

Author looks for what's vital in life

By David F. Kern

LITTLE ROCK CORRESPONDENT

Paul Vitale, a 27-year-old Christ the King parishioner, believes God has blessed him with a nurturing Catholic family and inspirational friendships with several parish priests.

The Russellville native has written and published a book to spread a motivational message, based on his upbringing. This month, he is taking a leave of absence from his job as a Little Rock advertising account executive to promote his book, "Are You Puzzled by the Puzzle of Life?" in several cities across the nation.

"Lessons to Remember As You Pursue Your Purpose" is the subtitle of the book he wrote with Heather Ericson, a former colleague at Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods, where Vitale has worked since 1995.

The book prescribes several methods for obtaining success and forms the basis for motivational seminars, which Vitale conducts through his company, Vital Communications.

He grew up in St. John Parish in Russellville, where he was an altar boy from fourth grade through his graduation from the University of Central Arkansas in 1995.

Vitale credits his parents with giving him a foundation in generosity.

"I have so much respect for my father because he's found so much to give back" to others, he said. His father, Lou, brought his wife, Carole, from their Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania home to Arkansas, where he was a Volunteer in Service to America (VISTA) volunteer in the 1960s. They had planned to stay only one year, but they have been here ever since.

His mother was trained as an elementary school teacher. His father works for a social service agency in Dardanelle. He has one sibling, Matt, 29, who lives in New Orleans with this wife.

The importance of family life was instilled in him being raised as an "Italian Catholic" and through his parish life, first at St. John and now at Christ the King in Little Rock.

His positive relationship with diocesan priests at those parishes enriched his Catholic upbringing. "I've been blessed to be around a

lot of neat priests," Vitale said.

He singled out Father Joseph Correnti, who had been assigned to the Russellville parish, as the first priest who influenced him.

"He used to come over for dinner during the holidays," Vitale said. "If I ever had any questions about the priesthood, he could talk to me in a way I could understand."

His parents taught him to set high goals and how to accomplish them. The result of this upbringing was the attitude he's developed that "if you could dream it, you could do it."

His message at motivational seminars and the general tone of the book is upbeat and written in plain, understandable language.

Scratch the surface, however, with questions about religion during an interview or workshop led by Vitale and he'll freely compliment his Catholic Christian upbringing. Why take that approach instead of being more religious at the outset? Vitale is not bashful about his upbringing and beliefs, and he said he merely wants to appeal to as broad a group as possible.

"People can't get enough (discussion) of self-esteem and a work ethic," he said. "When I'm asked more direct questions about religion, I'll answer them, but I don't initiate talk about this because it turns kids off."

Starting this month, Vitale is embarking on a six-month tour, which will take him to bookstores, such as Barnes and Noble and Books a Million, in Nashville, Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, Phoenix, Colorado Springs and Los Angeles. He published the book and is sponsoring the book tour with his own money.

The tour is more than a money-making, self-promotion opportunity.

Vitale is not only planning appearances where he will market his book, he's also planning volunteer stints at homeless shelters and other facilities, such as those which Catholic Charities or the Salvation Army operates.



Paul Vitale, a 27-year-old Russellville native, begins a six-month book tour to promote his first book, "Are you Puzzled by the Puzzle of Life?"

He volunteers with Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Citizens Police Academy and Christ the King Church. He is a 1998 graduate of the Leadership Greater Little Rock Chamber of Commerce program.

The 192-page soft-cover book, published by Walsworth Publishing Company, covers topics such as encouraging people to follow their passion, achieving balance, recognizing the power of choices, the importance of building relationships, continuing the learning process and remaining motivated each day. It is available through bookstores across the state.

He started writing the book three years ago, while speaking to more than 100 groups and organizations. The concept for the book originated with his personal search for the means to success. He interviewed people throughout Arkansas and across the nation and compiled what he learned in the book.

For all his inspiration from diocesan priests, one might think the priesthood would be an attractive pursuit for him.

"I hope I'm someday blessed with a family," he said. "I long for a wife and children one day, but I'm never going to rule it (the priesthood) out until I get married."