley, the new parish priest of the churches of St. Francis de Sales, Colborne, and St. Mary's, Grafton, says his duties counselling Catholics of this diocese seeking annulment of marriage "has taught me a lot about the way God works in the lives of people for healing."

Annulment, he says, is a "sensitive topic," and may be perceived by some as "the Catholic form of divorce." But, he says, that is not the case.

Divorce is the dissolution of a marriage, but annulment declares in effect that no true joining of partners ever took place.

He describes such cases as "something that was never meant to be." The persons involved, he says, "may have made the wrong choice of a partner."

Fr. Buckley grew up in the city of Peterborough and was ordained Aug. 5, 1988.

He served for seven months as the pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Hastings and is the Judicial Vicar for the

Peterborough Diocese, presently in the process of completing his Ph.D. in Canon Law from St. Paul's University, Ottawa.

It was in his capacity as Judicial Vicar that he came to be involved in annulment as an issue within today's Church.

But there are many other issues.

He says he is looking very much forward to parish work in Colborne and Grafton. On one of his first visits to Colborne, he says, he called in to the East Northumbria Community Care Drop-In Centre and volunteered his services, looking for a way to get involved in the community and meet some of its needs.

Toward the end of his days in high school, he says, he began to be interested in the priesthood as a possible way of life for himself. Later, when he was in university, he began working for Bishop James Doyle of the Peterborough Diocese, doing office work and conducting interviews with people who were seeking annulment.

It was, he admits, "quite challenging" work for someone of his youth and inexperience. However, he found that Canon Law was a field that irresistably

drew him.

Although by tradition, Roman Catholic priests are unmarried, he says nevertheless lay people find most priests "quite compassionate" when they bring their family problems to them.

After all, he points out, "we all grew up in families and the things that affected our own families, also affect others."

Asked if the Church is taking a more "liberal" view of marital dissolution, Fr. Buckley stresses that compassion was always there.

"Perhaps these things that were always true are becoming more apparent. People feel that the Church has become more compassionate, the structures are not so imposing and people feel more free to come to the Church with their problems."

In an age in which the priesthood seems more and more to be made up of older and older men, Fr. Buckley is an exception.

"With the technological society we live in, the priesthood is not presented as an option", he believes. Even in parochial schools, career training in technology has taken the fore, he says, and most youngsters may not actively be encouraged to consider the priesthood as a career.

But, in his own life, "for me to be happy, I had to respond to what I felt was

God's will."

He sees the Roman Catholic clergy of today as being "less rigid and more approachable," than in the past.

The Church has grown in the same direction as the rest of society. "It's not like in the '50s when the head of the household laid down the law," he explains.

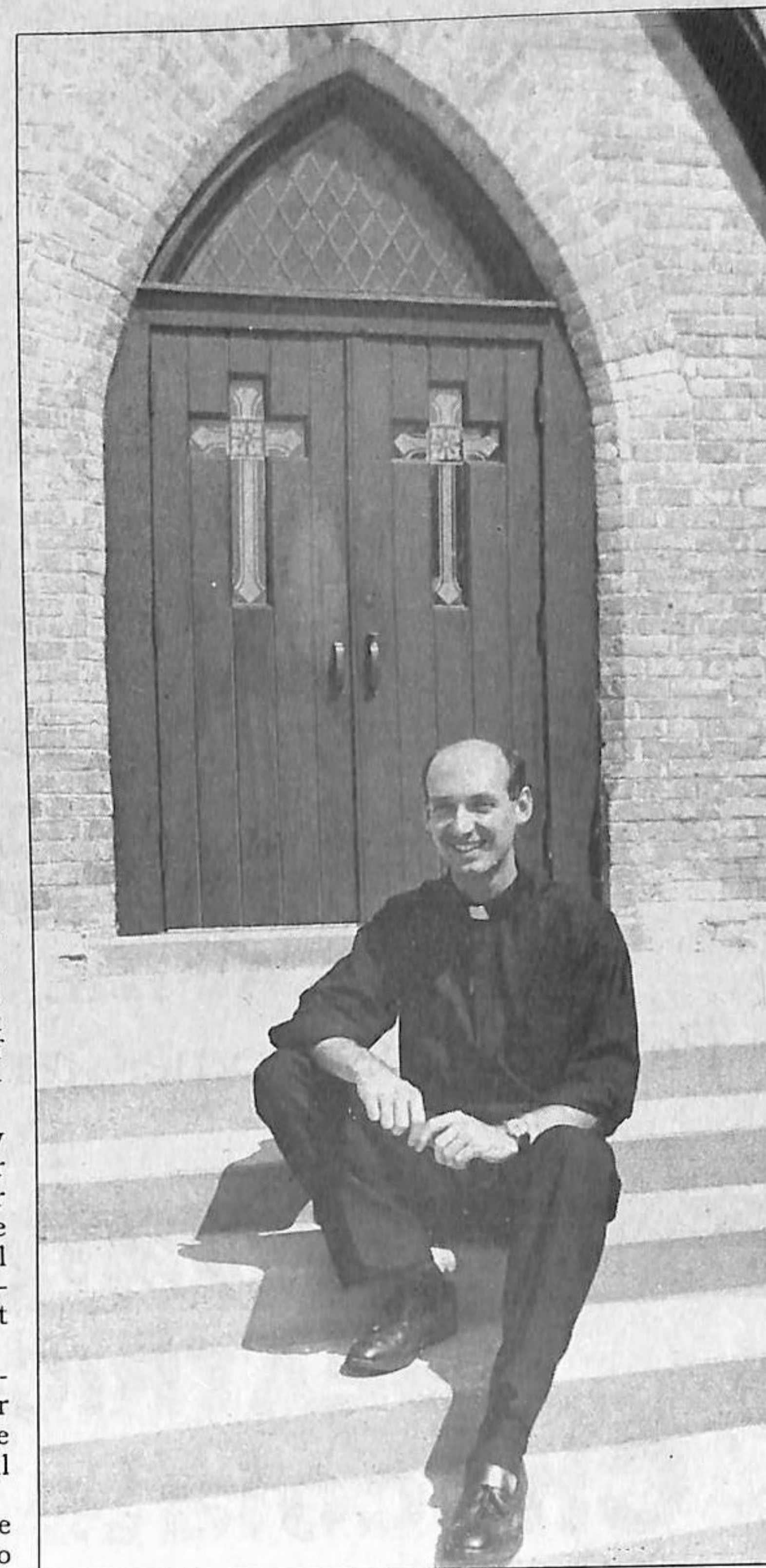
Far from wanting to lay down the law, Fr. Buckley says, "I like to be challenged. You must ask why. There is a reason why the Church teaches what it teaches."

Various options open to the Roman Catholic Church, should it choose to adopt them, such as the ordination of women or the relaxation of the rule of celibacy for priests, Fr. Buckley says he is content to leave in the hands of God and the Church hierarchy.

He explains the validity of ordination was never affected by celibacy or non-celibacy and that the lifestyle choice — total commitment to God — should be viewed in that light.

Far more pressing problems, he says, affect our communities and the parish priest has to deal with these first.

"We must concentrate on bringing faith back into our family lives. When we have that experience, the rest will take care of itself."



Experiencing faith in day-to-day life -- Father Mark Buckley is the new pastor of the Churches of St. Francis de Sales, Colborne, and St. Mary's, Grafton. Photo by Eileen Argyris

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