

Vocations

Bulletin of the Savannah Diocese Vocation Office

SPRING
2011

Page 2

**The Oldest Priest in the
Diocese**

Pages 3

Mothers Support Priests

Page 4

**Get to Know Seminarian
Tim Eyrich**

Page 5

Preparing for Ordination

Muggy, Buggy, Faith-Filled Summer

Good news from Vocation Director Fr. Mike Ingram

Ten years ago, when I was still a seminarian, one of my most memorable summer assignments was to help run the youth vocation camps near Savannah. The conditions were miserable—hot, humid, buggy, with a bunkhouse that seemed out of the third world—but I don't think I've ever seen kids have more fun. And I know for certain that I've never seen kids draw closer to Christ.

Those youth camps have been on hiatus for several summers, in large part due to the fact that the old Camp Villa Marie buildings were condemned (thanks be to God!). But I am happy to report that this summer we are resurrecting both *Call to Holiness* (for 7-12 grade girls) and *Vocatio Dei* (for 7-12 grade boys). We've got a new location at Camp Echeconnee, not far from Macon.

Our philosophy is simple: *play hard and pray hard*. From sun up to lights out, there will be non-stop activity. We'll do the classic fun stuff: tug-o-war, slip n' slides, mud pits,

capture the flag, and earth ball, but we'll include a very strong spiritual element, too: Holy Mass, the rosary, inspiring talks, music, and personal prayer.

Here's what the camp isn't: we don't talk kids into becoming priests and nuns. Rather, we focus on the universal call to holiness and help them understand all vocations, including marriage and the single life. The two girls pictured in the photo at left, who attended *Call to Holiness* in their teens, have both found their vocations to marriage and motherhood.

Some have asked me about the prospect of mixing middle school and high school students at the same camp. To be honest, I questioned the wisdom of that myself—until I witnessed the dynamic in person. What happens in practice is that the younger students look up to the older students, and the older students look after the younger ones. It works quite well.

Camp Echeconnee can house about 75 campers, and I fully expect each camp will be full. If you want a wholesome, fun, deeply spiritual experience for your child this summer, be sure to register early! See back page for more details.



The Oldest Priest in the Diocese

Msgr. Marvin LeFrois tells stories from a life of priestly service

Msgr. Marvin LeFrois, at 86 years old, is the oldest priest in the Diocese of Savannah, and has been assigned to every deanery in the diocese during his 62 years of service as a priest.

"I was serving in Valdosta when Atlanta split off of the Savannah Diocese back in 1956," remembers Msgr. LeFrois. When the new diocese was created, the priests were frozen in the area they served. "So the priest who had been stationed in Valdosta somehow caught wind of the change, and managed to get re-assigned to Atlanta, where he had family. So I took his place."

Not that he minded. Fr. LeFrois had originally come to Georgia after having heard of the state's great need for priests. At the time, he was studying for the priesthood in his hometown of Rochester, New York. A Savannah priest named Msgr. P.J. O'Connor who travelled frequently was apparently very zealous about recruiting priests for Georgia. As Msgr. LeFrois tells it now, "After hearing him, five of my brother seminarians and I all decided to go south and put Georgia on the map! But one by one they all changed their minds, except me."

Fr. LeFrois was ordained in 1949 and first assigned to Columbus, moving a short time later to the cathedral in Savannah. He fondly recalls a friendship he made there. "I remember coming down the steps of the cathedral rectory, and the rector, Fr. James McNamara, saw me and said, 'Marv, take care of the couple in the front room.'" There he met Donald and Sarah Beaudry, whose marriage he witnessed, and who remain his friends to this day. Even after the couple moved to California, they returned to attend Msgr. LeFrois' 50th anniversary of ordination, and likewise, he

attended their golden anniversary of marriage.

Msgr. LeFrois' family background is remarkable: he and his three brothers all grew up on a farm near Rochester, and all went on to become priests. "I remember when my oldest brother was ordained, he stopped helping us in the dry house, which was a building where my dad dried apples and berries," related Msgr. LeFrois. He explained that after each brother's ordination, the new priest stopped helping in the dry house. "I was the last to be ordained, and afterwards a reporter asked my father what he thought of all his sons becoming priests. He answered, 'Well, my sons may have found God, but my business has gone to hell!'"

Msgr. LeFrois has many such stories of serving the people of God in South Georgia. He remembers when, years ago, Bishop McDonough was visiting Columbus to celebrate a Confirmation, but first played a round of golf, during which he made a hole-in-one (and subsequently asked the press not to publish a story on it).

He fondly remembers his brother

Fr. Chris LeFrois, a Benedictine priest who also served in our diocese, who was well-loved by children because of his talented dog, Shadow. And he remembers the time a church worker spilled a bucket of paint from high atop a ladder, right onto another workman's head. The pastor of that parish, famously tight-fisted, witnessed the scene and scolded, "You're wasting my paint!"

After retiring some 17 years ago, Msgr. LeFrois took up residence at the Catholic campus ministry house in Valdosta, where he serves as chaplain. One of his former students, Jason Adams, is now studying for the priesthood in Rome. "He and I are real good friends," chuckled Fr. Marv (as he is affectionately known). "I understand he says I may have been an influence."



Motherly Support for Our Spiritual Fathers

Beverly Firmin extends a mother's affection to her son's brother priests

When their son was ordained six years ago, Beverly and Michael Firmin gained about 90 sons, in addition to the four sons and three daughters they already had. As Beverly sees it, the other priests of the Savannah Diocese are brothers to their natural son, Fr. Daniel Firmin.

So strongly did Bev feel this kinship that she began a new group, Mothers of Priests, which prays for all of our Savannah priests and seminarians.

Mothers of Priests started several years ago when she attended the funeral of another priest's mother. Afterwards, seeing all the priests together, she felt an overwhelming motherly love for them. She remembers telling one of them about her motherly affection, and then reassuring him, "It's not like I'm going to fix your collar or spit on my thumb to wipe your face!"

Rather, she and other women in the group provide spiritual support, praying for priests by name each month.

Just as any mother would, Beverly sometimes worries about Fr. Firmin. "Every mom wants to see her son happy," she explained. "One of the hardest things for me was the fear that he would be lonely, not having a family and being married. He's such a people person." Deep down, though, she knows her fears are unfounded. "I think being a priest is what Daniel was created to be because he's so happy, and that gives me great joy." She says that he has good friendships, and that people invite him regularly to dinner and various festivities. He even keeps contact with parishioners from his first assignment five years ago.

Fr. Firmin maintains a good relationship with his family. "I think we're all terribly proud of him," said Bev. "The rest of the kids turn to him for things be-

cause they know he has the answers. They respect him for all that he knows, but they also include him in their fun. The nieces and nephews call him 'Uncle Father Dan'—it's cute."

Being chancellor of the diocese means that Fr. Firmin is not as involved in parish life as most priests are, but that doesn't mean he isn't able to minister directly to the people of the diocese. For example, once after Mass, a woman told Bev how much Fr. Firmin had helped her on a recent Rachel's Vineyard retreat for women recovering from abortion. When she hears stories like these, she says, it gives her great pride to have a priest for a son. "It is such an honor," she beamed. "I can't even begin to describe what an honor it is...to pray for him and the people he serves...to be entrusted to have a son who is used by the Lord to bring His Body and Blood down to the earth."

The best part of having a priest in the family, said Bev, is witnessing her son offer Mass when he visits. "When he comes home to say Mass, it's like being in the anteroom of heaven."



Fr. Dan Firmin remains close to his family. Father is on the bottom left showing his loyalty to the Tigers.

Get to Know Seminarian Tim Eyrich

First-year seminarian shares about family life and seminary

Tell us about your family. How did your family life prepare you for responding to the call to priesthood?

I grew up with a family the size of a small parish (10 brothers and 4 sisters), so I was able to learn important virtues like sharing, patience, and humility. I learned how to love people and serve them even when I really just wanted time for myself. Of course, I was humbled when I had to drive a 15 passenger van to high school so that my younger siblings could have a ride. My mom would mention the priesthood to me sometimes when I left the house, and whether she knew or not that image remained in my mind while I was out with my friends.

What specific events or insights lead to you applying to seminary?

When I was young I used to say my own mass and require my siblings and parents to attend. There was something about the Mass that particularly attracted me because I knew in my heart Jesus was there. In middle school, I attended Vocatio Dei retreats in our diocese. I was sure at that time God was calling me to the priesthood even though I was very young. Throughout high school I kept the idea of priesthood in the back of my mind but I never told anyone except my parish priest. I went to Belmont Abbey College for two years on a soccer scholarship, but I wasn't happy. Something serious was missing in my life. In the spring of 2010 I applied to be a seminarian, and now that I am in seminary God is filling the areas that were empty

in my life.

What has been the most enriching aspect of your time in seminary?

Taking on a daily holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament. When I first came to seminary I struggled waking up early to have a holy hour. After working with my spiritual director, I realized that I was just beginning to deepen my relationship with Jesus. The deeper I grew into communion with Jesus in prayer, the more I yearned to be at Mass. I have found that the daily hour with our Lord is paramount to a life of spiritual growth. Our faults, failings, and virtues are brought to Jesus and the growth that takes place affects every other part of the day. Without this heroic prayer life the seminarian would fail, but with it the Lord is able to accomplish incredible things.

What aspects of seminary life do you think people would find surprising?

When I speak to people about seminary, I find that most have never heard about exactly what happens here. Of course they all know we study philosophy and theology, but in fact this intellectual formation is only a quarter of what we do. Seminary aims to form the entire person in four areas: spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral. To be a good priest, the seminarian has to grow in all four of these areas. We don't just study, but participate in a program that totally transforms the individual to form a happy and holy priest who can bring people to know Jesus.



Tim Eyrich plays a competitive game of soccer with other seminarians. Believe it or not, this (as well as other similar fun activities) is an important part of his seminary formation as he prepares for the priesthood.

Preparing for Ordination

Priesthood Ordination is 10 a.m. on June 4, 2011 at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist

Rev. Mr. Chris Ortega

The most important thing I need to do in preparation for ordination is simply allow myself to really understand what I am getting myself into. As much as I have reflected on this life-changing experience, and as many classes as I have taken, it's still difficult to fully understand Holy Orders. The fact that my very being and soul will change because of ordination is a great mystery that really requires one to prepare accordingly. Having solid spiritual reading for Lent and a continued growth in my personal prayer life is helping me continue to refine and purge myself for the great mystery I am about to enter.

In the midst of this preparation, I still have to take exams and write papers, figure out invitations, and get holy cards together in English and Spanish! I am also hoping to celebrate Mass with my future brother priests in Poland, so I am definitely going to be practicing the Holy Mass in Polish!



Rev. Mr. Dawid Kwiatkowski

In preparation for ordination, there are some practical things that need to be done such as designing and ordering holy cards and invitations. In my case, I have to do it in two languages: Polish (for those who will come to my Mass in Poland) and English (for all of you here). I am also planning my first Mass, which includes choosing songs, servers, readers, food for the reception, flowers, transportation, etc. Also we have to take care of our families when they come here, and on the top of that we still have a few papers to write and a few exams to take before our graduation from seminary on May 6th.

But the most important preparations are spiritual in nature. I have been meditating on the passages in the Gospels which talk about the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus Christ (John 6). These texts have been my main food for meditations these days. I also meditate on God's mercy as I come back to the story of the Prodigal Son. This shines a great light for me on the Sacrament of Confession, which is so closely attached to the priestly ministry and to my own journey with God.





CALL TO HOLINESS

Catholic Camp for Girls

Monday, July 25 – Thursday, July 28
Rising 7th through 12th grade girls
Camp Echeconne near Macon

Girls thrive at this lively summer camp that helps develop healthy friendships and a Catholic identity. Activities are every bit as energetic as the boys' camp, and are complemented by the joyful spirituality of guests from the Sisters of Reparation to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. The girls learn to imitate Mary as the "super model" who changed the world by saying "yes" to God. Cost is \$50.

For more details and to register online, visit www.SavannahPriest.com

VOCATIO DEI

Catholic Camp for Boys

Thursday, July 28 – Sunday, July 31
Rising 7th through 12th grade boys
Camp Echeconne near Macon

This dynamic summer camp is for boys who want to play hard and pray hard! Awesome outdoor activities combined with a strong Catholic spirituality make for a healthy and holy experience. The camp is run by the seminarians of our diocese, and the emphasis is on listening to God's voice and courageously following wherever He leads. Cost is \$50.



Savannah Diocese
 Vocation Office



Savannah Diocese Vocation Office
 4074 Chambers Road, Macon, GA 31206 ~ (478) 788-6386
 Fr. Mike Ingram, Vocation Director: vocations@diosav.org