

Vocations



CNS photo/Paul Haring

Pope Benedict XVI ordains one of 14 priests for the Diocese of Rome in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in 2010.

Love of God nourishes love of neighbor

By Francis X. Rocca
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Love of God nurtures love of neighbor, especially in people with vocations to the priesthood or religious life, said Pope Benedict XVI in his message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

*Love of both God
and other people
“must be lived with
a particular intensity
and purity of heart.”*

— Pope Benedict XVI

The papal message for the 49th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, which will be observed April 29, was released Feb. 13 at the Vatican.

“The profound truth of our existence is thus contained in this surprising mystery: Every creature, and in particular every human person, is the fruit of God’s thought and an act of his love, a love that is boundless, faithful and everlasting,” Pope Benedict wrote.

“It is in this soil of self-offering and openness to the love of God, and as the fruit of that love, that all vocations are born and grow. By drawing from this wellspring through prayer, constant recourse to God’s word and to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, it becomes possible to live a life of love for our neighbors, in whom we come to perceive the face of Christ the Lord,” the pope wrote.

Pope Benedict wrote that love of both God and other people “must be lived with a particular intensity and purity of heart by those who have decided to set out on the path of vocation discernment towards the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life.”

Caritas prayer group

Msgr. Joseph W. Pokusa, far right, a priest of the Diocese of Camden who serves in the Apostolic Nunciature in Washington, D.C, joins Camden visitors who travelled to the nation's capital on the invitation of Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, apostolic nuncio to the United States, for their monthly Jesus Caritas prayer meeting. Pictured with Msgr. Pokusa, from left, are Rev. Mr. Vincent Guest, Father Thomas R. Kiely, seminarian Matthew Corbett, Father Ronald S. Falotico and Msgr. John Frey. The Caritas prayer group also included Father Joseph Capella, Father Nicholas Dudo, Father Matthew Weber, Father Fabio Jose Fernandez, Father Stephen Rapposelli, Father Neil Lambert, Father Steven Pinzon and Father James King.



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A Culture of Vocations

By Father Michael Romano

At the most recent Continental Congress on Vocations in North America, great effort was made to focus on the need of creating a culture of vocations in each diocese. If this culture exists, young Catholics are open “to a personal invitation to discern accurately and embrace freely the form of permanent commitment in the church to which they are being called.” The Congress recommended that to create this culture of vocations, five things are necessary:

- To Pray
- To Evangelize
- To Experience
- To Mentor
- To Invite

In an attempt to fulfill that first and most important need, this year, the Office of Vocations has tried to provide more opportunities for the people in our diocese to pray for an increase in priestly and religious vocations.

First Thursdays has been a successful initiative in which each deanery takes turns hosting a Holy Hour for Vocations on the first Thursday of the month. Gathering together as a community of faith affords the people of our diocese the opportunity to “ask the Master of the harvest to send our laborers for his harvest.” I invite you to consider attending one of the upcoming First Thursdays Holy Hour for Vocations and joining us in prayer (May 3 at St.

Isidore Church in Vineland; June 7 at St. Rose of Lima Church in Haddon Heights; July 5 at Epiphany Church in Longport).

Another upcoming initiative to increase the vocational culture in our diocese will be our first ever iRace 4 Vocations at Washington Lake Park on Sunday, June 24. This 5K walk/run serves as a reminder that the Lord has a plan and purpose for all of us and that we need to be open to that plan. Everyone is welcome to join in this race as we celebrate together church vocations.

For those unable to join us physically, I ask you to join us in prayer. Might you consider making a pledge to pray for our seminarians as they race? You can find more information on this initiative, which is certainly one of prayer, later in this supplement.

Inviting people to consider a vocation to the priesthood or religious life is another key in creating a culture of vocations in our diocese. In my few months as the Director of Vocations for our diocese, one priest has already had me meet with 12 young men from his parish who could be potential candidates. Would that we all took our duty to invite young people as seriously.

In this supplement, you will read about that invitation from some of our priests, seminarians, religious and deacons. Sometimes, the invitation is clearly felt from God himself. Other



Photo by Alan M. Dumoff

Father Michael Romano talks with Sister Rose Chuckerel, MPF at St. Joseph School, Hammonton, during a visit to talk about vocations.

times, the invitation comes directly from lay people, priests or religious. It is my hope that their stories will inspire more of us to do our part to be great inviters.

As we celebrate the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, we thank God for our own vocations and for those who have responded to Christ's call. We pray together in particular for an increase in priestly and religious vocations within our diocese. We ask for

the grace to be inspired to invite young people to courageously respond to their proper vocation in life as we work together to build up God's Kingdom. With time and effort, we can confidently create that culture of vocations so necessary in the church today.

Father Michael Romano is the Director of Vocations for our diocese. He was ordained in 2007.

Invitations from God take different forms

By Deacon Robert P. Foley

When we think of invitations, different things may cross our mind. For a young person, it may be a colorful card (handed out in class) for a bowling party or one of those fun houses. For others, it may be a formal card with a return addressed RSVP.

In our lives, we receive invitations and they take many forms; not all are cards and not all are direct.

I can describe the invitations that I have received as nudges. God has moved me along with these nudges and they have taken many different forms; sometimes they are direct, but often they are not.

About 15 years ago I received an invitation by an event happening in our lives. My daughter, Shannon, entered the religious education program at St. Agnes. My wife Laura (who is not Catholic) took her to the first meeting where the parents were told “this is a home study program.”

They were provided with the book and schedule of meetings (to check progress). Later that day, my wife handed me the book and explained the program.



DEACON
ROBERT P.
FOLEY

Since I was the Catholic parent, it fell to me to do most of the work with my daughter. Laura helped from time to time, but this was mostly time spent between Daddy, daughter and God. This invitation brought me closer to God than I had been, and showed me the importance of sharing faith. Sharing my faith, answering her questions, and seeing Jesus through her eyes, moved me.

Thirteen years ago, the invitation came directly from another person. Mass had just ended and we were leaving the church. My wife had gotten ahead of me with two of our three children. (I was carrying Daniel our youngest.)

Our lives were full, keeping up with three children, a recent promotion at work, and my duties as a volunteer fire-

fighter. We didn't think there was room for anything else.

This particular Sunday there was something different in the gathering space. Our parish was having a mini-ministry fair. Each week a different ministry had been spotlighted and this week was the readers' turn. As I made my way through the crowd, I was approached by two of the readers who asked if I might be interested in joining their ministry.

About a month later, I was nervously waiting for my reading to begin. I had never read in front of this many people. Why had I agreed to do this?

The time came and I made my way to the Ambo. My wife and children were in the first row. I read the reading and as I was turning to sit down when my son Robert, 4, stood up and proclaimed, “That's my Dad!”

Others approached me and told me they liked the way I proclaimed the word. This invitation helped me to realize a gift I didn't know I had.

Almost nine years ago, I felt the invitation inside. I was still a reader and had been serving as an extraordinary

minister of holy Communion for a time. I began to feel that I still needed to do more. I prayed over this for weeks, and one day at Mass I had a feeling that I needed to investigate what a deacon is.

It took a few more weeks of prayer to gain the courage to discuss this with one of the deacons at our parish. After Mass I approached Deacon Joe Buccilli and discussed what a deacon is, what he does, and what I had been feeling. We prayed together in front of the church and he recommended I contact the diocese. I called and got the information, and my wife and I discussed and prayed over applying to the deacon formation program. We agreed this was what I should do and I began the process.

Sometimes invitations are events that appear in our lives, sometimes they are directly from another person, and sometimes they are God moving us inside.

When you get an invitation, how do you respond?

If God is inviting you, however you are invited, please RSVP “yes.”

The influence of my parents, and a homeless man

By Rev. Mr. Vincent G. Guest

I have had a blest journey. Full of many experiences and opportunities to seek God in my life. It is a story that is faith filled, and sometimes one of doubt, but always one that felt the pull of God to live a life of service.

I will be ordained a priest on May 19, 2012 for the Diocese of Camden, and for me this is a long awaited dream come true. I am not the youngest seminarian in the Camden Diocese, having turned 52 last December. I am an example of the relentless love of God, always active in one's life, reaching out and calling us into relationship.

I was born the son of a Philadelphia policeman and a homemaker, (Vincent and Margaret Guest), the fourth of five children. There are four boys and one girl in the family. My early years are full of happy memories. Family and faith were the center piece of our lives — and still are. My older brothers are John, Dennis and Tom and my younger sister is Peggy Ann. We grew up in St. Bernard's Parish in the Mayfair Section of Northeast Philadelphia. I attended St. Bernard's Grade School and was taught by the wonderful Sisters of St. Joseph and dedicated lay faculty. I went to Father Judge High School and there was influenced in a



REV. MR. VINCENT G. GUEST

positive way by the Oblates of St. Francis De Sales.

The biggest influence on my life and my vocation is without question my good parents, who unfortunately passed into eternal life not too long ago. Our Catholic faith and heritage was in the air we breathed as my siblings and I grew up. We never missed Mass on Sunday and holy days and when my parents retired daily Mass was their routine.

It was more than devotional, as my parents lived their faith by being active

in the parish and the community. They received the Body of Christ and they served the Body of Christ, the community, by how they treated family and neighbors.

As I was completing high school years my parents hinted to me, in their gentle way, if I ever thought about being a priest. I admitted that I did and it was that encouragement that prompted me to enter St. Charles Seminary in Philadelphia after high school.

The seminary is a place of discernment, and after some years I left to gain further clarification of where God was calling me. The church remained an important part of my life and I pursued a career in public service. I obtained a Master's Degree in government administration and served in the Administration of Pennsylvania Gov. Robert Casey, as Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth and Special Assistant to the Governor.

As the Casey Administration came to an end I entered Temple Law School and passed the Pennsylvania and New Jersey Bar Exams. I thought I was on my way to a career in government or politics. God had other ideas.

I felt a calling to serve the poor with my law degree. A Jesuit priest friend suggested I contact the Camden Center For Law and Social Justice (CCLSJ). CCLSJ is a faith based law center that is sponsored in part by the Camden Diocese and at that time, the Jesuits.

I was offered a job on a modest salary as a public interest attorney and practiced immigration, family and housing law. I was soon made director of the Law Center and in many ways my life was changed. As I worked with the poor the feeling of being called to priesthood came back to me in a strong way.

My clients were people who were broken in many ways. They faced deportation, were victims of domestic violence and were homeless due to an eviction. I know my staff and I helped our clients in wonderful ways, but I felt I was being called to help them in another way. Not as a lawyer, but by bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ into their lives. I felt called to bring to them the healing of the sacraments.

I continued to pray about entering the seminary and as the "Hound of Heaven," the relentless love of God, continued to probe me, I was graced by a wonderful encounter.

I have a devotion to Our Blessed Mother, especially to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. My parents and I would frequently go to this Shrine in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. On one particular day a few years ago we went to the evening novena service and my parents and I placed a written petition in one of the Shrine's reception baskets, as is the custom. I prayed for clarity in my vocation.

On the way back to my home I stopped by a local Dunkin Donuts for a cup of coffee. As I approached the door I saw a homeless man struggling down

the sidewalk. He approached me and asked me for money. We chatted for a moment and I asked if I could buy him a cup of coffee and a doughnut. He said, "Yes, that would be good."

When I came out of the store I gave him the coffee. He thanked me and to my amazement said to me, "Are you thinking about

*He thanked me
and to my
amazement said,
"Are you thinking
about becoming
a priest?"*

becoming a priest?"

This was about an hour after my parents and I prayed to Our Lady asking for guidance in my discernment. I told the man I was praying about becoming a priest and thanked him for asking. I asked him to pray for me and he said he would.

I returned to my car with tears in my eyes, realizing that God touched me in the guise of a homeless man on the streets of Philadelphia. As I reflect on my life I realize that there were probably many such moments in my life, and in all of our lives. The Father continually draws us to Himself and into relationship with His Son. We need to listen to this call to become more like Christ in our daily lives. For some reading this article it may be a call to priesthood or religious life.

I thank God every day for the relatives and friends who have influenced my life and my vocation. My mom and dad stand atop that list.

When Bishop Galante places his hands on my head during the Rite of Ordination I believe on my shoulders there will be the hands of my parents reaching down from heaven in love. They led me to the altar. With the prayers of my mom and dad and the prayers of the diocese, I pray to be a faithful and holy priest.

Rev. Mr. Vincent G. Guest will be ordained a priest May 19.

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A family invitation

By Edward Kennedy

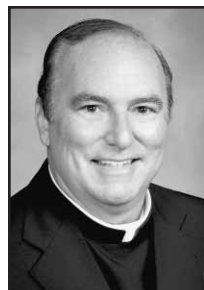
My “invitation” to the priesthood has been a part of my life since I was very young. I have been blessed to have two wonderful examples of the priesthood in my family: Msgr. William Hodge and Father Raymond Gormley.

My cousins have had a tremendous influence on my vocation through the example they set for what it means to be a holy priest. From their examples, I have come to gain closer insight into the life of a diocesan priest. From them, I have learned skills for parish leadership, and have been able to observe the joys and challenges of the priesthood from a different perspective than most people.

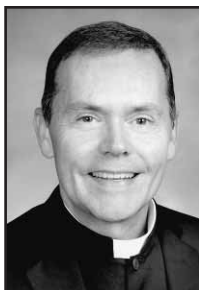
I was in high school when Msgr. Hodge was made pastor of St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church in Atlantic City. I had been sent, along with my brother, Christopher, to work at the Atlantic City Shelter and to view for myself the hardships some people are burdened with. We were in shock the first time we were sent to work at the shelter.

We thought we would see the old men we sometimes saw around the city. Much to our surprise, it was families being helped and fed at this location. They were just like us, but did not have the wonderful support system we were used to.

Msgr. Hodge’s church runs a large food bank. Helping people get what he calls “a leg up” is a way of life. Due to his location, it is not a place where people come for help only on special occasions but on a daily basis.



MSGR.
WILLIAM
HODGE



FATHER
RAYMOND
GORMLEY

I always remembered (when we saw someone really down) my own grandmother saying, “but for the Grace of God.” Seeing Msgr. Hodge helping these people just made it more natural to me to find time for giving.

Being with cousins who are priests makes it more natural to consider taking this road in life. The rewards are so very great when you see small children smile and when you can find a pair of shoes for a person who is barefoot in the middle of the winter.

Seeing my cousin, Father Ray Gormley, working to give young children the opportunity to attend Catholic grammar school and to be given a Catholic education is important to me. Teaching children that life is a beautiful gift from God and the importance of helping others is something our society needs now more than ever. I hope and pray that I can follow Father Gormley’s example of giving and caring.

Mostly, I hope I can have the contentment in my life of knowing that I gave



Photo by James A. McBride

Seminarian Edward Kennedy, serving as censerbearer, stands in front as clergy and seminarians line up outside and prepare to enter St. Agnes Church, Our Lady of Hope Parish, Blackwood, for the Chrism Mass April 3.

it all for the Glory of God. Just like my two cousins. A priest forever!

Msgr. Hodge and Father Gormley let me know throughout my growing years that a priest is just a person like most other people who live their faith. Good, honest, hard working and fun loving men. The difference is that they gave it all and would do it all over again for the salvation of man.

They put it all in God’s hands and I find their joy in the priesthood what ultimately “invited” me to my vocation.

Edward Kennedy is a seminarian for the Diocese of Camden from St. Nicholas of Tolentine Parish in Atlantic City. He is in his first year of theology studies.

An atheist believes he hears Jesus calling him

By Rev. Mr. Francis Kim

Do you like rainbows? When I was a child, I really liked rainbows. Whenever I saw one, I always followed it. One day, I saw a beautiful rainbow, and I wanted to see and touch it, so I followed. I thought I could look at it closely and touch it. But I couldn’t. I approached nearer and nearer, but it just went farther and farther. Finally, I lost my way home. Late that evening, a policeman found me and took me home.

Some dreams are like rainbows; the more we chase them, the more they go farther away. Do you have dreams? What kind of dreams do you have? Like most other people, I wanted to live a happy life. But I didn’t know what real happiness is.

When I knew about Jesus and his love, I realized that the rainbow that I followed when I was a child has always

been in my mind. Jesus taught me what real happiness is and how to embody the dreams. Jesus gave me a vision and hope in the future. I could understand the beauty of life through Jesus, and I believe that all my dreams will come true with him.



REV. MR.
FRANCIS KIM

I came to the United States two years ago. Frankly, I still don’t know how I came to the United States, or why I am here. That is a mystery of God’s calling, but I know Jesus Christ always guides and leads me, and I always stay in his love.

I was born in Seoul, South Korea. I became a Catholic at 26. It was my turning point in my life. Before I was baptized, I was an atheist. I didn’t believe in God. At that time, I was an engineer for Mercedes Benz in Korea.

My major was mechanical engineering in the university. After studying hard for five years in the university, I

got a degree in engineering science and became an engineer. It was my dream. I enjoyed my job as an engineer. But God’s calling made me live differently in a special way.

My vocation story begins one summer day. I went to summer camp for a week with the youth in my diocese. I was a supervisor for youth ministry. During the camp, we went fishing in the sea. We caught a lot of fish the whole day, and really enjoyed it. We returned joyfully in the dusk of the evening. On our way back, we walked along the beach and sang a song together loudly, looking at the sunset. Everyone was so happy. Then, we saw the most beautiful sunset we had ever seen. We were really in seventh heaven. We would never forget that beautiful sunset forever because it changed our lives.

Watching the beautiful sunset, I thought I heard Jesus’ calling to me, “Follow me and from now on you will be catching people.” At that moment, I realized God’s calling to the vocation of

priesthood. After few months, I gave up my career as an engineer, and entered the seminary.

Reflecting on my past years, I thank God for calling me to grow in his love and grace. Wherever God calls me, I can go everywhere because I am not going alone, but with Jesus Christ. Now, I can understand the real happiness and beauty of life with Jesus Christ.

We know the story that the Risen Jesus appeared to his two disciples who were going to Emmaus. On their way, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them. While he talked with them on the road, they felt their hearts burn. They had a beautiful and unforgettable experience with Jesus on their way.

Jesus is always walking with us in our lives, and he is calling us in a special way. Let us walk in him and with him, and do not hesitate to follow his calling!

Rev. Mr. Francis Kim will be ordained a priest May 19.

Fascination with the cosmos, then an eye toward heaven

By Joshua Nevitt

Growing up, I had never thought about becoming a priest. In fact, I had never asked myself what God might have in store for me at all. From a young age, I had been fascinated with space and wanted to be an astronaut. I loved to think about the world that existed outside of our atmosphere. It mesmerized me that there was a God who could create all of that vastness. I wanted to explore this world beyond our world. I wanted to fly high. What I would soon learn, however, was that God wanted me to fly higher.

The first time I ever thought of God's plan for my life was during my freshman year of high school. I was on a retreat when I heard a priest and a seminarian each talk about what it was like for them to hear God's call to the priesthood. Seeing their joy and their love for the Lord, I thought, "Could I be a priest? Is this what God wants me to do with my life?"

I felt that the Lord was inviting me to explore the priesthood more. I not only began to think about becoming a priest more, but I also began to pray about becoming a priest. Consequently, my relationship with the Lord grew.

I still lived a normal high school life. I hung out with my friends, dated and even thought about going to college to become an engineer. Throughout it all, the thought of the priesthood never left me. In fact, I found that the desire to become a priest only grew with each of my experiences. Truly, I felt the Lord inviting me to enter

the seminary; now it was my turn to respond.

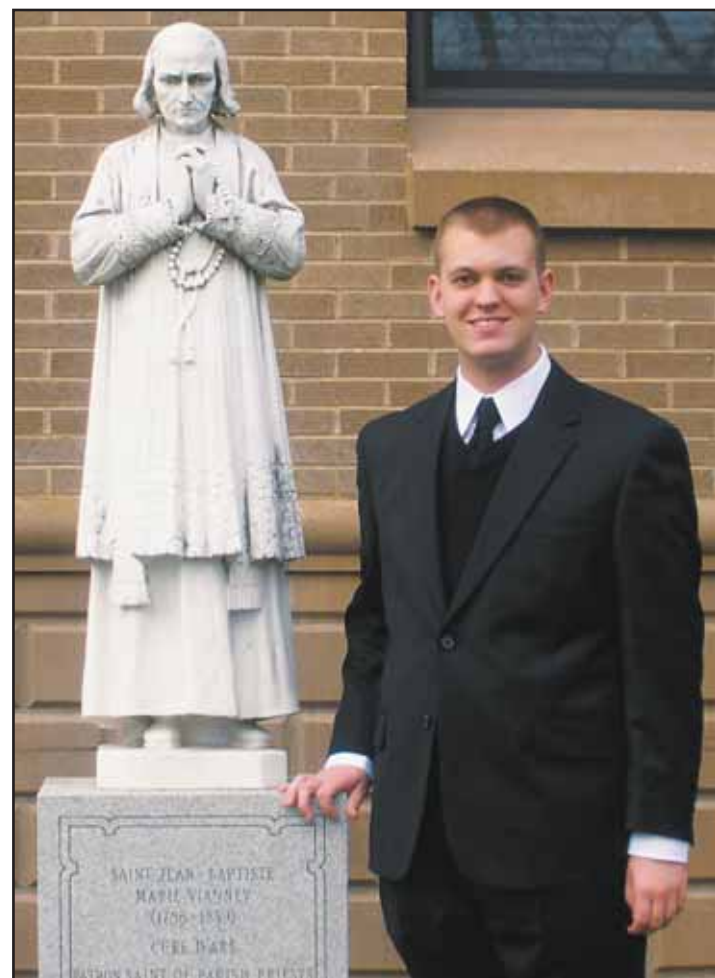
When it came time for me to begin applying to colleges, applying to the seminary seemed like a natural option. My parents supported me and helped me with everything that I needed to do to apply and eventually enter the seminary.

Currently, I am in my third year of college seminary at St. Andrew's College Seminary in South Orange, N.J. Looking back on the three years since I entered the seminary, I can see how much God has blessed my life. Despite any struggles that I have had, the Lord has always been there to help me through them. I love what I am doing and wouldn't have it any other way.

Ultimately, I believe that Jesus is inviting each of us to do something great for him. Today, he is calling many young men to be priests, many young women to be religious, and many young couples to enter into the sacrament of matrimony. I have had the wonderful opportunity to know many great people pursuing each of these vocations. My time in the seminary has truly been one of the greatest adventures of my life and I can only imagine what great things God has in store for me for the rest of my time in the seminary and, if he wills it, as a priest.

Once, I wanted to fly into space. Now, with God's help, I hope that one day I will be looking down from an even greater height from heaven.

Joshua Nevitt is a seminarian for the Camden Diocese from Our Lady of Peace Parish in Williamstown. He is a junior in college.



Joshua Nevitt stands next to a statue of St. John Vianney, patron saint of parish priests.

Office of Vocations Diocese of Camden

Upcoming Events

FIRST THURSDAYS - HOLY HOUR FOR VOCATIONS

May 3 - St. Isidore Church, Vineland

June 7 - St. Rose of Lima, Haddon Heights

July 5 - Epiphany Church, Longport

Suscipe Saturdays

Open to all High School Males

St. Peter's Parish, Merchantville

May 12 & June 9

For more information contact Office of Vocations at
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Say your prayers, put on your sneakers for vocations

By John Kalitz

I remember being a junior in high school and during one of my sixth period religion classes a priest came in to speak about vocations. I got all excited sitting in my seat. “Finally, a topic I

know a lot about,” I thought. “My family and I go to Wildwood every year. I love vacations!”

The priest began to tell us that a vocation is what God calls us to do with our life. I wasn’t even close to being on topic.

Here I am, 12 years later married with three kids, and I find myself getting excited about this topic once again (vocations not Wildwood). In that time I have found a love and understanding for the Mass.

This year, a new initiative at Church of the Holy Family has provided us with a chance to dig deeper into vocations. This project, called iRace 4 Vocations, is designed to bring our Catholic family together in praying for our seminarians and for an increase in vocations for our diocese and throughout the church.

Each month the Vocations Committee has created a series of monthly prayer challenges to both pray for and promote vocations to the priesthood, religious life, sacred married life and sacred single life. Each month these prayer cards were handed out at Mass to be completed and returned. Those prayer cards were turned into spiritual bouquets and sent to our seminarians in their various seminaries.

These monthly prayer challenges lead up to the actual 5K race to which this initiative gets its name. iRace 4 Vocations welcomes people of all ages to run/walk in our 5K on Sunday, June 24, the feast of St. John the Baptist, at Washington Lake Park in Sewell.

This is an awesome opportunity for family and friends to “Build Up and Maintain the Body of Christ” by praying, training and racing for vocations in this free 5K race/walk. Participants will be encouraged to pray for vocations during their run, and in preparation for the race we are asking each participant to raise pledges of prayers per kilometer for vocations. The top three individual faithraisers of the race will be awarded the top prize: Lunch with Bishop Joseph A. Galante.

There are five different 5K race options: Men’s 5K, Women’s 5K, Kids Run, Family Walk/Senior Stroll, and Religious/Seminarian 5K. Registration is available on our website: <http://www.churchoftheholymfamily.org/irace4vocations>. Registration is open until June 1.

Think of the effect your presence can have on a young man who is contemplating the priesthood, who came out to run the race, who is praying for God’s guidance to carry him all the way. Imagine if, at every kilometer, he saw fellow participants running for vocations — running for his vocation.

Participants who race for vocations can literally be the means by which God calls that young man to the priesthood. How awesome is that?

Mass for seminarians

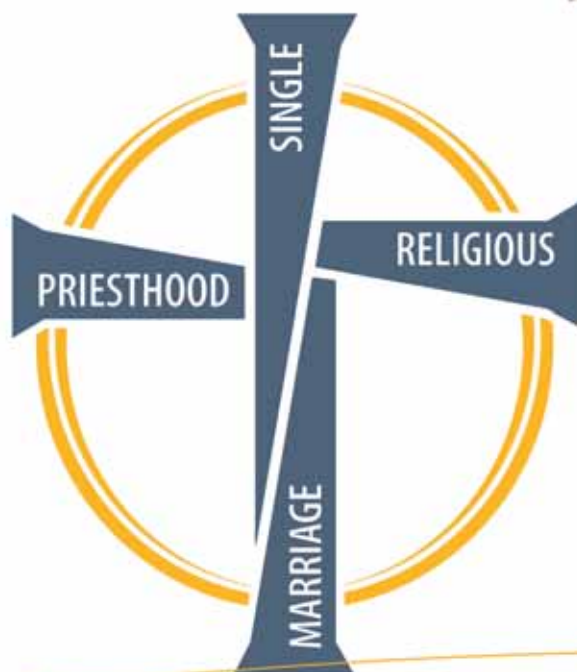


Photo by James A. McBride

Bishop Joseph A. Galante speaks to seminarians at the annual Christmas Mass for seminarians at St. Pius X Spiritual Life Center, Blackwood, in December 2011.

iRace4Vocations

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Scan the code to register or visit us online at:
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The priest pointed me out, and asked me to stand...

By Kevin Mohan

As I approach ordination to the transitional diaconate this summer, I often reflect on the way God has led me: sometimes not a straight path, but always one that takes into account my humanity and my reluctance to receive God's love and grow in his grace. I would like to share an important moment in my journey, a moment in which someone had the audacity to question me about God's desire for my life.

In 2003, I had entered seminary right after high school, and then left the program after two and a half years. To put it simply, I had heard God's call, but subsequently discovered that I, myself, didn't have a desire to be a priest.

On Jan. 13, 2007, I was at Saturday evening Mass at then-St. Agnes Parish in Blackwood, my hometown. I had been working toward my English degree, and the next morning I would be flying to Europe for a semester of studying abroad.

For that evening, however, I was simply looking forward to hearing the

homily of the presider, whom I knew to be a good preacher. But, instead of the presider giving the homily after the Gospel, I saw another priest, wearing a religious habit, bustle down the main aisle. I had never seen him in my life.

He gave a speech about the upcoming parish retreat which he would give. My disappointment that I didn't get to hear good preaching was compounded by the fact that this strange priest hadn't even given a homily about the Scriptures.

Now, keep in mind that St. Agnes is one of the largest churches in our diocese, and on that Saturday night it was filled to capacity. Nonetheless, at the end of his talk, the priest pointed me out and asked me to stand. He began to ask some questions about my plans to attend his parish mission. Of course, I said I'd be in Europe by then.

Then he asked me one final question: "Have you ever thought about becoming a priest?"

"Yes, Father, I have," I replied, unsure if my voice betrayed my frustration or not. Of course, I had thought about it — I had been in and out of the



Photo by James A. McBride

Seminarian Kevin Mohan assists Bishop Joseph A. Galante at the Chrism Mass April 3 in St. Agnes Church, Our Lady of Hope Parish, Blackwood.

seminary! Who was this outlandish stranger to deprive me of a proper homily and then stand me up in front of this huge crowd and interrogate me?

But, as I realized afterward, God was trying to get my attention. My first time in seminary had not closed the door to a priestly vocation: my decision to leave was the middle — not an end — to the journey.

That semester, as I studied and made pilgrimages throughout Europe, I con-

sidered the priestly vocation and God's love for me. Slowly but surely, God brought these two things together in my mind and heart. Finally, I had come to believe what I now believe: that it is precisely in living life as a priest that God desires me to receive his love.

Kevin Mohan is a seminarian of the Camden Diocese from Blackwood. He will be ordained to the transitional diaconate on May 5.

The Whisper of God's invitation

By Sister Emily Vincent, IHM

If there is any Scripture passage that I consider to be an invitation to religious life, it is Mark 10:21-22, "The Rich Young Man." When I was contemplating a vocation to the religious life, I was not rich, but my life was well-established. I had a good-paying job, a close relationship with my family, and friends I enjoyed spending time with. I also owned a small condominium in a pleasant, quiet complex.

The Scripture passage of the Rich Young Man always made me a bit uncomfortable for two reasons. The first reason was not that I was materialistic, but to give up everything I worked so hard to earn seemed so impractical. The second reason was that it always chilled me that the rich young man went away sad after he heard God's call and chose not to follow it. So, I was in a quandary whether to do something impractical or walk away sad.

I had contemplated the idea of religious life a couple of times, but I didn't



SISTER EMILY VINCENT

actively pursue it. Since I went to public school, I didn't have much experience with sisters. I also thought that if God was calling me to religious life, it would be through a direct call, like to the rich young man.

Through time and prayer, I came to realize that God often calls us softly, as he did to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:12. It occurred to me that instead of brushing off that soft voice I should ask for further direction. I started to ask God to reveal

his will for me in my life, and that's when the invitation became clearer.

I heard about a "Theology on Tap" event located at a tavern, which was out of the way for me. However, I felt compelled to go because the topic was interesting and I knew the speaker.

When I showed up, I realized it wasn't the speaker or the topic that God wanted me to hear. Instead, he sent me there to meet some young sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM). I was amazed at how joyful and at peace they seemed. I think I stared at them the entire time. I grabbed one of them at the break and asked what made her decide to become a sister.

After that, she and I started to meet regularly and she introduced me to her community.

For the next year, I started attending monthly retreats with the IHM Sisters, but I was so secure in my life that it was hard to make the next step, which was to formally apply. I found the prospect of religious life both exciting and scary at the same time. On one hand, it was exciting

to let go and trust in God's Providence as to where I would one day be missioned as a sister. On the other hand, I was used to choosing where to work and live. Having been laid off twice in my career, I had to admit that I didn't have complete control over my life, anyway, but was I ready to give up the control I did have?

When I shared my situation with my spiritual director, he offered something that really helped. He said that the only way I could really know if religious life was right for me was to actually enter the community.

I took his advice and applied to the IHM Sisters. Once I answered the call, I realized that it was not just one call that I had to answer. Every day, I wake up and privately renew my vows to God. I don't know from day to day what I am going to be asked to do. Some calls are harder than others. All of them, however, bring me closer to God, whether I see it in the moment or not.

In the end, I am so glad that I didn't walk away sad, and that I answered the whisper of God's invitation.

The question answered in moments of clarity

By Father David Rivera

The Question

“When did you know that God was calling you?”

This is a question that I often receive at my vocation presentations. It is a simple question, but the answer is not so straightforward.

First, it is difficult to speak of “knowing” when it comes to a vocation. Often people seek a level of certainty that is illusory before they are willing to enter the seminary or religious formation.

Like many things in life, you can’t know you “like it” or if it is “for you” until you take the leap of faith and try. In other words, certainty follows after the decision and does not precede it.

That does not mean that I did not anticipate my serious choice with serious consideration. The point is that I entered the seminary to find out what could be discovered only through experimentation, through experience — whether God was truly drawing my heart to the priesthood.

Second, there were several “moments” when I began to know of God’s calling. These moments include the initial invitation to consider the priesthood, the moment when I felt the actual desire to enter the seminary and various other occasions when the vocation was confirmed.

If no one had asked, I would not have thought of the priesthood. However, the various moments of reassurance that occurred throughout my formation and preparation for the priesthood reinforced the assurance of that first time I felt the desire to be a priest.

The Moment (s)

So the answer to the question of “when” cannot be answered with one sentence, unless the sentence goes something like “I knew when I knew,” but that does not say much, does it?

I want to share the moment that is really a conglomeration of moments

when I “knew” that God was calling me to the priesthood.

The first time someone actually invited me to discern priesthood was sometime in May of 2000. Father Paul Breslin OFM, pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Church in Camden at the time, suggested that I attend a “Come and See” retreat being sponsored by the Diocese of Camden at St. Charles Seminary in Overbrook, just outside of Philadelphia.

I had approached him with a desire to participate more in the parish life. His suggestion was the discernment retreat.

Although I immediately responded positively, I had no intentions of entering the seminary. Up to that time no one had ever suggested the priesthood to me, at least not seriously. I figured that the retreat would be a great way to pray, visit a seminary, which I had never done, and meet new people. With nothing to lose and everything to gain, I went to “Come and See.”

On the last night of the retreat, just before the beginning of vespers (evening prayer), one of the Camden seminarians, now a priest, entered the chapel, genuflected and took his place in the stall. It was the moment when I first heard my heart speak to me and say, “I want to wear that and be here.” The “that” referred to clerical garb, and the “here” referred to the seminary. The “voice” spoke clearly and distinctly. There was no doubt; my life was about to change.

Although that inner locution was sufficient to drive me into the seminary, it would not have been enough to keep me there. That desire sparked by that internal voice would need and did receive many external confirmations. The constant encouragement showered upon me, and the occasional yet perfectly occurring “coincidences” would be the moments that would slowly but surely build the certainty I needed to continue.

What began as a one-year trial turned into a 10 year run ending finally with ordination, which itself is only another beginning.



Photo by Alan M. Dumoff

FATHER DAVID RIVERA

Now I see!

They say hindsight is 20/20 but it can also be 20/10. Looking back with eyes full of the realization of God’s call, I can now see that God had been calling me from before my birth and that the ‘coincidences’ of life were really the Hand of Divine Providence gently, and sometimes not so gently, preparing me for the moment when I would first

know what I should have realized all along.

Yes, there was a moment when first God called me, and yes, there was a first moment that began the process of knowing, but the truth is I am still hearing God’s call as it was the first time. It did not stop with that blessed moment in the seminary chapel but continues everyday.



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Dios también te llama

Por Father René Canales

Una de las experiencias más solemnes y trascendentes de la vida del cristiano es el llamado específico de Dios hacia una persona. Por ejemplo vemos en la historia de Israel y en la historia de la Iglesia numerosos relatos de personas a quienes Dios llamó para cumplir una tarea especial. El llamado y las respuestas dadas fueron tan diversos como los individuos que fueron llamados. Algunos de ellos fueron llamados a ser líderes, otros fueron llamados a un servicio simple, y otros huyeron, otros discutieron, y aún otros respondieron inmediatamente.

El común denominador entre todos los llamados sea que respondan o no; es la Decisión. Hoy en día, Dios sigue llamando a hombres y mujeres para el servicio a su misión, y su respuesta a Dios será basada en la relación personal que ellos tengan con él. Si uno se pregunta, ¿porque no hay muchas vocaciones Sacerdotales y religiosas hoy en día? La respuesta es sencilla; hoy en día hay poco conocimiento acerca del beneficio del llamado de Dios a la persona y su respuesta hacia Dios. Vivimos en un mundo egoísta que solo piensa en careers (carreras de preparación) que esta bien, pero se olvida de la primera dignidad y dimensión del ser humano; el llamado al servicio del prójimo, de la mejora del otro.

Por ejemplo vemos en el Éxodo 3:1-10 el llamado de Moisés. Aquí en este llamado vemos la asombrosa experiencia de un ser humano (hombre) con todas sus flaquezas e interrogantes. Aquí podemos acatar claramente que el llamado al servicio del Señor empieza con el. Dios toma la primera iniciativa y

él nos da la capacidad, nos equipa, nos enamora y nos mantiene. Nadie, sean cuales sean los talentos o la posición que tenga, puede darse el lujo de establecerse ante la presencia de Dios como escogido. Cuando medito en mi propio llamado, medito en unas palabras sabias, “Dios no llama a los cualificados sino que cualifica a los llamados.”

Pregunta: ¿Cuáles son los criterios que nosotros empleamos para determinar el potencial de una persona, y los criterios que usa Dios? La gente a menudo juzga las cualidades de los demás según su inteligencia, habilidades, y capacidad para tomar decisiones.

Las normas que Dios usa son diferentes (Dios ve el corazón y no las apariencias (1Samuel 16:7). Porque si fuera así, creo que muchos de nosotros no seríamos Sacerdotes o Religiosas hoy en día. Incluso cuando el obispo te ordena sacerdote dice unas palabras claves que son directamente del Ritual para las Ordenaciones: “Confiamos en la ayuda del Señor que este hijo, nuestro hermano se mantendrá en su servicio para la Gloria de Dios.” Por ejemplo, vemos en el llamado de Moisés, que Dios no lo llamó cuando éste gozaba de los deleites del palacio de Faraón o de su preparación en la escuela de los egipcios.

La clave y el sentido de todo llamado entonces es que: “Dios continúa revelándose a sí mismo a aquellos que lo buscan. Él desea una íntima relación con sus hijos; desea ser conocido de una manera personal.” Por ejemplo, Moisés no fue llamado por sus talentos, por su preparación, o por sus éxitos personales, al contrario; Moisés fue llamado porque Dios

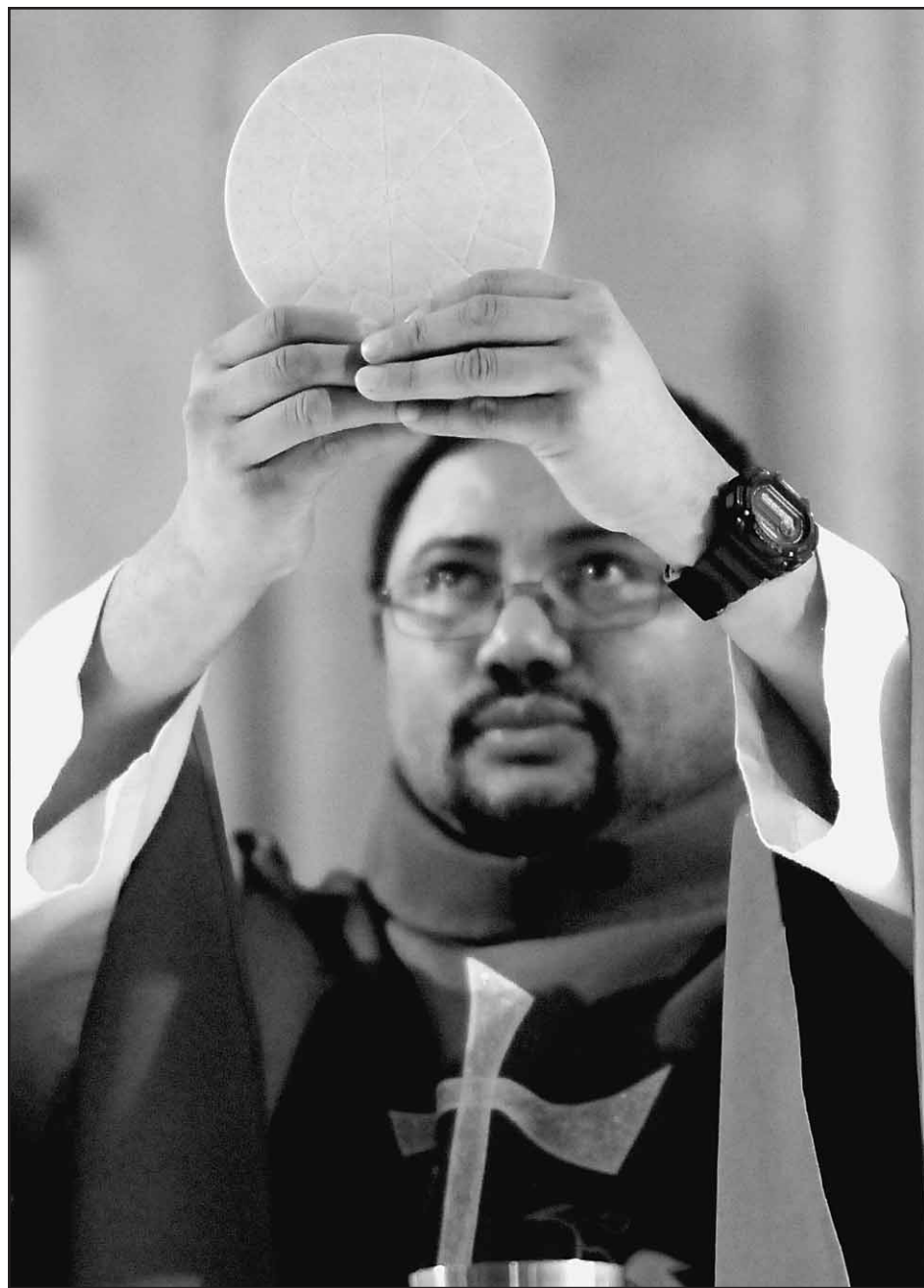


Photo by Alan M. Dumoff

FATHER RENÉ CANALES

sabía lo que Él podía lograr por medio de él.

Así como fue importante para Moisés saber quién lo llamó, así también usted es importante que sepa que Dios cada

día nos llama. ¿Y tu crees que Dios te esta llamando a su servicio?...No te vas a arrepentir.

Que Dios Proteja en tu caminar...

God also calls you

By Father René Canales

One of the most solemn and important transcendences of the life of a Christian is to know that our God is a personal God, who calls us into relationship with him.

For example, we see in Israel's history and also in the history of the Church, many stories of people God called to fulfill a special task. The call and the responses were as diverse as the individuals who were called. Some of them were called to be leaders, others were called to a simple service, and some fled, others argued, and still others responded immediately.

The common denominator, among all these calls of these individuals was their decision and response.

Today, God continues to call men and women for service to the mission, and their response to God is based on the personal relationship they have with him.

If one wonders why there are not many priestly and religious vocations today, the answer is simple: today there is little knowledge about the benefit of God's call to the person and their response to God. We live in a selfish society in which people think only of careers. They often forget that the first dignity of the human dimension is the desire to be in relationship, to serve the other.

For example, we see in Exodus 3:1-10 the call of Moses. Here in this call we see the amazing experience of a human being (Moses), an experience filled with difficulties and misfortunes.

It is clearly seen in this encounter between God and Moses that it is not man who makes the first step. On the contrary, it is God who comes to man (us).

When I reflect on my own call, I often meditate on these words of wisdom that someone gave me a while ago as when I was discerning whether I was called by God to the life of service, “God does not call the qualified but qualifies those he called.”

A question: What are the criteria we use to determine the potential of a person, to know when he or she is called by God to a life of service?

People often judge the qualities of others according to their intelligence, skills and ability to make decisions. Fair enough. But the criteria used by God appears to be different. (God

judges and sees the heart and not appearances (1 Samuel 16:7).

We see then in the call of Moses that God does not call him when he enjoyed the pleasures of the palace of Pharaoh or while he was being prepared and schooled by the Egyptians. No, he was called when he was at the wilderness shepherding, searching for something else, a moment of solitude perhaps, a moment when he begins to wonder, to find himself. There God can be found.

It was important to Moses to know who was calling him from the burning bush. It was God.

You should know that God also calls us every day. Do you think that God is calling you to service? You will not regret it.

May God protect your journey of faith.

Emmaus Club retreat



Fifteen members of the Emmaus Club of St. Joseph High School, Hammonton, participated in a weekend religious retreat in February to the Villa Walsh Convent in Morristown, N.J. The weekend included an open forum with the sisters discussing their religious life. The convent is home to the Sisters of St. Lucy Filippini or, as they are also known, the Religious Teachers Filippini. This order has provided teachers to St. Joseph Elementary School and St. Joseph High School for 90 years.



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Suscipe Saturday



Photo by Alan M. Dumoff

Participants pray during a Suscipe Saturday at St. Peter Parish, Merchantville, in January. Sponsored by the Vocation Office of the Diocese of Camden, Suscipe Saturday is a discernment program for high school age males that encourages them "to cultivate a deeper prayer life and relationship with Christ in order to better discern God's call for their lives." Future Suscipe Saturdays will be held on May 12 and June 9, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., at St. Peter's.

New members in religious orders

WASHINGTON—Women and men entering religious orders today are younger and more educated than new members of the recent past. They also have participated in numerous church activities, including parish youth ministry and campus ministry, according to a national survey.

The findings were made public in New Sisters and Brothers in Perpetual Vows, a study of men and women religious who professed perpetual vows in 2011. The study was conducted by the Georgetown University-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA).

Profession of perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience marks a final step of incorporation of new members into religious communities.

The CARA survey was commissioned by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. The survey was sent to sisters and brothers identified by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR), the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), and over 150 contemplative communities.

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