



Vocations

RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL TO PRIESTHOOD AND THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

Are You Being Called to "Altar" Your Life?

By Fr. Tim Donahue, Assistant Vocation Director

Years ago, before I entered the seminary, I was in Savannah and stopped at the Cathedral to pray. As I knelt at the back of the church, I saw an old priest come out from behind the altar. I watched him with interest as he knelt before the Blessed Sacrament. I was impressed that after so many years in the priesthood, he would still stop to pray in front of Jesus. His name, I later discovered, was Msgr. Felix Donnelly.

What an impression that

Ordination to Priesthood

Rev. Mr. Justin Ferguson.
June 24th, 2006 at 10:00 am
Cathedral of St. John the Baptist
Savannah, Georgia

Ordinations to Diaconate

Stephen Pontzer
April 22nd at 10:00 a.m.
St. Vincent Basilica in Latrobe, PA

Johnny Johnson and David Koetter
May 21st at 1:00 pm
St. Joseph's Church in Augusta, GA

made on me. This priest had no idea I was there, but his life, like that of so many priests, was an inspiration and a spark of hope - especially because he was returning to pray to the source of his vocation - Jesus.

I have discovered that more than a few vocations have come from men with a devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, who found their calling by spending time with Christ in Adoration or prayer before the tabernacle. On a summer assignment with the Missionaries of Charity, we had Adoration every night. One evening the sisters asked me to place the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance. When I opened the doors to the tabernacle, I had a radical experience of something completely "other" - complete holiness seemed to beam out. By the time I had reposed the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance, my hands were shaking.

Many parishes offer Adoration, and there is no feeling like sitting in the quiet presence of the Lord. For parents, it's an excellent way to teach children about the importance of reverence, and our need for quiet in our lives as Christians. We experience the collateral



Continued inside...

Where are the priests of tomorrow?

By Fr. Tim McKeown, Vocation Director

When I was a young boy I just assumed those older men on the altar had always been up there. Only later did I realize that they had grown up just like me, been through middle school and high school and on to college, but somewhere along the line they had made the decision to be priests for God. I think we all carry some of this notion around with us, that we'll know the priestly candidate because we'll see the halo over his head. The reality is that none of us walk around with haloes over our heads and the truth is there are candidates for the priesthood all around us.

With over 150,000 Catholics in the Diocese of Savannah, you play a key role in vocation work. You can play the role of inviter. Ask any of our seminarians and they will tell you that they began to seriously consider the priesthood only the third or fourth time someone asked them, "Have you ever thought about becoming a priest." I was a senior in high school getting a physical for the soccer tryouts when a nurse, who happened to be a neighbor, asked me, "Have you ever thought about being a



Fr. Tim McKeown, normally seen without his halo, has been Vocation Director for two years. Fr. Tim enjoys fishing, kayaking, and other sports.

priest? Your name comes to mind when I pray about vocations." As a senior in high school I was not ready for that commitment but it did plant a seed in my life and I remembered that moment.

Our future priests are all around us. Do you know someone who might make a good candidate? Invite them by asking them, "Have you ever thought of becoming a priest?" They may be a lector, a reverent altar server, a member of the youth group or a youth minister. They may be a teacher at your school or in the CCD program. Perhaps you notice them at daily Mass or Adoration. Maybe they exhibit leadership skills as they play sports or perhaps exhibit a servant's heart as they help others.

As you invite young men to consider the priesthood you may plant a seed that comes to fruition five or ten years down the road. Or perhaps your question may give that young man courage to make the vocational choice that he has been hearing in his heart. I encourage you to be part of the Vocation program as an inviter. Just don't expect to see haloes.

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Seminarian Profile: Johnny Johnson

Date of birth: December 2, 1979

Seminary: Mount St. Mary's Seminary, Emmitsburg, Maryland

Home parish: St. Joseph, Augusta

Family: Parents, Keith and Martha Johnson; brothers, Judah, David, and Levi

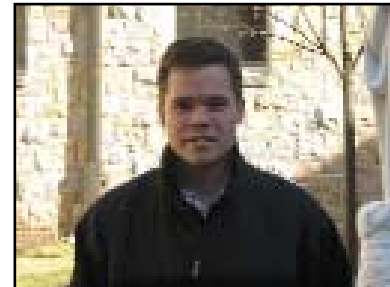
What do you like about the seminary?

The brotherhood and the great academics!

Who is your favorite saint?

There are two: St. Augustine and St. Therese. St. Augustine is the Doctor of Grace; he knows what it is suffer, to be forgiven, and to be redeemed. His life is a glowing testament to the power of God's mercy. Secondly, I love St. Therese of the Child Jesus for her little way - she was named a Doctor of the Church and is popularly held to be the greatest Saint of modern

times. Yet, for all this, she wrote only one major work and sought only to be a little, humble flower in God's garden.



Johnny Johnson will be ordained a deacon this summer and then spend a final year at seminary preparing for his ordination to priesthood.

How will your life experiences (up to this point) help you be a priest?

Looking back in my life, I am especially thankful for the many friends, family, and experiences that I grew up with in the Alleluia Community and St. Joseph's parish of Augusta. I have learned the importance of faith, friendship, and family. I am equally grateful for the opportunity to live and serve at St. Joseph's Parish in Macon with Fathers Brett Brannen and Tim McKeown. In

the end, most seminarians, me included, would say that every experience, good or painful, comes to play an important part in your formation for ministry. I look to the future with joy, gladness, and excitement as I prepare for my diaconate ordination this summer.

I Think I'm Being Called. What Next?

Remember that God always has your best interest in mind. If you feel a stirring in your heart towards the priesthood, don't run from it. Here are a few things you can do:

- ◆ Pray! Ask God for guidance and peace as you discern.
- ◆ Talk to a priest you know and respect about your calling.
- ◆ Ask close friends and family members if they could see you as a priest.
- ◆ Call one of the Vocation Directors to talk about what is involved in becoming a priest.

Q & A with Deacon Justin Ferguson

For seminarian studying in Rome, ordination is only months away



Deacon Justin Ferguson has spent four years preparing for the priesthood in Rome, Italy. He returns to the US this summer for his ordination on June 24th.

How have you prepared for the day of your ordination?

My preparation for the priesthood began in my family, and then continued during my college years at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio. I majored in philosophy and theology and was part of a formation program that cultivated a daily regimen of prayer. There was also a natural continuum from college to major seminary.

What do you look forward to most in your priestly ministry?

I am especially looking forward to celebrating the sacraments of Reconciliation and

the Eucharist. They express so beautifully God's mercy and love ~ and they offer great moments of grace in the life of a priest.

When did you know you wanted to be a priest?

As a young boy, my four brothers and I would act out the Mass, but I don't think I really desired to be a priest at this time. During high school, I very much desired to be married and have a family. (Plus, I really disliked school, so the thought of another seven to eight years was rather daunting.) After high school I worked at the gift shop at the monastery in Conyers, Ga. I made a business trip to Rome where I experienced great clarity in my vocation to the priesthood.

Any thoughts for young men (even boys) on hearing God's call?

My parents always emphasized the importance of an openness to God's call, while encouraging us to ask St. Joseph to guide us in discerning our true vocation. Discernment is like a time to "date God." You wouldn't get married without getting to know your future spouse, and this same period of "dating" should apply to men thinking about the priesthood.

Have you thought about your first Mass?

The "Mass of Thanksgiving" has been in my thoughts during this final year of formation. My first Mass will be the day after my ordination at the cathedral in Savannah. I think that it will concretize the reality of what took place the day before. This Mass and my first confession heard will help to bring about this realization of the inner change that has taken effect at the moment of my ordination to the priesthood.



Priests of the diocese celebrate the funeral Mass for Fr. Andrew Doris. Fr. Doris was 90 years old when he died and had served as a priest for 58 years. He was widely known in the Augusta area, where he was well-known as an excellent confessor. He continued to celebrate Mass up until the time of his death on February 17.

The Priesthood: Never a Dull Moment

Fr. Ray Levreault's first year of priestly service

For Fr. Ray Levreault, the first year as a diocesan priest has been full of surprises.

"There is no such thing as an 'average' day in the diocesan priesthood," said Fr. Ray, one of five priests ordained this past summer in our Diocese. "There are some days when you say mass in the morning, other days you have a funeral, or wedding, baptism - it can be any number of events in any given day."

Fr. Ray said his daily duties can include anything from visiting the sick at hospitals and nursing homes, to hearing confessions and blessing buildings, rosaries and a variety of other objects.

The only given in each day, he said, is prayer. "One thing for sure that is built into your day is prayer," said Fr. Ray. "The Divine Office, Liturgy of the Hours - five times a day we stop and pray to keep our focus on the real reason Jesus called us to this ministry."

Although he was raised Catholic and was very active in youth ministry in middle and high school,

Fr. Ray never heard a call to the priesthood until he began to distance himself from that life.

"It was when I was away from ministry, during some dark times of my life, that I came to realize how much I needed God and His Church," said Fr. Ray. "When I was around 28, I began to seriously reconsider my 'call' to serve in a more meaningful way."

Fr. Ray began a process of discernment that included a great deal of prayer, especially to our Blessed Mother Mary, as well as a more formal process of interviews and applications with the diocese.

"There are many people who help you in your vocation," reflected Fr. Ray. "It's all part of God's plan - although you never realize it until after you have become that which

God had planned for you. That's just how it works! There are always a few out front who encourage you and the likes, but truly the ones that you least expect are the ones who God uses to direct your life in certain paths."



Fr. Ray Levreault celebrates his first Mass at St. Teresa of Avila in Augusta. Fr. Ray is originally from Rhode Island; he found the Savannah Diocese online and was attracted because, as he puts it, "it was the first photo I found online in which the bishop was smiling."



Discern your vocation at
savannahpriest.com
 FAQs, discernment tips, and much more

Escuchando En Tu Corazon Un Deseo Sacerdotal

Por Padre Rafael Estrada

Soy el Padre Rafael Estrada. Nací en La Unión Valle, Colombia, Sur América. Mi vocación al sacerdocio comenzó desde cuando estaba muy pequeño, estudiando en la escuela secundaria. Mi familia toda es Católica. Recuerdo que mi mamá me llevaba a la Misa los domingos y algunos días a la semana. Mi mamá era muy religiosa. Cuando estaba en la escuela, un padre fue a visitarnos al salón de clase y comenzó a hablarnos de la vocación al sacerdocio.

Yo estaba muy joven pero sin embargo sentí como un deseo de algún día ser padre como aquel sacerdote que me hablaba. Después de la visita del sacerdote a mi escuela, quise ver la manera de ir a la Iglesia y pedirle al padre de mi parroquia que me dejara ayudarlo como monaguillo. Y así fue. El padre me aceptó y desde entonces pude aprender más y más acerca de la Iglesia, nuestra fe y la vocación al sacerdocio. Cuando termine el bachillerato, ingrese al seminario. Y con la ayuda de Dios comencé el proceso de formarme como Padre.

En el año 2002 por medio de un amigo sacerdote en la Diócesis de Savannah, pude venir a los Estados Unidos a continuar mis estudios. Gracias a

Dios, el 5 de Junio del 2005 el Señor me concedió la gran alegría de ser un Sacerdote para el servicio de su Iglesia. Nunca me he arrepentido de estudiar y ser un Sacerdote. La vocación al sacerdocio es una llamada de Dios. Pero como toda llamada debe ser aceptada por cada uno.

Si tú escuchas en tu corazón un deseo, al menos pequeño, de ser sacerdote, no dudes en ponerte en contacto con un padre. Los mejores consejeros en este caso son los sacerdotes y tu familia. En mi camino aprendí que siempre habrá alguien que te ayude a tomar la decisión de estudiar y prepararte para ser un sacerdote. Ojala que si sientes el deseo al sacerdocio, aceptes la llamada del Señor. Te invito que confíes tu vocación al padre de tu parroquia. El te ayudara en tu camino vocacional.



Fr. Rafael Estrada was ordained with four other men in June 2005. It was one of the largest classes in our 150-year diocesan history.

Continued from page 1: Eucharistic Adoration as Source of Priestly Vocations

effects of peace and grace. It is a transforming experience, and in no small way will be a building block of vocations to the priesthood and religious life - but only if we bring our children along and introduce them to this mystical and divine presence of the Lord.

One summer, while a seminarian, I was assigned at the Cathedral and went down to the adoration chapel. On my way out, I noticed the sign-up sheet and lo and behold, at 4:00 a.m. that morning was the

signature of Msgr. Daniel Bourke.

There must be something to this devotion to bring men back years after their ordination. It's comforting to know that after so many years working in the vineyards of God, these men still needed the Lord to sustain them in their ministries.

Check your local bulletin to find out whether your parish offers perpetual adoration or special times of Eucharistic Benediction.