



# Vocations

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

## Five New Priests Ordained for Diocese!



Top: Bishop Boland and the new priests on the steps of the cathedral. Above: Our new priests react as the bishop hands them their parish assignments.

For the first time in over fifty years, the Diocese of Savannah ordained five new priests at one time in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. The ordination is also significant in its diversity of men: two from the United States, one from Nigeria, and two from Colombia – a direct answer to prayer for our heavily Hispanic diocesan population.

God has heard our prayers for an increase in vocations. With gratitude, we continue to pray for our newly ordained. As Bishop Boland reminded us in his homily at the ordination, "we pray that through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, she will forever care for her five new sons who are called to share in the priesthood of her son, Jesus Christ."

**Fr. Fredy Angel**

*Sacred Heart Church, Warner Robins*

**Fr. Rafael Estrada**

*St. Joseph Church, Augusta*

**Fr. Raymond Levreault**

*Blessed Sacrament Church, Savannah*

**Fr. Chidi Osondu**

*St. Anne Church, Columbus*

**Fr. Mark Van Alstine**

*St. Anne Church, Columbus*

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# A Life Lived for Others

By Fr. Chidi Osandu



*Chidi Osandu's mother presents the offertory gifts to Bishop Boland during the June 5th ordinations. Members of Fr. Chidi's family travelled from Nigeria to attend the ceremony.*

As I begin this priestly ministry, I think it's summarized under the sentence that propelled me into the ministry: the priesthood is a life lived for others. Because of that, my first thoughts are that I'm ordained and ought to be available to the people of God, and to minister to them as much as I can. I want to be exhausted for the ministry, to give everything — my all — to the ministry of the priesthood. Love, for me, is a sacri-

fice. And the priesthood is a life of sacrifice. I'm willing to sacrifice anything to make sure the word of God is preached to the farthest ends of the earth. I'm ministering to the Kingdom of God made visible in the Catholic Church.

I'm not coming into the priesthood to change things. I'm coming to assist the Bishop as much as I can in propagating the faith of the Catholic Church. Wherever there are souls I'll go there. I'm willing to go wherever I'm sent. Right now, I'm at St. Anne's. I'm going to work with my pastor and help as much as I can. I'm going to make sure I can bring a smile to the people at St. Anne's. My target is to make sure I leave people with a smile — it might be a spiritual smile, an internal fulfillment, but I want to be a blessing during this ministry.

The priesthood is a life of the Cross. I'm not expecting it to be butter and bread. But I prayed, when I lay on the floor at my ordination, that the grace of God will never depart from me. I know I'm not worthy to be a priest, I know that it will be tough, but I pray the grace of God will abide with me every second. And I pray people can, through spiritual discernment, see where I'm coming from.

The one thing I believe... one thing that can liberate me in this ministry, is a love that does not count — a love that just loves for the sake of the kingdom, without minding the cost.



Learn more about a priestly vocation at:  
**savannahpriest.com**

New design, new information.

# Vocaciones Hispanos

Por Rey Morales, Director del Ministerio Hispano

Que la paz y amor de Jesucristo este siempre con todos ustedes. Mi nombre es Rey Morales, soy Director del Ministerio Hispano de la Diócesis de Savannah aquí en Georgia. Quiero hablarles hoy de un tema bien importante para toda nuestra Iglesia Católica, en especial para nosotros los hispanos.

A todos nos llega el tiempo de tomar una decisión de vocación en la vida. Hay muchos que discernirán que van al campo de medicina, comercio o tecnológico; sin embargo, también habrá aquellos que sientan el llamado de Cristo como Religioso, Diacono o Sacerdote. Tomen ese paso y hablen con el director de vocaciones, su párroco o puede hacerlo conmigo.

Del Sacerdocio es que quiero hablarles hoy en especial de vocaciones Hispanas. En la diócesis tenemos a varios Sacerdotes Hispanos que son una gran fuente de inspiración. Les exhorto a que hablen con ellos. Esta el Padre Alfonso Gutiérrez en Tifton, Padre Lorenzo García en Lakeland, Padre Freddy Ángel en Warner Robins y el Padre Rafael Estrada en Augusta. También tenemos muchos que son bilingües como el Padre Michael Smith en Moultrie, Padre Dan O'Connell en Douglas y muchos mas.

También están los padres de familia, que debemos tomar la vocación religiosa como una posibilidad para nuestros hijos. Si su hijo tiene esta inquietud, de le su apoyo y a ti joven hispano, toma seria consideración al discernir tu vocación. Sabes que el Sacerdote es el representante de Cristo en nuestra iglesia. Si es usted hombre soltero de gran fe y espiritualidad; yo le exhorto a que considere seriamente el llamado al Sacerdocio. Por favor ponte en contacto con tu Párroco o con el Director Diocesano de Vocaciones, Padre Tim McKeown, (912) 201-4078. También pueden llámame al (706) 361-3570.

# Religious Vocations

by Fr. Tim Donahue, Asst. Vocation Director

What an exciting time to be a priest in the Diocese of Savannah! The five newly-ordained who recently entered the fraternity of the priesthood are a sign that God's love continues to reach out to us all, even in the hot and humid climes of southern Georgia.

Each year more people turn out to show their support of the seminarians and our diocesan mission to encourage vocations. Seminarians are always grateful for this support and for the prayers of the entire Diocese – it is a source of ongoing grace in their discernment process.

While the Church always needs priests, we also need men and women to commit themselves to the religious life. This call is sometimes overlooked, but is a genuine and cherished gift in our faith history. These dedicated religious need our prayer and support as they perform some of the hardest work in the diocese. The work of the Lord would be almost impossible without them.

As we thank the Lord for our new priests, let us also storm heaven for the gift of the religious and consecrated life. The joy of the Risen Savior cannot be contained, and the hard-working and dedicated religious brothers and sisters who serve in this diocese reveal that joy. May God continue to bless their ministries, and call more men and women to join them.



*Fr. Tim Donahue is the Assistant Vocation Director for the Diocese of Savannah. He is the new pastor of Most Holy Trinity in Augusta. He is well known for his sense of humor.*

# The Mother of a Priest

By Toni VanAlstine

“So, you’re the mother of a priest now. How proud you must be of your son!” “You must be very excited about your son’s ordination.” The comment that struck home... “The mother of a priest is a very blessed woman.” And finally the question that still is causing lots of thoughts, “What did you do raising him to become a priest?” There were many well meaning congratulations and wishes of joy made by friends, family and strangers.

Sitting in the pew of a magnificent church, listening to beautiful music and listening for that quiet voice speak to me about what was actually happening at the moment was indeed an incredible experience. My son was saying yes to the Holy Priesthood of Jesus Christ, not for life but forever! He has become a servant to the people of God through holy obedience to the Bishop and the Church. The ordination celebration was a very holy time filled with a kaleidoscope of blessings – all most beautiful but impossible to grasp because of the mystery of the sacrament.

What did I do raising Mark to become a priest? Nothing extraordinary. By myself nothing good was accomplished. Motherhood is part of family to me. Perhaps this can be best stated this way: being a supportive and nurturing mother requires a strong man of God for a husband and father and a life commitment to Jesus. Praying to Jesus for revelation of the Father’s will for Mark



*Above: Fr. Mark with his parents, Toni and Bill Van Alstine.*

*Below: Fr. Daniel Firmin, who was ordained last year, lays hands on Fr. Mark during the ordination ceremony. One of the most moving portions of an ordination is when each priest of the diocese greets his new brother priests.*



wasn’t always easy to do. How many years does it take to know the will of God about the vocation he has for this son? Pray and listen. But still the peace of knowing that the Holy Spirit was about a mighty work in Mark began to come to me. Just be patient and pray. Always pray. The moment in time has come, said Bishop Boland. Mark really truly is a priest. No more praying for his vocation. It has come to be. Sorting out the feelings, thoughts and emotions of the occasion is an ongoing process. My focus now is to pray that Mark will be a holy priest who loves Jesus, His Church and its people.

So, am I proud of him? Most blessed, thankful and humbled would be more like it. Blessed because he chose my son to be a priest. Thankful for being Mark’s mother. And especially humbled by the awesome presence of God in the Priesthood. I’m sure there are going to be many more special blessings to come. Life with a priest-son is just beginning.

So, what did I do, really? Hopefully what every mother does – love God, live out her own vocation, love her husband, be open to life, pray for

vocations within the family, and love Jesus. Trust God and follow Jesus. What does a mother do now when all has been said and done? Life goes on so pray for vocations, pray for holy priests, love my husband and family, say yes to the will of God and pray for Father Mark.

# An Historic Moment

Seminarian Justin Ferguson serves as lector at the first Mass of Pope Benedict XVI

Catholics in the Diocese of Savannah watching Pope Benedict XVI's first mass may have seen a familiar face – that of seminarian Justin Ferguson, who was chosen to be a lector at the Papal mass this past April. While Justin isn't sure how he was chosen to be a lector, he's eternally grateful he was.

Two days before the historic mass, Justin, who will be ordained a deacon in October, was approached by a faculty member of the Pontifical North American College, where he is a third-year student.

"My understanding is that the Head Master of Ceremonies at the Vatican had someone call the rector here at the American seminary in Rome," said Justin. "After consultation with other priests of the faculty of the seminary, my name seems to have been chosen, which led to one of the priests on faculty approaching me on Friday to ask if I would be willing to be the lector at the Mass."

The day before the mass, Justin was told what scripture he would read at a rehearsal that he described as "a simple and routine review for the Installation Mass." He was then instructed to arrive at St. Peter's Square by 8:30 Sunday morning, and

to wear a suit and tie.

"The day of the Mass," said Justin, "I left the seminary early and arrived at my special seating. While waiting for the Mass to begin, I was struck with a profound sense of peace and joy. I am certain that this peace came from the Holy Spirit and our Blessed Mother Mary."

Justin decided to recite the rosary during the time before mass, which he said was the source of the quiet strength he needed for the task.

"This truly gave me that tranquil spirit needed to fulfill this humble ministry of lector," he said, adding he was also calmed by the people's love for their new pope. "The joy that I felt came from the sounds of the crowds resonating in my ears. I could hear the sounds of people clapping and cheering for the pope, in many different languages. I think that will resonate in my ears for years to come."

The experience, said Justin, is one that will stay with him forever.

"This is something I know I will take with me back to the States when I finish up here in Rome and I will share it with the people of God. It will add something to my priesthood. It somehow fits in with God's providential plan for me."



*Justin Ferguson, a second-year seminarian studying in Rome, had the unique privilege of reading one of the scriptures at Pope Benedict's first Mass. Here Justin is pictured on the roof of the seminary while crowds gathered for John Paul II's funeral Mass.*

*Please pray daily for our priests and seminarians*

# What is Seminary?

By Fr. Tim McKeown, Vocation Director

**W**hat is your vision of seminary? Is it a large remote castle, sitting on a hilltop?

A mysterious place where men to go, not to return until they come back as priests? I must admit that even as I headed off to major seminary in 1993 I had no idea what to expect. Among my misconceptions: that seminary would be a quiet, somber place, and that I would be the best basketball player there.

What I found was a vibrant community of young men who had come from all walks of life. Some were just out of college but many were coming from other professions: teachers, coaches, military, and farmers. They were gifted musicians, athletes, and scholars.

What struck me first was the sense of fraternity. We were 160 men discerning if God was calling us to the priesthood. There was an atmosphere of trust, respect and support. One-hundred sixty men who had laid aside their school and jobs to come listen to God. This proposition attracts a certain quality of men and made seminary an attractive home to me.

We prayed the Liturgy of the Hours and celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. There was Adoration, Theology classes, and confession. And there was intramural football, hiking, and pancake breakfasts.

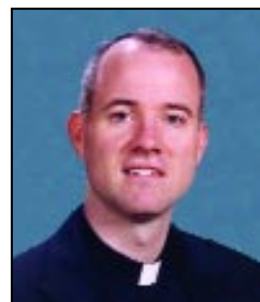
I found seminary to be a place of peace. The most peaceful place to be is in the center

of God's will and here were 160 men gathered seeking God's perfect will surrounded by a devoted faculty and staff of priests, religious sisters and lay people there to support and form us.

Seminary is not a place of "no return." It is about formation, and the opportunity to see if God is calling a man to the priesthood. A sign of a healthy seminary is that some men leave — there is no shame in

that. These are men who have set aside a time in their life for discernment, and sometimes they don't hear the call to the priesthood. But this year in seminary makes these men better Catholics. They have spent a year in prayer, attending daily mass, frequenting confession and studying Theology — and they have grown.

A large gothic castle on a hill? Hardly. The seminary is a place of life! It is a place of education and formation and for young men to say, "Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?"



*Fr. Tim McKeown attended seminary at Mount St. Mary in Maryland and also at the North America College in Rome. He is now stationed in Savannah as Vocation Director.*

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