



(Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Every vocation offers the faithful new hope

By Fr. Michael Keucher

Each year, the archdiocesan vocations office creates posters of our seminarians and of our men and women religious in formation. These posters hang in our parishes, schools and agencies across the central and southern Indiana.



Fr. Michael Keucher

One woman was next to me in the narthex of St. Joseph Church in Shelbyville as I was hanging the posters up this year. Looking at the seminarian poster, she almost began to cry as she said, “I’m just filled with so much hope when I look at these faces.” And then she folded her hands.

She hit the nail on the head!

I’ve heard some version of that statement by so many people during my years as vocations director, and I feel its sentiment strongly in my own heart. The response is always the same: folded hands in hopeful prayer of gratitude and prayer of petition.

Hope! Every vocation should fill the faithful with a great big dose of hope.

Every vocation reminds us that our Lord is still calling men and women to follow him, spend their lives for him and pour themselves out for the salvation of souls.

Every vocation requires a total gift of self. And, praise God, there are so many young folks in our archdiocese willing to lay down their lives and give that heroic “yes.”

Every vocation, as Pope Francis reminds us, “flows from the heart of God and blossoms in the good soil of faithful people”—and our archdiocese is filled with these good and faithful people.

Every vocation brings more grace and love in this world and leads to the eternal salvation of real souls.

Every vocation is connected in a mystical yet vital way to other vocations. Holy priests, for example, need holy families, and holy families need holy priests.

Hope! Each and every vocation is a source of great, great hope—for our world, our Church and our very souls.

Pope Francis has announced the upcoming 2025 Jubilee Year’s theme to be “Pilgrims of Hope.” No matter what troubles afflict our world, hope means knowing that Jesus provides for us something so much bigger: his grace, his mercy, his presence, his love—and even his salvation.

And Jesus offers all that wrapped up in a deeply mysterious and personal way inside each and every vocation issued, answered and lived.

The priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life—these are the three types of vocations we hold in special prayer and honor during National Vocations Awareness

Week. Because of them, our tabernacles and souls are not left empty. Our sins are not left unabsolved. The poor are not left destitute. The imprisoned are visited. The hungry are fed. Children are taught and formed. The eucharistic Lord is not left abandoned. The Lord’s purposes are attended to by folks who give up their whole lives for him.

For all that, we ought to join with Pope Francis in his beautiful prayer: “May hope fill our days!” Those words, I suggest, ought to be our prayer when we look at the faces on our vocations’ posters, when we read the stories in this supplement and consider the vocations of those we know and love—and even our own.

This week, we thank God for the gift of the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life. I invite you to consider how those in these vocations have touched your lives, and, if able, offer a word of support and gratitude. At the same time, we pray for a generous increase in these holy vocations.

May hope fill our days! May hope fill our hearts! May hope fill our archdiocese!

(Father Michael Keucher is director of vocations for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, dean of the Batesville Deanery and pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Shelbyville and St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Shelby County. Contact him at mkeucher@archindy.org.) †



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'The joy is immense'



Father Thomas Kovatch poses with Noah Jager, left, and Anthony Leal, both members of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bloomington, at Columbus North High School in Columbus in March 2020 after Jager's and Leal's Bloomington South High School boys basketball team won its sectional in the Indiana High School Athletic Association boys basketball tournament. (Submitted photo).

Father Thomas Kovatch finds happiness in leading others to Christ and the Church in Bloomington and around the world

By Sean Gallagher

BLOOMINGTON—Father Thomas Kovatch loves the Eucharist so much that he celebrates it for his parishioners every day—even on those days when he's at his parish but taking a day off.

"I can't imagine going a day without Mass in my life. I just can't," he said. "It's not something that I have to do. It's something that I love to do."

Father Kovatch has lived out this commitment to the Mass since 2008 when he was first assigned to be a pastor in the archdiocese, leading St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Parish in Bright. Since 2011, he has served as pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bloomington.

The effects of his commitment to the Eucharist reach out to the rest of his ministry as an archdiocesan priest, helping to draw his parishioners closer to Christ and the Church in their daily lives and even sharing the faith with them in

mission trips to Uganda in east Africa.

Wherever he goes, Father Kovatch shows his commitment to his priestly life and ministry by wearing a Roman collar. That's his way of showing his availability to others.

"How can I, as a priest, not wear the collar?" he asked. "The availability goes into that. That's my mindset. I'm a priest. I'm not just here for the people of St. Charles. I'm here for anybody that sees me anywhere."

Bringing the presence of God to others

"I just feel the presence of God so intimately during Mass that it just has a feel that I wish others could feel," he said. "And I think that some laity feel it when they're at Mass or in adoration. There's something that just grabs you."

An important way that Father Kovatch helps his parishioners be open to the presence of God at Mass and the rest of their lives is through another commitment he's made as a pastor: to hear confessions

before every Mass he celebrates.

The sacrament of penance, he said, is like the Mass because it is "another time when the presence of God is right there in the priest."

"When we absolve them, we don't say, 'Jesus absolves you,' " Father Kovatch said. "The words are, 'I absolve you.' Now, I'm not the one absolving them. Christ is using me in that sacrament."

A main reason for making himself available for the sacrament of penance is to help Catholics be reconciled to God when they have missed going to Sunday Mass, something that many recent studies have shown a majority of Catholics in the U.S. do.

Father Kovatch knows the effects of missing Mass personally. As a young adult, he fell away from the practice of his faith.

"We have to be ready to receive the Eucharist," said Father Kovatch, 66. "And if we miss Mass—which I did for

a number of years myself—then we need to have the opportunity to go and confess that before I go and receive the Eucharist, along with the other sins."

Before becoming an archdiocesan seminarian in his 40s and being ordained in 2007 at 49, Father Kovatch served in the U.S. Marines and later became a successful businessman.

He started going to Mass daily when discerning if God might be calling him to the priesthood.

"I did that before I entered the seminary and I haven't stopped that since," Father Kovatch said. "It's just very powerful."

'He truly jumped all in'

Kim Sprague saw Father Kovatch's dedication to the Eucharist and confession when he was pastor of St. Teresa and she was the parish's director of religious education.

"He always had a deep sense of

PRIEST, page 9B

Vocations Awareness Supplement highlights the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life

This issue of *The Criterion* features our annual supplement that highlights vocations in the Church to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life.

It is ordinarily published during the U.S. bishops' annual Vocations Awareness Week, which this year is on Nov. 3-9.

From the beginning, the Church has recognized that marriage is also a vocation, a pathway to holiness, to which God calls people. *The Criterion* publishes two marriage

supplements annually, usually in February and July.

In addition, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis has three offices which promote vocations. For information on the Office of Marriage and Family Life, visit www.archindy.org/marriageandfamily. For information on the diaconate, go to www.archindy.org/deacon. For information on the priesthood and consecrated life, visit www.archindy.org/vocations. †



Benedictine sisters bring hospitality to local, international communities

By Ann Margaret Lewis

The Benedictines are one of the oldest religious orders in the Church. Communities of Benedictine monks, nuns and sisters have been guided for some 1,500 years by St. Benedict's *Rule*, which lays out how his spiritual sons and daughters seek holiness together.

One of the key precepts of the *Rule* is hospitality, or welcoming the other as one would welcome Christ.

The Benedictine Sisters of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove have a special focus on hospitality, both locally in their special liturgies, which are open to the community, and internationally through acts of loving service.

Benedictine Sister Marie Therese Racine has been a professed religious for 21 years. As Our Lady of Grace Monastery's director of liturgy, she



Sr. Marie Therese Racine, O.S.B.

manages preparations for the regular liturgies of the community. They include Masses in their chapel as well as the Liturgy of the Hours, which the community prays together three times a day.

These liturgies offer many opportunities for hospitality,

Sister Marie Therese said. And yet, as she became part of the community, she found that charism particularly difficult to practice.

"I'm more of a shy person," she said. "But it's a development of a disposition of heart or an attitude of the heart to always be ready to welcome someone as Christ."

She adds that St. Benedict wrote that no monasteries should be without guests.

"All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ," she said. "So ... we show proper honor to them and meet with them with all the courtesy of love."

Sister Marie Therese keeps visitors in mind while prepping for the community's liturgies. This includes ensuring there are lectors and servers for the liturgies as well as enough supplies, and that the chapel is accessible for those with disabilities and using mobility devices.

She also directs the *schola* and handbell choirs and prepares worship aids so that visitors can sing along. Worship aids are especially important for the Liturgy of the Hours, the regular prayer of the Church with which many visitors might be unfamiliar.

"Historically, [the Liturgy of the Hours] was the people's prayer before it got really involved in monasteries," said Sister Marie Therese. "So, because it's always been the prayer of the people, we really want to have people here with us praying."

Members of the outside community, even people of other faith traditions, are always welcome at any of the liturgies, the times of which are listed on the sisters' website.

Sister Marie Therese said it is her hope, and the hope of all her sisters, that "[guests] feel welcome and comfortable and prepared to pray with us. [That they are] able to have their hearts open to encounter Christ during that liturgy. [And that] when they come, they can find peace, some healing, if that's what they need, as well as some joy."

The Benedictine charism of hospitality, however, doesn't stop with their local community. Benedictine Sister Mary Luke Jones, a professed member of Our Lady



During a recent visit in September, Benedictine Sister Mary Luke Jones (second from left) and Community of International Benedictines moderator Benedictine Sister Lynn McKenzie (far left) share joy and playfulness with orphan children in Tanzania. (Submitted photo)

of Grace Monastery for 56 years, is executive secretary to the moderator of *Communio Interantionalis Benedictinarum* or the Community of International Benedictines (CIB), which is committed to sharing the *Rule* of St. Benedict with all cultures and countries.

In that role, Sister Mary Luke has traveled extensively.

"Benedictines are the same all over the world," she said. "I have had the privilege of visiting



Guests join the Benedictine sisters in the chapel of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove for the Easter Vigil on April 8, 2023. (Submitted photo)

sisters in a number of countries and meeting with sisters from every continent, and they are all the same in regard to their commitment to hospitality. Similarly, people all over the world ... want to be respected and treated as children of God."

She noted that Benedictine communities in Tanzania, Ukraine and Australia, as well as those in the United States, work together to promote the charism of hospitality and treating others with dignity and respect.

"The role of CIB," Sister Mary Luke explained, "is to strengthen the bonds of Benedictine women worldwide, to acknowledge their work, to support their efforts on behalf of the people they serve and to unite our prayers for the world.

In so doing, sisters are fortified in their mission of prayer, work and hospitality."

At the same time, she said, "the recipients of their hospitality gain a sense of worth and dignity. Benedictine women extend themselves in service to men and women,

children of all ages through education, health care, spiritual direction, prayer."

She added, "Never counting the cost, the sisters go out of their way to meet and greet, serve and pray for the people of God—the ones before them and others from all over the world."

An example of this, Sister Mary Luke said, comes from the sisters in Ukraine, who are dealing with the daily struggles of war in their country. The Abbess Klara Swiderska of Zhytomyr, Ukraine, wrote to the CIB community, relating how their sisters had to adapt to regular shellings, gunfire and deaths that are close to their home. The abbess wrote: "We have learned that the only thing we can do and change in the world is our little heart."

By changing themselves and focusing on Christ in the other, Sister Mary Luke and Sister Marie Therese reach out and assist to the wider community in any way they can.

(To join the Benedictine sisters at their Beech Grove monastery for their regular liturgies, see their prayer schedule on their website, benedictine.com/prayer-schedule. For more information on CIB and their hospitality outreach worldwide, go to benedictines-cib.org.) †



Sr. Mary Luke Jones, O.S.B.

Formation, ministry helps Providence sister see all of who she is 'as a gift'

By Jason Moon

Special to *The Criterion*

ST. MARY-OF-THE-WOODS—More than eight years ago, Providence Sister Emily TeKolste joined the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in St. Mary-of-the-Woods in western Indiana.

"I became a Sister of Providence because I found a community whose spirit matched mine," recalled Sister Emily, previously a member of St. Anthony Parish in Indianapolis. "They are rooted in love, mercy and justice, both contemplative and action oriented. I wanted to be a part of justice-making in the world and to do it in community."

Since September 2016, Sister Emily admitted she has grown exponentially in her spirituality.

"I have learned to embrace people who express their Catholicism, Christianity and spirituality in many different ways," she said. "I have been able to find my authentic self in new ways and



Sr. Emily TeKolste, S.P.

embrace more of who I am without the shame that was taught to me when I was younger.

"I have grown to see all of who I am as a gift, even the harder parts."

Sister Emily admits the growth has been mildly difficult. But she continues to move forward.

"Sometimes, it's still hard to work through some parts of what I feel and express. I'm learning to listen for what others are telling me, trusting that God gave them to me for a reason," she said. "I've learned to be in more authentic relationship, meeting people where they are and being more honest about my own needs and boundaries in many situations."

Upon entering the Sisters of Providence, Sister Emily volunteered in the Congregation's Mission Advancement Department as well as at Providence Health Care and White Violet Center for Eco-Justice.

In her third year with the congregation, she began ministry as a high school teacher of theology and sociology at Bishop McNamara Catholic School in Kankakee, Ill. There, she was able to utilize her bachelor's degree in sociology from Xavier University in Cincinnati.

Following her profession of first vows in 2019,

Sister Emily started ministering as a grassroots mobilization coordinator for NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, where she remains to this day.

"My ministry is to work with citizen advocates, everyday people across six states who want to fulfill the call of Catholic social teaching to participate in creating the world we want to live in," Sister Emily said, "a world that values human dignity and puts policies in place to honor that human dignity."

She and other advocates meet with senators and representatives, write letters to newspaper editors, elicit phone calls and host community education programs.

She explained how NETWORK is currently advocating for a return to the 2021 Child Tax Credit, which cut the child poverty rate in half.

"We continue to advocate for returning to that expanded Child Tax Credit since we know it works to significantly reduce child poverty," she said.

(Jason Moon is communications director for the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. If you are interested in learning more about becoming a Sister of Providence, contact Providence Sister Joni Luna at 361-500-9505 or e-mail jluna@spsmw.org.) †



Franciscan priest seeks to share life in abundance with Oldenburg Catholics

By Jennifer Lindberg

Special to *The Criterion*

OLDBENBURG—It may seem odd to sing a funeral hymn at an ordination, but when Father John Barker's fellow Franciscans chanted the "*Ultima*" hymn over him, after he had just received the laying on of hands to become a priest, something eternal unfolded.

"When death's hour is then upon us, to your Son pray that he grant us death both holy and serene, Virgin Mary, Mother, Queen."

This ancient hymn to the Blessed Virgin Mary is valued so much by Father John's Franciscan province that they sing it at all special occasions.

It is a hymn about death leading to new life. On Aug. 24, Father John did die to his old self and put on the new man of the priesthood.

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, who ordained Father John, stated at the ordination Mass that the priesthood is a dying to self for the good of the people of God.

"It's never about us," the archbishop said at Holy Family Church in Oldenburg where the liturgy took place.

Father John says this dying to self is about showing the people of God how living the Catholic faith is about living a life of abundance.

"If I had a motto, it would be from John 10:10: 'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly,'" said Father John, who has served as pastor of Holy Family Parish since his ordination. "God wants us to be free and healed, and if we can frame everything in this verse, even in the most difficult circumstances, we can see everything as a gift for God."

This new life in Christ that Father John embraced in abundance has brought a lot of firsts into his life. For instance, he is the first priest to be ordained at Holy Family in Oldenburg since 1958.

He's also thought about his life anew after spending 24 years as a Franciscan brother before thinking about the path to priesthood again.

The first prompting to the priesthood began while attending Mass at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Charleston, S.C. He had thought about pursuing a pre-med college degree—his father was a doctor—but was working in the restaurant industry at the time.

He also had a strong revival in his Catholic faith. So, when the cathedral's rector asked him if he had ever considered being a priest, he was open to the idea.

After a period of discernment, he felt called to the religious life and not the diocesan priesthood. After sending inquiries to several religious communities, the Franciscans of St. John the Baptist Province in Cincinnati responded. It



Franciscan Father John Barker poses in the friary at Holy Family Parish in Oldenburg, where he has served as pastor since being ordained a priest there on Aug. 24. (Submitted photo by Jennifer Lindberg)

later merged with other provinces and is now part of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Province based in Atlanta.

He professed temporary vows as a Franciscan brother in 2000 and solemn vows in 2004.

At first, Father John thought he would take the typical path to the priesthood, but he also had a deep desire to study Scripture and wanted to focus on it.

"I'm not a good multi-tasker," Father John said.

Those early decisions led him to earn a master's degree in theology and biblical studies. He continued his education at Boston College in Boston, earning a doctorate in Scripture in 2016 and teaching at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. He also co-authored *Living the Word: Scripture Reflections and Commentaries for Sundays and Holy Days* (World Library Publications, 2019).

It was while teaching that Father John decided academia was not for him for the long term. Also, his favorite saint started showing up in prayer. On Aug. 4, 2020, the feast of St. John

Vianney, Father John felt called to the priesthood once more.

And like St. John Vianney, he wants to bring the sacrament of reconciliation to the forefront of his parishioners' lives. Father John believes so greatly in the graces and healing of the sacrament of reconciliation to help people live

well into what Father John is trying to communicate about God's abundance. The devotion comes from messages from Christ to a 17th-century nun, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. Those who keep the devotion—by going to the sacrament of reconciliation and receiving holy Communion—will receive peace in their

'You can see the power of Christ come into someone's life in this sacrament. There are times when you see people leave [the confessional] and they are so relieved.'

—Franciscan Father John Barker, pastor of Holy Family Parish in Oldenburg on the sacrament of reconciliation

the abundant life in Christ that his first decision as pastor of Holy Family was to offer confession before every Mass. The joy he has as a priest to offer the sacrament of reconciliation for his people is poignant.

"It's a celebration on both sides of the grate," Father John said. "I know people stay away from the sacrament, so I want to make it as easy as possible for people to get back to it."

While the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Catholic faith, people need to be in a state of grace to receive it—and for that, they need the sacrament of reconciliation.

Confession helps those struggling with certain sins to know that there is forgiveness and healing awaiting them, said Father John.

"You can see the power of Christ come into someone's life in this sacrament," he added. "There are times when you see people leave [the confessional] and they are so relieved."

Another way Father John is helping live out his priesthood with the people entrusted to him is starting First Friday devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is the second decision of his brief priesthood tenure, but one that he feels will bring people closer to Christ.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart fits

homes, comfort in their afflictions, all the graces necessary for their state in life and much more.

His idea to start the devotion at Holy Family began when he found a large and beautiful monstrance in the safe of the friary in Oldenburg. While Holy Family Parish has adoration from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily, Father John wanted to do something special in the church on First Fridays. That means adoration is moved for First Fridays into the main church with Benediction at 7 p.m.

In his brief time as a priest, Father John said offering a word of encouragement to his parishioners gives him a lot of joy in his ministry. Usually, at the end of a homily, he reminds people about the peace of God, ending with the encouragement of "be at peace."

It seems Father John has found that peace in the order best known for preaching it: the Franciscans. He's also learned that peace comes with God's timeline and not his own.

"I think I trust more in that now," he said.

(Jennifer Lindberg is a freelance writer and a member of St. Mary Parish in North Vernon. For more information about the Franciscans of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Province, visit friars.us.) †



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson anoints with chrism oil the hands of Franciscan Father John Barker during an Aug. 24 ordination Mass at Holy Family Church in Oldenburg. (Submitted photo)



Prayer groups commit to interceding for priests, seminarians and religious

By Sean Gallagher

GREENWOOD—The number of seminarians preparing for priestly ministry in the archdiocese has grown during the past several years, and the priest who oversees the archdiocesan vocations office looks quickly to one cause for the rise.

“I always think that the reason we have a surge in vocations right now is because people are praying in our churches and

adoration chapels so hard,” said Father Michael Keucher.

Groups of people and individuals in parishes across central and southern Indiana praying for vocations in part led the archdiocesan vocations office to develop a new prayer



Fr. Michael Keucher

resource for them.

It had 15,000 copies of “Eucharistic Adoration for Vocations” recently printed and distributed to parishes and schools across the archdiocese. The booklet includes prayers for adoration, discernment, religious, seminarians, priests, prayers written by saints, rosary meditations for priestly and religious vocations and a litany for vocations.

“This booklet is the perfect thing we can give to folks who are looking for a focused way to pray for priestly and religious vocations,” Father Keucher said. “We wanted to be able to give them the tools they need.”

This prayer by a growing number of people interceding for priests, religious, seminarians and those discerning ordained and consecrated vocations has also had a positive influence on their faith.

Fran Chigi, a member of St. Joseph Parish in Shelbyville, spoke of how her prayers for seminarians and priests have increased her awareness of the blessings and challenges of the daily life of priests.

“Because I pray for them, I think I have a better understanding of their lives, the commitment that they have and the sacrifices that they’re making,” she said.

“It’s not just a priest up there celebrating a Mass. It’s who he is and why he has committed himself, and what a great commitment it is.”

Marilyn Ross has been part of a group at Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish in Greenwood that for about 10 years has prayed a holy hour for vocations on Tuesday nights in the faith community’s adoration chapel.

“I feel like God has really called me to this,” she said. “It’s not just something that came along. Knowing that I have this commitment to pray for priests and vocations helps keep me on track with my prayer life.”

Ross’ regular prayer for vocations has also led her to action to support vocations ministry.

She and others at Our Lady of the Greenwood hosted teenage boys taking part in Bishop Bruté Days, the vocations office’s annual summer vocations camp, late one evening after a full day of activities.

“It was about 10:30 when they got to the parish,” Ross recalled. “We had make-your-own ice cream sundaes for the boys. I called it ‘Jesus and Ice Cream.’”

Father Todd Goodson, Our Lady of the Greenwood’s pastor, then took the teens to the parish church where they prayed Night Prayer, part of the Liturgy of the Hours.

“We just don’t know how we’re impacting,” Ross reflected. “And we’re not called to know. To me, we’re called to be faithful to what God is asking us to do, and he’ll bring the fruit.”

Father Goodson has started his own holy hour for vocations in Our Lady of the Greenwood’s adoration chapel at 4 p.m. on Fridays.

“I try to commit to a holy hour daily,” Father Goodson said. “I don’t always do a perfect job, but this one helps me get my holy hour in. There’s a real need for vocations. I think it’s an opportunity if someone thinks he might have a vocation to come and pray with us.”

While Father Goodson and other archdiocesan priests try to pray a holy hour each day, there is a growing number of Catholic women across central and southern Indiana who are doing the same, offering their holy hours specifically for the priests serving in their parishes.

They’re part of the Seven Sisters Apostolate started in 2011 by Janette Howe in St. Paul, Minn. The name of the ministry is taken from the way it is organized.

Seven women commit themselves to praying a holy hour on a specific day of the week for their parish priest.

From starting in the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul in 2011, the apostolate has grown in just 13 years to be present in all 50 states and 39 countries around the world.

“It just goes forward by the excitement of people understanding the need of prayer for priests,” said Howe.

In the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, there are three groups of seven women praying for Archbishop Charles C. Thompson and 14 other groups praying for priests serving in their parishes.



Father Todd Goodson, right, leads a holy hour for vocations on Oct. 4 in the adoration chapel of Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish in Greenwood. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Pam Malinoski has helped lead the group at Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish in Indianapolis for about 10 years, with one in the group praying a holy hour each day during that time for Father C. Ryan McCarthy, Holy Rosary’s pastor since 2013.

“We don’t know who they are,” she explained. “We don’t want to know who they are.”

Howe recalled that a vicar for clergy told a priest who came to him for help “that there’s someone praying for him today.”

“It’s one of the most incredible holy

‘I feel like God has really called me to this. It’s not just something that came along. Knowing that I have this commitment to pray for priests and vocations helps keep me on track with my prayer life.’

—Marilyn Ross

“There are a lot of activities in our parishes,” Malinoski said. “Having this as an option for a more contemplative way to build up the Church is a beautiful thing.”

She added that the prayer of Seven Sisters groups is a way of showing gratitude for all that priests do for them and the parish as a whole.

“Sometimes priests can be taken for granted,” Malinoski said. “As often as we ask them to pray for us and serve us in our spiritual lives, we can support that and give that back to them through our prayers in the dedicated and intentional way that the Seven Sisters do.”

Howe spoke about how the Seven Sisters Apostolate helps its members focus on the needs of priests in the present moment.

“It really slows one down,” she said. “When we’re before the Lord, we realize that we don’t need to pray for the priest’s whole life right now. We’re committing to praying for what happens in the next seven days, in a sense.”

Seven Sisters also has opportunities for men to give of themselves spiritually for priests. Its Fasting Brothers groups

have six men fast on a particular day of the week and offer that sacrifice for a particular priest. There are only six in such a group because, in the Church’s tradition, no fasting should be done on Sundays.

Seven Sisters has also developed groups of seven women called Elijah’s Helpers, who pray daily holy hours for priests experiencing a crisis in their life and ministry. Howe explained that the vicar for clergy in dioceses where such groups are established let the group leader know when a priest needs their prayers.



Janette Howe

hours I do every week,” Howe said. “It’s my favorite one.”

In leading a large suburban parish with a school, Father Goodson has many duties from week to week. So, he’s grateful for the Seven Sisters group that prays for him daily.

“It’s very edifying and helpful,” he said. “We need a lot of prayer. We have a lot of responsibilities in this challenging world that we live in. It’s very helpful knowing that there are people out there praying for us.”

Father Keucher, who has a Seven Sisters group praying for him, sees their ministry as rooted in Scripture.

“Jesus had a lot of women supporting his ministry,” he said. “I think of Mary and Martha, and then Luke mentions Joanna and Susanna and points to other women as well. We priests are *alter Christus* [other Christs], and what a joy that is. And so, we also need the support of holy women. The Seven Sisters apostolate means so much to me.”

Malinoski hopes that the prayer of the Seven Sister group in her parish and in others across the archdiocese will help all Catholics—not just priests—grow in holiness.

“There’s the idea that if your priest is a saint, then the people will be holy,” Malinoski said. “Hopefully, this will have a ripple effect through our parish. The more we can support Father McCarthy in his growth and spiritual life will come right back to us. Hopefully, that will make our entire parish more holy.”

(For more information about priestly and religious vocations in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit HearGodsCall.com. For more information on the Seven Sisters Apostolate, visit sevensistersapostolate.org.) †



This is the cover of a new prayer resource, “Eucharistic Adoration for Vocations,” developed by the archdiocesan vocations office.



Deacons share the good news at work, ‘using words if necessary’

By Natalie Hoefler

Since 2008, the archdiocese has been blessed with the ministry of men ordained as permanent deacons. Currently, 63 active deacons are assigned to parishes throughout central and southern Indiana.

Their mission is three-fold: to assist at liturgies, to serve in a ministry of charity outside of their assigned parish and to proclaim the Gospel at Mass.

Like all Catholics, deacons are also called to proclaim the Gosepl in their daily lives, “using words if necessary,” as goes the quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi.

Such daily proclamation of the good news includes their workplace.

“Deacons don’t get paid, so unless you’re retired, you still have to earn a living,” says Deacon Jerome Bessler, a battalion chief for the Washington Township Avon Fire Department.

The Criterion spoke with Deacon Bessler of St. Roch Parish in Indianapolis, Deacon Mark Schmidl of All Saints Parish in Dearborn County and Deacon Steven Tsuleff of St. Michael Parish in Brookville and St. Peter Parish in Franklin County to learn how their diaconate mission of proclaiming the Gospel plays out in the workplace.

‘Helping them find some closure or peace’

As a fireman, helping people was already part of Deacon Bessler’s job. But being a deacon added a new element to that service.

For starters, he became a chaplain for the Hendricks County Fire Department and joined a peer support group that “just listens” when firefighters and medics need to talk after a difficult run.

He also offers a listening ear while at an emergency.

“If I’m not in charge as medic on a run, I assign myself to talk with the family,” says Deacon Bessler, 56, who was ordained in 2022. “Maybe we weren’t able to revive a loved one after a cardiac arrest. Or maybe there was a suicide. It’s just being an ear for them and helping them find some closure or peace.”

“I ask if there’s a pastor or priest I can call. If I find out they’re Catholic, I can walk with them in the faith.”

Sometimes in traumatic situations, Deacon Bessler proclaims the Gospel in a more tangible way.

“I carry pocket crosses,” he explains. “If I think it will help, I’ll give one to someone and say, ‘No matter what you do, hang onto the cross. Take all your problems and give it to the cross.’”

Deacon Bessler witnesses to the Gospel at work in simpler ways, too.

“We see people that don’t really make a lot of smart choices, and those choices cause others or themselves to get hurt,” he says. The tendency is to “want to judge [them] without knowing who they are or what they’ve been through.”

“I tell them we’ve got to put ourselves in their shoes. I’ve used the phrase [from John 8:7] quite a bit, when it comes to judging people: ‘Let he who has not sinned cast the first stone.’”

Deacon Bessler witnesses without words as well. Before carrying a pocket cross, he used to carry a small rosary of 10 beads in his pocket.

“If a conversation was not heading in

the right direction, I would pull it out and put it on the table, and when I did that, the conversation would change,” he says.

Since beginning his diaconate journey several years ago, “People I never would’ve expected come up and share their faith with me,” says Deacon Bessler.

“Some guys of faith will ask me to pray for them. I used to say, ‘Yeah, I will.’”

“But now I’ll say, ‘How about we pray right now?’ And we stop and pray. That’s something the diaconate put in me is that the time to pray is right now.”

‘I just try to meet them where they’re at’

Deacon Tsuleff’s co-workers have known of his calling from the start: The week he began his job 11 years ago as a commercial production editor and videographer for Local 12 WKRC-TV in Cincinnati, he also started his diaconate formation classes.

“I don’t hide the fact that I’m a deacon,” says Deacon Tsuleff,

62, who was ordained in 2017. “When you come into my office, you’ll see a crucifix on my desk and a picture of me and my wife the day I was ordained. On the wall there’s a picture of the archbishop and Pope John Paul II, and a statue of Mary and a Bible on my bookshelf. I don’t blatantly have spotlights on anything, but they’re there.”

These silent objects are one way Deacon Tsuleff proclaims the good news at work. The second form is also silent: listening.

“The biggest thing is people know they can sit down and talk with me, and that I’ll listen and hold everything in confidence,” he says.

The nature of their faith—or lack thereof—is not an issue.

“They know what it means for me to be a Christian, and whether they are or not, I don’t force anything on them,” says Deacon Tsuleff. “I just try to meet them where they’re at. I don’t force anything.”

Deacon Schmidl’s co-workers seek him out, too—even though he works from home in his job as a regional manager overseeing building maintenance of commercial properties.

“‘Oh, by the way, before we hang



In this Oct. 16 photo outside a fire station in Avon, Deacon Jerome Bessler, a battalion chief for Washington Township Avon Fire Department, displays one of the pocket crosses he carries with him on emergency runs to share with those impacted who might find it helpful. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)

up’—that’s how it tends to be,” he says of co-workers seeking his pastoral care.

But there’s another way he says his role as a deacon helps him spread the good news at work.

“A lot of it is through organic conversation,” says Deacon Schmidl, 52, who was ordained in 2022. “I’m very open about being a deacon. So, when people ask, ‘What did you do this weekend,’ I can say I did a wedding on Friday night and a baptism on Sunday.”

Being a deacon draws lots of questions from co-workers, he says—Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

“It gives you that opportunity to

talk about the Church in general,” says Deacon Schmidl. “Some will tell me they’re Catholic but don’t go to Mass, so we’ll talk about that.”

“I get a lot of great questions just out of curiosity, and I love sharing the answers.”

One of his favorite questions concerns how much he gets paid as a deacon.

His answer: “Well, nothing here—but the eternal pay is great!”

(For more information on the diaconate, go to www.archindy.org/deacon or contact Deacon David Bartolowits at 317-236-1493 or dbartolowits@archindy.org.) †



Deacon Mark Schmidl



Items of faith adorn the desk, shelves and wall of Deacon Steven Tsuleff’s office at Local 12 WKRC-TV in Cincinnati on Oct. 22. (Submitted photo)

‘I carry pocket crosses. If I think it will help, I’ll give one to someone and say, “No matter what you do, hang onto the cross. Take all your problems and give it to the cross.”’

—Deacon Jerome Bessler, who works as a battalion chief for the Washington Township Avon Fire Department



Catholic leadership skills instilled in seminarian from a young age

By Sean Gallagher

ST. MEINRAD—Parish priests are called to be leaders. Sometimes within a few years of their ordination, they will be pastor of a parish.

That call to leadership is one of the reasons why priestly formation happens through the course of several years and involves many kinds of supervised ministry.

Samuel Hansen started to see what Catholic leadership looked like long before he became a seminarian.

He saw it as a student at St. Roch School and Roncalli High School, both in Indianapolis, in their teachers and in their administrators—including his father, Joseph Hansen, St. Roch’s principal when he was a student there.

“It was made clear to us explicitly at St. Roch, not just by my dad, but by every teacher there, that their job there was ministry as well as just educating,” Hansen said. “They were there to love you and attend to your faith.”

He saw Catholic leadership at home where he grew up with two younger brothers.

“It was always faith first,” Hansen recalled. “We dedicate ourselves to God in everything we do, whatever that might be. We give glory to God in the good times and in the bad. We’d have deep conversations together about the faith.”

And he’s seen it in archdiocesan priests, especially retired Father James Wilmoth, Hansen’s pastor at St. Roch for many years.

“You could sense it in every interaction he had with people he met,” Hansen said. “He just really belonged to the people of the archdiocese. He tried to give of himself to as many people as he could, to cast a wide net.”

Now in his fourth year of priestly formation and enrolled at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad, Hansen, 25, is embracing in his own life the models of Catholic leadership that he’s been given.

Being drawn to a ‘sacred fraternity’

Hansen’s thoughts turned to the priesthood while he was still at St. Roch School. His discernment became more focused while at Roncalli, and he realized that, no matter what vocation to which God called him, “we are called to lay down our lives for others.”

“My search for my future in general was asking how I was supposed to do that,” Hansen said.

He found encouragement for his discernment from his fellow students at Roncalli.

“If I mentioned that I was interested in the priesthood, they were so supportive,” Hansen said. “They thought it was so cool. They’d ask me questions about it. It was an environment that encouraged it. You don’t expect reactions like that from high school kids.”

Hansen ultimately decided to become a student at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Ind., after graduating from Roncalli.

Soon after arriving at the all-male college, Hansen started exercising the faith-filled leadership skills he had seen growing up, getting involved in the college’s Newman center and trying “to take a lead in building a deliberate Catholic community where I could.”

In his sophomore year in college, Hansen served as the student president of the Newman center and was drawn to “getting the Gospel out to as many people as we can.”

His continued love for his faith and taking opportunities to lead others in it led Hansen by the end of his sophomore year at Wabash to discern becoming an archdiocesan seminarian with the help of two priests: Father Douglas Marcotte, an associate vocations director for the archdiocese, and Father Sean Danda, pastor of St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg, who then served as Hansen’s spiritual director.

“They were honest about me having thoughts about the priesthood, but not really doing anything about them,” Hansen recalled. “It didn’t seem so obvious to me until I talked to Father Danda about them.”

During that time, Hansen visited Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary in Indianapolis.

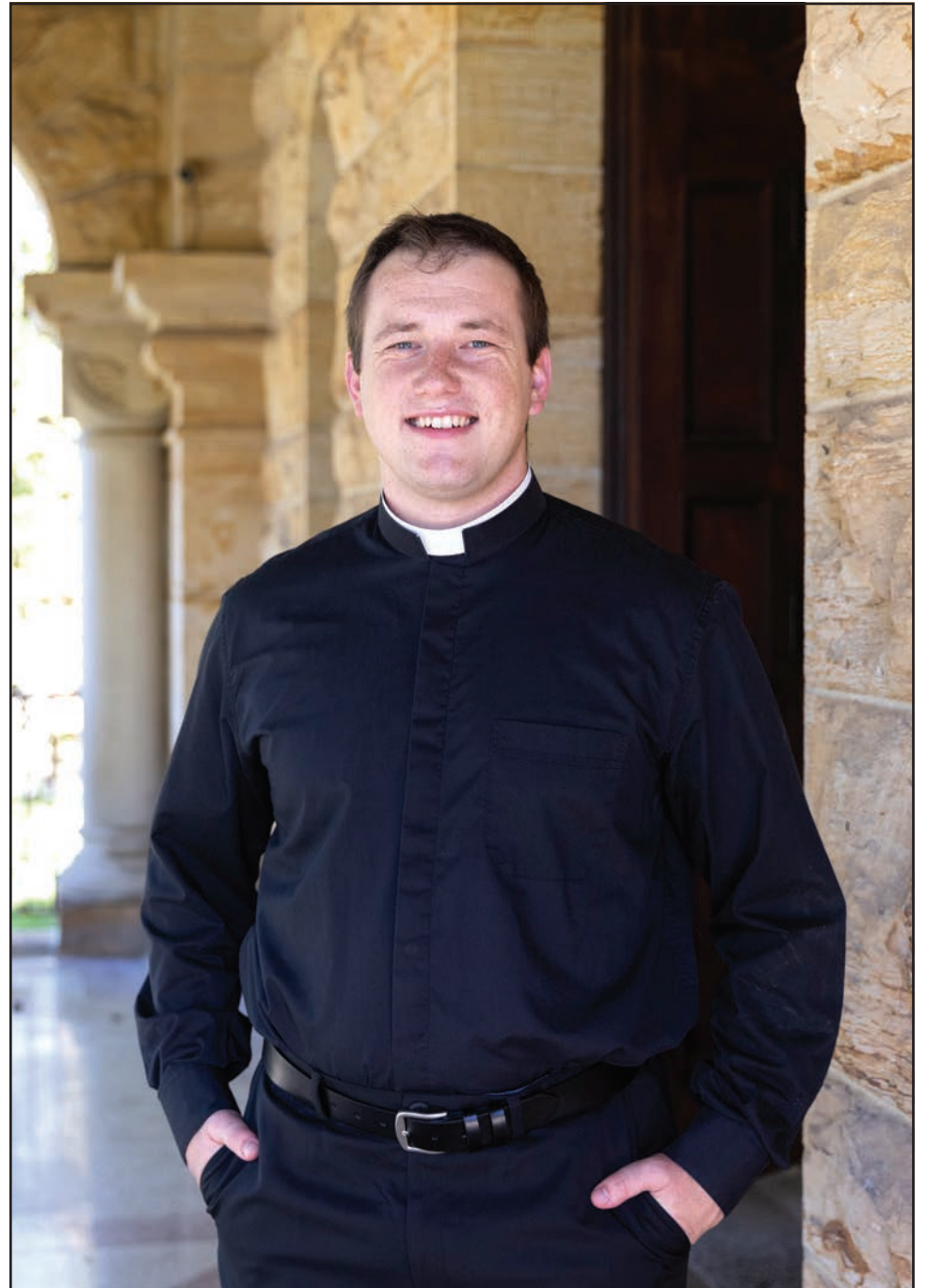
He found the fraternity among the seminarians there similar to what he had experienced at Wabash, “but under the guidance and banner of the Church.”

“A lot of what I learned in that visit was the importance of, not just fraternity, but sacred fraternity in terms of men bonding together specifically because of their faith,” Hansen said.

‘Lay it all on the line like Christ did’

In the fall of 2020, Hansen was an archdiocesan seminarian at Bishop Bruté and taking classes at nearby Marian University.

Two years later after graduating from Bishop Bruté and Marian, he began



Seminarian Samuel Hansen poses on Oct. 3 by the main entrance of Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad. A member of St. Roch Parish in Indianapolis, Hansen is in his fourth year of priestly formation as an archdiocesan seminarian. (Photos courtesy of Saint Meinrad Archabbey)

priestly formation at Saint Meinrad.

During his four years as a seminarian, Hansen has come to understand with more clarity the thread of faith and leadership woven into his life from grade school to the present.

“I don’t think I knew how to articulate it back then,” he said. “But what I was trying to do was to give my life for others, not just to do a good thing for others, but to lay it all on the line like Christ did.”

“For me, priesthood has always been the answer, and I’ve kind of come to realize that.”

That realization has happened through the formation he’s received in the classes and community life at Bishop Bruté and Saint Meinrad, but also in a trip he and other seminarians made in January to the town in Guatemala where Blessed Stanley Rother ministered as an American missionary priest and died as a martyr in 1981.

It also happened in ministry in the summer of 2021 at St. Joseph Parish in Shelbyville and St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Shelby County.

Father Michael Keucher, at the time pastor of St. Joseph and sacramental minister at St. Vincent, was his ministry supervisor.

“I don’t think he has ever met a stranger,” Father Keucher said of Hansen. “Sam takes a genuine interest in the people in front of him and is present to them. He is just the kind of guy people

like to be around. He’s fun, thoughtful, prayerful and just kind to everyone.

“Sam is a hard worker, but at the same time he knows how to have fun while doing it all. I don’t think he thinks ministry is work at all.”

The leadership qualities that Father Keucher saw in Hansen in 2021 were apparent to Mary Ann Chamberlin much earlier. She was his middle school social studies and religion teacher at St. Roch.

“He was just one of the kindest students that I ever had,” said Chamberlin, still a teacher at St. Roch. “He had a great sense of humor and still does. He was an outstanding student and worked very hard. He was in all the sports and did extracurricular activities.”

Chamberlin is happy to see such growth in Hansen, whom she has known since his time at St. Roch.

“He talked even back then about wanting to become a priest,” she said. “It gladdens my heart that he stayed with that. He has so many qualities that will make him a very good priest and pastor. He listens to people.

“He certainly has a servant’s heart. He also has the leadership style of leading by example.”

(For more information about archdiocesan seminarians and about a vocation to the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit HearGodsCall.com.) †



Seminarian Samuel Hansen plays soccer on Jan. 22 with young boys at Colegio Católico Padre Ablas in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala. He and other seminarians visited earlier this year the town where Blessed Stanley Rother, an American missionary priest, ministered and was martyred in 1981.

‘... what I was trying to do was to give my life for others, not just to do a good thing for others, but to lay it all on the line like Christ did.’

—Seminarian Samuel Hansen



SISTER MARIA

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“Everyone was very scared,” Nguyen says, her recollections aided by the memories of the adults who were in that boat. “But then what can they do? Instead, they turn to God for help in prayer.”

“The spirit of prayer and faith was so strong that, even in the midst of weakness and seasickness, all was offered up to God in faith and trust—and in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. There was a spirit of, ‘It’s going to be OK. God will help us.’ And that gave us all so much courage.”

The boat that approached theirs was owned by a fisherman, who befriended the group and towed them to the nearest landing of safety—in the Philippines. Two years later, Nguyen and her family finally made it to America.

At 5 years old, she never imagined that the true journey of her life had just begun, a journey that would eventually lead her to Indiana and the life that she believes God has always wanted for her—a life of faith as a Carmelite sister.

A moment that changed a life

On the verge of her 40th birthday—November 5—Sister Maria says, “The journey out of Vietnam gave me a grand impression of God’s existence in my life and in the life of my family.”

So has the faith of her family, who settled in California upon their arrival in America.

“Throughout my journey, my parents and grandparents played a crucial role in nurturing my faith. Each night, we would gather to pray the rosary together,” she says. “And whenever our family has a need, we all ask St. Martin de Porres for his intercession. And he has never let us down.”

The prayers and petitions were all part of her family’s approach to faith, an approach that centered on a fundamental belief:

“We were all taught that this life is very temporary and that whether we live or die, everything is in God’s hands, so let us not worry,” Sister Maria says. “I know that whatever I aspire to be in life, that if I go for it and if it’s God’s will, then it will happen. But if it is not God’s will, then I might have to sit back and do some more reflection or try something else, but not to give up.”

As that belief has shaped her life, a moment from her childhood has shaped her vocation.

It happened late in her time as an elementary school student when her father drove her home one day. Getting stuck in a traffic jam, she looked out the window and saw a small child walking with her grandfather.

“As they were walking past our car, I could see the big backpack was getting too heavy for the little girl, so her grandfather took the pink backpack off her and swung it on his back. And with the other hand, he pulled out a dinner roll from his pocket for the little girl to eat. Her face was full of joy.

“As they passed by our car, I suddenly felt the love of God the Father on all his children. Tears rolled down my eyes, because I was so touched by what I saw, but more so by what I felt inside of me. It was God loving me at every moment of life, and it was his reminder that he is with me.

“It was a moment of conversion I guess, but ever since then, I felt God’s love calling me to follow him. God’s love called me to pursue religious life so that I can remain in that love which gives me strength and courage in life.”

Yet, just like the journey of her family leaving Vietnam, her path to religious life took time.

Searching for a home for the soul, for a place to belong

After graduating from college in California, she worked at a shelter for homeless families before applying

to become a Salesian Sister. But after a year of living and working with that order, she realized it wasn’t her calling.

Two years later, a friend told her about a monastic experience at the Discalced Carmelite Monastery of St. Joseph in Terre Haute. That weekend in 2014 touched Sister Maria’s soul and led her to request living in the community, even as she struggled with the thought of leaving her family in California.

There were other struggles, too. She says moving into the monastery “was like entering into a new world.”

“I had to put a stop to some of my bad habits like talking too much. I took corrections terribly hard, and I was sensitive, so it made me feel unworthy and discouraged at times. Worst of all, we were given permission to call home only once a month. And we were given only half an hour to talk on the phone. I missed my family so much, especially my mom and dad.”

At the same time, she increasingly felt the sense that she was meant to be part of the Carmelite community.

She began caring for the community’s orchard filled with blueberry bushes, fruit trees and a flower garden. She learned about woodworking, plumbing and fixing the heating and cooling systems. Most of all, she increasingly embraced the spirit and purpose of the community.

“Our ministry is prayer for the Church, for the missionary, for those defending the Church, and for the evangelizers of the faith.

“We pray for the suffering people who go through life with one trial after the next and for all the sick who have recommended themselves to our prayers. I believe that, somehow, our intercession is going to bring some relief to the needs of others. God is so good to us, and he never abandons us, especially during difficulties.”

On the feast of the Assumption in 2018, she made her first profession of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, consecrating her life to God.

“This was a moment of immense joy for me, as my entire family and community friends gathered in the chapel to pray for me,” she says. “I felt great joy to have found a home with the Carmelite sisters. It was a blessing to be able to find a home for your soul, a place to belong and to do what you love to do—to give praise and thanks to Almighty God for his love and mercy.”

Yet as she embraced a new home with the Carmelites, she was also tugged by what was happening in her family’s home in California.

‘My mother gave me the biggest smile’

“After my mother attended my first profession of vows, she started her first treatment of dialysis. From that day onward, her health declined little by little,” Sister Maria recalls. “It was very difficult for me to see her being so sick and not be able to be at home to comfort her and to care for her.”



As Discalced Carmelite Sister Maria Nguyen professes her solemn vows on July 29, 2023, Carmelite Sister Anne Brackmann, left, and Carmelite Mother Mary Joseph Nguyen pin a flower crown onto her new black veil. In the Discalced Carmelite order, Sister Maria notes, the wreath of flowers symbolizes “the glory to come to those who accept espousals with the crucified and risen Lord.” (Submitted photo)



Carmelite Sister Maria Nguyen shares a moment of joy with her parents, father Oanh Nguyen and mother Sang Bui. (Submitted photo)

During the next few years, she was allowed to make one trip home when her mother had surgery to help with her hearing—and another visit as her mother was nearing death.

“My mother gave me the biggest smile when she saw me at home. We hugged each other and didn’t want to let go. My mother had wanted to see me before going home to God. She made sure to tell me that she was so proud of me. Hearing her say that gave me so much courage.

“On October 29, 2022, I was holding my mother’s hand at home with my father, sister, nephew and niece when my mother suddenly opened her eyes and breathed her last very peacefully. My first profession of vows gave my mother such joy that she was ready to go home to God. Her journey was complete seeing me in my Carmelite habit.

“Nine months after my mother’s death, my family flew from California to Terre Haute to witness my solemn profession.”

On that day—July 29, 2023—Sister Maria’s commitment to God became as complete as the trust she put in her mother when they stepped on that boat 37 years ago.

As she looks back on the journey of her life and her vocation to this point, Sister Maria thinks about how far she has come since she was a 3-year-old girl whose family wanted a better life for her.

“I was a little girl on a boat heading toward America, and here I am giving witness to God’s goodness in my life and in the life of the Church,” she says. “The idea of leaving Vietnam was to give the children and grandchildren the opportunity to discover freely what God is calling them to do—and to go for it with full confidence.

“Here I am living my dream, a dream that God has for me.”

(For more information about the Carmelite Monastery of St. Joseph in Terre Haute, visit heartsawake.org.) †



On the day of her solemn vows—July 29, 2023—Discalced Carmelite Sister Maria Nguyen celebrates with three of her childhood friends, Tiffany Tran, left, Lina Thai and Mary Pham. (Submitted photo)



PRIEST

continued from page 2B

prayer,” said Sprague, who continues to serve at St. Teresa, as well as at St. Lawrence Parish in Lawrenceburg and St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish in Aurora. “You could sense his commitment to his prayer life and the sacramental life of the Church. He brought all ages into that. He was very convicted on the importance of the sacrament of reconciliation.”

She also saw his dedication to leading the Batesville Deanery faith community’s youths closer to Christ and the Church by taking them to the annual national March for Life in Washington, D.C., and the National Catholic Youth Conferences held in Indianapolis.

His commitment to the parish’s youths also took him and them together halfway around the world after one teen suggested a mission trip to Africa in a brainstorming conversation during a youth group meeting.

Without hesitation, Father Kovatch gave the green light to the idea. Sprague tried to warn the pastor about that later.

“After the meeting, I was like, ‘You know, you just can’t say OK. They’ll remember this,’” she recalled.

The teens may have remembered his words, but so did Father Kovatch. He also remembered that a friend from his time in seminary was from Uganda.

They hadn’t been in contact much since both were ordained priests, but the suggestion of service in Africa soon got them reconnected and ultimately led to Father Kovatch leading 17 mission trips to the east African country.

“He truly jumped all in,” said Sprague, who took part in the first mission trip.

“There was not a reservation. You have to trust that there’s the prompting of the Holy Spirit. He allowed himself to be moved in those directions.”

The ministry she saw Father Kovatch do in Uganda was consistent with what she had witnessed in Bright.

“There was instantly a deep love that



Father Thomas Kovatch, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bloomington, sprinkles holy water on the site of a new dormitory for St. Jerome Primary School in Kapeeka, Uganda, on July 4, 2018. The parishioners of St. Charles Borromeo raised \$125,000 for the project. Father Kovatch has led 17 mission trips to the east African country. (Submitted photo by Ashley Barnett)

you could see from him for the people,” Sprague said. “His love just poured out. Just because he said yes.”

For his part, Father Kovatch put the focus on the love he’s experienced from the people of Uganda.

“The love they have is immense,” he said. “We don’t do [ministry] to get the feeling back. But, when we get that back from the people, then I think it’s God saying, ‘Hey, keep doing that.’”

‘I want to be like Father Tom’

Noah Jager was a fifth-grader at St. Charles Borromeo School when Father Kovatch became his pastor in 2011. Now a recent graduate of the United States Military Academy in West Point, N.Y., and a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army doing graduate studies in London, Jager’s connection to his pastor stays strong far from his Bloomington home.

“No matter if I am having the best of times or the worst of times,” Jager said, “Father Tom has been someone that I always wanted to call.”

Jager’s bond with his pastor came through Father Kovatch’s words and witness.

“He teaches about Jesus in a way that is joyful,” Jager said. “He shows what Christ can do for you. That’s a way that God works through Father Tom, bringing joy through teaching the faith. The values he gave are something that I want to live up to. I want to be like Father Tom in a lot of ways.”

Jager said that his desire to give of himself in service in the Army was inspired by his pastor’s self-giving, first as a Marine and then as a priest.

While such high ideals were appealing to a young man like Jager, he soon learned at West Point that it involves a lot of sacrifice and hardship in balancing difficult classes and the demands of Army training.

“In those times of struggle, I would call Father Tom,” Jager recalled. “He would say to ask God for strength and that sometimes God would put me in difficult situations so I can come out stronger on the other side. With that strength, I can help people in the future.”

Creating ‘a culture ... that values the priesthood and religious life’

Father Kovatch has helped lead another young man from St. Charles to give of himself.

Seminarian Casey Deal, a member of St. Charles, sees power in the priestly life and ministry of his pastor.

“Father Tom loves being a priest, which can be contagious to other young men,” said Deal, who is currently serving in a pastoral internship at St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg. “Father Tom has created a culture at St. Charles that values the priesthood and religious life, which makes the possibility of a priestly vocation a

viable option for young men.”

That culture has helped Deal in his own discernment and priestly formation during the past three years.

“I am grateful for Father Tom’s support as I discern a vocation to the priesthood,” Deal said. “He is always willing to get together to talk about the priesthood and seminary. His spiritual support is a tremendous blessing as well. Every Mass he celebrates, he prays by name for the seminarians and those in religious formation who he has a connection with.”

‘The joy is immense’

While there are people from Bright to Bloomington to Uganda who have been blessed by Father Kovatch’s Christ-like ministry, he is quick to acknowledge how much God has given to him in his vocation—and how much he might be offering to other possible future priests.

“As a priest, we’re invited into places where people can’t normally go,” he said about bringing God’s mercy to people in confession. “Even though there’s trauma and the hard stuff about it, all of these people have invited me even deeper into their lives. Through their hurt, I think they take on what the priest kind of exudes, that this isn’t our home. We’re on a journey toward our true home.”

Being St. Charles’ pastor for 13 years has also opened Father Kovatch to the love of its parishioners in ways that continue to grow.

“They’ve invited me into their families,” he said. “Whenever I hear someone say that priesthood is lonely, it’s only because you allow it to be that way. I could be with somebody every night of the week if I wanted to. The people are thirsting for time with a priest.”

For men considering that God might be calling them to the priesthood, Father Kovatch encourages them to be open to the invitation.

“Don’t be afraid of it,” he said. “God will give us joy and happiness when we do what he’s calling us to do. The joy that comes from being a priest is so deep and profound that, unless you are a priest, you don’t know what it feels like. The joy is immense.”

(For more information about a vocation to the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit HearGodsCall.com.) †



Father Thomas Kovatch, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bloomington, prays the Divine Mercy Chaplet during eucharistic adoration on Oct. 9 in his parish’s church. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

2024-2025 Seminarists

VOCATIONAL SYNTHESIS STAGE



Deacon Thomas Day '25
Saint Meinrad Seminary
Holy Rosary, Indianapolis



Deacon Liam Hosty '25
Mount St. Mary's Seminary
St. Barnabas, Indianapolis



Deacon Isaac Siefker '25
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. John the Apostle,
Bloomington



Casey Deal '28
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Charles Borromeo,
Bloomington



Kristofer Garlitch '26
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Mary, North Vernon



Samuel Hansen '26
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Roch, Indianapolis

CONFIGURATION STAGE



Timothy Khuishing '26
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Mark the Evangelist,
Indianapolis



Aaron Noll '26
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Bartholomew,
Columbus



Randy Schneider '28
Saint Meinrad Seminary
All Saints, Dearborn
County



Nathan Thompson '28
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Ann, Jennings County



Khaing Thu '26
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Mark the Evangelist,
Indianapolis



Lance Tony '27
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Simon the Apostle,
Indianapolis *Co-sponsored with
the Diocese of Palayamkottai

DISCIPLESHIP STAGE



**Emiliano Enriquez
De Alva '29**
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
St. Ambrose, Seymour



Antonio Harbert '31
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
St. Joseph, Shelbyville



Aidan Huersperger '29
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Joseph, Jennings County



Seth Hickey '29
Saint Meinrad Seminary
Mary Queen of Peace,
Danville



Abraham Hudepohl '31
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
St. Nicholas, Sunman



Nathan Huynh '31
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
Our Lady of Perpetual Help,
New Albany



Lucas LaRosa '30
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Mark the Evangelist,
Indianapolis



Robert McKay '29
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
St. Ann, Indianapolis



William Rees '31
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
St. Nicholas, Sunman



Joshua Russell '31
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
Holy Family, New Albany



Todd Seiler '30
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Mary, Aurora



Noah Sherman '29
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
St. Mary, North Vernon

PROPAEDEUTIC STAGE



Levi Wojtalik '29
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
Holy Rosary, Indianapolis



Jack Fraley '32
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
St. Gabriel, Connersville



John Fritch '31
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Martin of Tours,
Martinsville



Adam Hermesch '32
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
All Saints, Dearborn County



Dominic Pavey '32
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
Holy Rosary, Indianapolis



HearGodsCall.com | (317) 236-1490
vocations@archindy.org



RELIGIOUS IN FORMATION

2024-2025



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Sr. Emily Tekolste, SP
Sisters of Providence,
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods
St. Anthony, Indianapolis
Temporary professed



Sr. Jessica Vitente, SP
Sisters of Providence,
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods
Temporary professed



Sr. Leslie Dao, SP
Sisters of Providence,
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods
Temporary professed



Sr. Stephanie Marie Rivas, SP
Sisters of Providence,
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods
Novice



Sr. Mary Amata Naville, OSF
Sisters of St. Francis of
Perpetual Adoration
St. Mary, Navilleton
Temporary professed



Sr. Mary Peter Ruschke, OSF
Sisters of St. Francis of
Perpetual Adoration
Batesville
Temporary professed



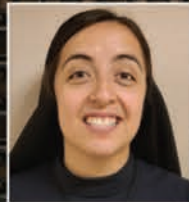
Miss Christina Sheehan
Sisters of St. Francis of
Perpetual Adoration
Holy Rosary, Indianapolis
Postulant



Sr. Israel Mercy Magnificat
Sisters of Life
St. John the Evangelist,
Indianapolis
Temporary professed



Maureen Pisani
The Sisters of St. Francis,
Oldenburg
St. Vincent de Paul/
St. Joseph, Shelbyville
Postulant



Sr. Maria Guadalupe Figueroa, RSM
Religious Sisters of Mercy
St. Anthony, Indianapolis
Temporary professed



Sr. Magdalene Marie Schafer
Daughters of the Holy Mary
of Sacred Heart of Jesus
St. Lawrence, Indianapolis
Temporary professed



Sr. Mary Lily Among Thorns McCann, SSVN
Servants of the Lord and
the Virgin of Matará
All Saints, Dearborn
County
Temporary professed



Sr. Mary Paul Callahan, FSGM
Sisters of St. Francis of the
Martyr St. George
St. Joseph University Parish,
Terre Haute
Junior professed sister



Sr. Amada Agnes
Missionaries of Charity
St. Michael, Brookville
Postulant



Sr. Maria Gemma Barnett, SOLT
Society of Our Lady of
the Most Holy Trinity
St. Charles Borromeo,
Bloomington
Temporary professed



Sr. Katelyn Noll
Nashville Dominican
Sisters of St. Cecilia
Our Lady of Perpetual Help,
New Albany
Postulant



Kristin Foresman
Mercedarian Sisters of
the Blessed Sacrament
St. Mark, Indianapolis
Novice



Br. Gregory Morris, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey
St. Meinrad, IN
Temporary professed



Br. Isaac Levering, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey
St. Meinrad, IN
Temporary professed



Br. Jude Romero-Olivas, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey
St. Meinrad, IN
Temporary professed



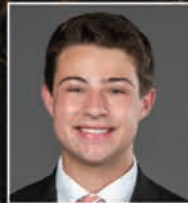
Joshua Brahm
Saint Meinrad Archabbey
St. Meinrad, IN
Novice



Owen Meredith
Saint Meinrad Archabbey
St. Meinrad, IN
Novice



Br. Benjamin Sasin, CSC
Congregation of Holy Cross,
United States Province of
Priests and Brothers
St. John the Evangelist,
Indianapolis
Temporary professed



Josh Amodeo
Congregation of Holy Cross,
United States Province of
Priests and Brothers
SS. Francis and Clare,
Greenwood
Novice



Br. Alberic Henry, OCSO
Abbey of Gethsemani
Our Lady of the
Greenwood, Greenwood
Temporary professed



Ben Jansen, SJ
Society of Jesus -
Midwest Jesuits
SS. Francis and Clare,
Greenwood
Philosophy studies



Taylor Fulkerson, SJ
Society of Jesus -
Midwest Jesuits
St. Mary, Lanesville
Theology



Diaconate ordination



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson ritually lays hands on seminarian Thomas Day during an Oct. 26 Mass at the Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln in St. Meinrad. Day and seminarian Isaac Siefker were ordained transitional deacons during the liturgy. They, along with transitional deacon Liam Hosty, are expected to be ordained priests for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis next June. (Photos courtesy of Saint Meinrad Archabbey)



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson ritually gives a Book of the Gospels to newly ordained transitional Deacon Isaac Siefker during the ordination Mass. Seminarian Khaing Thu, center, assists during the liturgy.



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson poses with transitional deacons Thomas Day, left, and Isaac Siefker after the ordination Mass.

2024-2025 Seminarians & Religious in Formation Prayer Card

Please pray for the following individuals and intentions on the corresponding day of the month.

1. Pope Francis
2. Archbishop Charles C. Thompson
3. Deacon Thomas Day
4. Deacon Liam Hosty
5. Deacon Isaac Siefker
6. Kristofer Garlitch
7. Samuel Hansen
8. Timothy Khuishing
9. Aaron Noll
10. Khaing Thu
11. Lance Tony / Sr. Emily Tekolste, SP
12. Randy Schneider / Sr. Mary Amata Naville, OSF
13. Nathan Thompson / Sr. Mary Peter Ruschke, OSF
14. Casey Deal / Christina Sheehan
15. Emiliano Enriquez De Alva / Sr. Israel Mercy Magnificat, S.V.
16. Aidan Hauerperger / Maureen Pisani
17. Seth Hickey / Sr. Maria Guadalupe Figueroa, RSM
18. Robert McKay / Sr. Magdalene Marie Schafer
19. Noah Sherman / Sr. Mary Lily among Thorns McCann, SSVN
20. Levi Wojtalik / Sr. Mary Paul Callahan, FSGM
21. Lucas LaRosa / Sr. Amanda Agnes
22. Todd Seiler / Sr. Maria Gemma Barnett, SOLT
23. Antonio Harbert / Sr. Mary Francis Noll
24. Abraham Hudepohl / Kristin Foresman
25. Nathan Huynh / Br. Benjamin Sasin, CSC
26. William Rees / Josh Amodeo
27. Joshua Russell / Br. Alberic Henry, OCSO
28. Jack Fraley / Br. Ben Jensen, SJ
29. John Fritch / Br. Taylor Fulkerson, SJ
30. Adam Hermes / Dominic Pavey
31. For Vocations to the Priesthood and Consecrated Life

For information on the Seminarians and Religious in Formation from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit www.HearGodsCall.com

THE EUCHARIST

HEART OF VOCATIONS



2024-2025