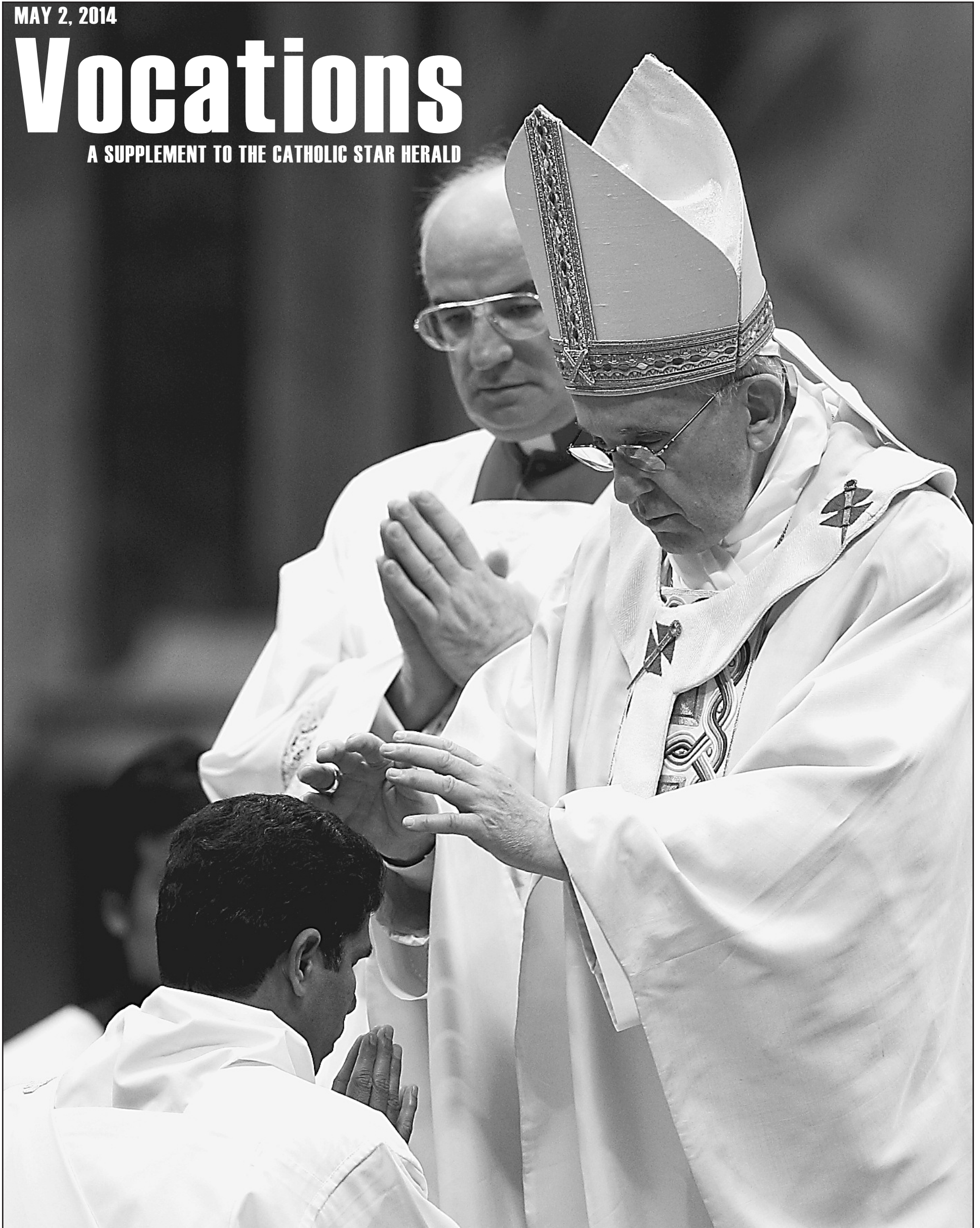


MAY 2, 2014

# Vocations

A SUPPLEMENT TO THE CATHOLIC STAR HERALD



Pope Francis ordains one of 10 priests during a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican April 21, 2013.

CNS photo/Paul Haring

# Reflect on the impact of church vocations

By Father Michael M. Romano

On the first Sunday of November, Bishop Sullivan asked the diocese to celebrate Vocations to the Diocesan Priesthood Sunday, a day when the priests of the diocese would share their own vocation stories and when the people of the diocese would re-up their efforts to pray for and support vocations to the priesthood for our diocese. In addition, he assigned each of our seminarians to one of our parishes to speak that weekend.

The articles from our seminarians in this year's Vocations Supplement are adaptations of the talks they gave to parishes throughout the diocese.

As we prepare to celebrate the 51st annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations next weekend, each of us is afforded the opportunity to reflect on the impact of church vocations in our lives. For some of us, it may be gratefully remembering the priest who ministered to us in a time of grief. For others, it could be the ministry of service that the deacons of our parish engage in so generously. For many, it is reflecting with fondness on the men and women religious who educated us in the classroom.

Certain religious figures from our past and present hold a special place in



Photo by James A. McBride

Father Michael M. Romano, director of Priestly Vocations for the Diocese of Camden, speaks at the iRace4Vocations event at Rowan University, Glassboro, on April 27.

our hearts. The World Day of Prayer for Vocations gives us the chance to thank the Lord for those men and women, but also to beg him to send us more young people who will give their lives in service to the church. As you read the articles in this supplement, I hope that it will inspire you to encourage young people to be open to the possibility that God may be calling them to a religious vocation.

At last Sunday's iRace4Vocations, one of the highlights was the many women religious who were present, leading the little kids in games and participating in line dances with the teens. Another was seeing priests running a 5k, offering up their training and their run for an increase in vocations for our diocese. These priests and sisters gave great witness to the hundreds that turned out.

My favorite part was seeing so many families from all over our diocese come together to pray for, to promote and to support vocations to the priesthood and religious life. For parents to bring their children to iRace showed implicitly their support of church vocations. For those who were there and are considering the priesthood or religious life, it was a visible manifestation of the prayers and support they so greatly need.

Everyone in our diocese needs to work to create an environment where vocations are discussed, young people are open to the call of the Lord in their lives, and the witness of priests and sisters is more clearly seen. In that way, we provide fertile soil for the Lord to work with in the minds and hearts of the people of the Diocese of Camden.

May this year's World Day of Prayer for Vocations see each of us doing our part to support those in church ministry, to pray for those in formation for ministry, especially our seminarians, and to encourage those who we think the Lord may be calling. And may God bless us abundantly with an increase in vocations in the near future.

*Father Michael M. Romano is the Director of Priestly Vocations for the Diocese of Camden.*

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# A call to something radically different

By Edward Kennedy

I am a seminarian for our diocese currently on pastoral year, a sort of internship year, but I study at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore.

I received my call to the priesthood at one of our parishes, Our Lady of Sorrows, while praying before the Blessed Sacrament. However, that is not where it all began.

The diocesan priesthood is something that is special to me, as I'm sure it is to you. I was raised, in a sense, in the diocesan priesthood. Two of my cousins are priests in this diocese, and they were examples for me of what the priesthood is all about. I saw the joy that their vocations brought to their lives. I saw the way they brought joy to people's lives when they celebrated weddings, and the comfort they brought to people when they celebrated funerals. They showed me that the priest-

hood was a lot more than what we see every Sunday.

I was drawn to the priesthood not only because of their example, but because there was something in me that knew that I was called to something different. And that is certainly what a vocation to the priesthood is, a call to something radically different. It's a call that provides an opportunity to be a part of something greater than yourself, and to help the communities in which we serve, to experience that goodness that we preach and celebrate. The diocesan priesthood is a call to put one's own needs aside in order to faithfully serve the people of God.

While I still have a little more than two years until I'm ordained, God willing, I've been able to experience the life of a diocesan priest this year at my pastoral year assignment. I am able to assist in weddings and funerals, both daily and Sunday Masses. I am able to



EDWARD KENNEDY

teach religious education, take part in the many ministries in the parish, and experience the fraternity of rectory life.

Today I would like to extend an invitation, and a challenge, to the young men of our diocese. The Office of Vocations currently holds discernment

groups where young men are able to come together to try and discover their own calling in life. It's an opportunity to meet other young men who feel they might be called to the priesthood. You get an opportunity to meet some of our seminarians and priests, and if you're lucky maybe even get a nice dinner prepared by yours truly. Most importantly, these groups are an opportunity for you to deepen your relationship with God in order to find the path that he has in store for you.

For everyone else, I ask you to pray for me and my brother seminarians, and to pray for an increase in vocations for our diocese, something so greatly needed.

*Edward Kennedy is on a pastoral year assignment at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Lindenwold. His home parish is St. Nicholas of Tolentine in Atlantic City.*

# Speaking to and listening to the Lord

By Matthew Corbett

Although I can't pinpoint one specific moment in my life that I began to think about the priesthood, I have good memories of praying with my mom when I was younger. One night before bed, my mom taught my brother and me how to pray the Hail Mary and the Glory Be, and after that night, we would practice saying these prayers before we went to bed every night.

Later on when I was a little older, my mom and I would together pray along with the rosary that used to come on EWTN at 9:30 every night — which meant I could stay up late!

Praying with my mom began in me the important habit of speaking to and listening to the Lord. And without a doubt, the habit of prayer has been crucial to my seminary discernment, because there can be no true discernment to any vocation if it is not borne out of communication with the Lord.

An influential part of my decision to enter the seminary was being an altar server in my home parish at St. Peter's in Merchantville. I remember first wanting to become an altar server, not for the noblest of reasons, but because my older brother was one, and I always wanted anything that he had. I couldn't wait to be in kindergarten for no reason other than that he was in kindergarten. And when he once got a trophy from playing hockey, I was determined to do the same — and not to brag, but I did bring home the biggest trophy.

The exposure that I had to different liturgies as an altar server, like Sunday Masses and novenas, captivated my



MATTHEW CORBETT

imagination and I was always excited to be able to participate in them. And my parents made sure that we were present for our assignments — my mom seemed to volunteer us for just about anything that came up, be it a funeral, a wedding, or a special Mass, so I was in the church a lot as a kid.

In fifth grade my pastor, Father Anthony Manuppella, asked me if I would want to become a priest, and his invitation at that time converged with my own interest in the priesthood. He and the other priests of my parish, including Father John Byrnes, who was suffering from cancer at that time, were encouraging and were always grateful for my assistance. The kindness they showed me, their joyful dispositions, and the devotion to their ministry were an inspiration to me, and I remained close to my parish priests as I went through Camden Catholic. With their guidance and that of our high school campus minister, I entered St. Andrew's College Seminary the

September after graduating high school in June of 2007.

I enjoyed my time in the College Seminary, especially the newfound freedom that comes with being in college, where you're able to arrange your own schedule and expand your social life. I lived in a community of about 30 men of different ages and backgrounds and enjoyed forging new friendships.

When I was asked by our vice rector toward the end of my last year of college seminary about my favorite aspect of being a part of the St. Andrews community, I thought of our many impromptu outings when we'd crowd into the house vans to go out for food or just to get out of the house; I thought of the two trips we'd gone on together to France and later to Spain, but what most stood out to me was getting back to the house on Sunday evenings and praying Night Prayer together as a seminary community. Especially in that last year of College Seminary when I was starting to feel sentimental about graduating, I would look around during that time of silent prayer before the Eucharist and see my brother seminarians. Some had their eyes closed and heads bowed (maybe they were asleep, I don't know), others stared off into the distance — but I knew that all of us had challenges ahead: the immediate challenges of schoolwork, but especially the challenge of discerning how we were being called to be imitators of the Lord in service to his church.

As a person who likes to think through my problems, I often act as if I can figure everything out on my own. But in praying about my vocation I have found that it is only in prayerful

conversation with the Lord on a personal level that I can truly express myself, and I am convinced that I am always assured of a response from him. In prayer and through reflection, I've come to find that he has always been in my life, working through the people who have helped motivate me to discern my vocation to the priesthood — priests, family, brother seminarians.

The diocese asks that you please pray that men both young and old will respond to God's call to them to be his priests. God may well be calling men from your own parish or family to the ministry of priesthood, and we have to be sure that we're all doing our part to encourage them by our prayers and support.

In my time as a seminarian I've been helped along by the prayers of so many good people. Just recently some parishioners at Holy Family Parish, where I'm assigned for my pastoral year, assured me of their continued prayers by giving me a prayer cloth that has little knots sewn into it to represent each member's prayers for me. After getting to know me in these past few months, Father Robert Hughes, who was my supervisor for some time, responded to their kind gesture by telling them that I don't need a prayer cloth, but a prayer blanket.

So I thank you for whatever prayers you may have said for us seminarians and encourage you to consider the vocations that may come from those who you know.

*Matthew Corbett is on his pastoral year assignment at Holy Family in Sewell. His home parish is St. Peter's in Merchantville.*

# The diaconal ministry is one of service

By Deacon John Kacy

I was ordained on March 15, 1997. After my ordination, I was assigned to St. Mary's in Williamstown, now Our Lady of Peace, where I am thankfully today.

Diaconal ministry is diverse, beginning with the obvious: the deacon at the Mass. But there is so much more: baptisms, holy hours with exposition and benediction, stations of the cross, funerals, vigils for the deceased, burials, taking the Eucharist to shut-ins, and much, much more.

I am involved in all those ministries in my parish at different levels, but one of my favorites is being the director of RCIA (The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults). In 1984 I went through the RCIA and received all three sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil. So as you can imagine, the RCIA is special to me. Each year I get to watch people of all ages grow in their faith as they learn about this wonderful faith we call The Holy Roman Catholic Church. I get to watch as people start out a little apprehensive or doubtful and then being moved to tears when they receive the Easter sacraments at the vigil.

The Easter Vigil is like the best retreat of the year for me. It reignites the fire of the Holy Spirit that was lit in me at the Easter Vigil in 1984 and keeps me going for another year.

At Our Lady of Peace we open the RCIA to Catholics who want to know more about their faith. We usually have a few and they are amazed by how much they learn about the faith they thought they knew. My favorite statement is "I never knew that."

At Our Lady of Peace we have more than 65 ministries of which I chair two: RCIA, of course, and Adopt a Shrine, which is a great group of people who give to their parish through a labor of love by maintaining one or more of our 15 shrines and various flower beds on the parish and school grounds. They do so by power washing and painting the statues, planting flowers, mulching, weeding, trimming shrubs, picking up trash and whatever else is needed for the area they adopt.

And Father Cadmus Mazzarella, our pastor, gets many emails and letters from people telling him how nice our grounds look that he forwards to me and I forward to all the members of the Adopt a Shrine ministry.



DEACON JOHN KACY

Get involved in your parish, for it's really true that the more you give the more you get. You don't have to be a lector or an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist, or have a beautiful singing

voice to get involved — there is something for everyone.

Deacon comes from the Greek word *diakonos* and the Latin *diaconus* which means servant. The diaconal ministry is one of service. Not just service to the bishop and priest but to all of the People of God, and I am proud to do so humbly and with sincerity.

We just celebrated the Triduum which started with the Mass of the Last Supper when our Lord instituted the priesthood and gave us that wonderful example of service when he washed the disciple's feet which the celebrant does each year on Holy Thursday when he washes the feet of 12 parishioners, an example of humble service we are all to follow.

Our Lord said, "Let your yes mean yes and your no mean no; everything else is from the evil one." I have tried to model my diaconate after those words from our Lord. I believe I have been pretty successful so far and I pray for God's grace to help me stay on track. God bless you. Get involved.

*Deacon John Kacy ministers at Our Lady of Peace Parish, Williamstown.*

## A vocation story that begins in high school

By Sister Dianna Higgins

I am a Franciscan Missionary Sister of the Infant Jesus. I entered our community after finishing college and teaching school for a year, but my vocation story begins during my high school years. At that time I was searching for meaning in life, asking myself what I would make the reference point in my life. I realized that as a Christian, Jesus was my reference point and I would find meaning in life by following him, living a life like he did.

From the Scriptures we know that Jesus lived a poor life, a chaste life, and a life obedient to the will of his Father. I concluded that, for me, living a life like Jesus meant living a life of poverty, chastity and obedience, and the first seeds of a religious vocation started to grow.

I had a phenomenal religion teacher who helped me see that God is present in all of the events of our lives. He speaks to us in Scripture, through others, in everyday events, in music, in nature, in silence and in our hearts. I learned that prayer is about a relationship with one who loves us. Knowing and experiencing the love that Jesus had for me, I could only love him back. I loved going to Mass and receiving the Eucharist. I started reading the Bible.

During high school one of my friends invited me to go with her, the FMIJ sis-



SISTER DIANNA HIGGINS

ters and some other teens to Planned Parenthood to pray the rosary to end abortion. That evening, I asked the sisters a lot of questions. Sister Theresa answered them all, and she invited me to join a Bible Study group she had begun with the other kids who came to the rosary rally.

For the rest of my high school years this thought of a vocation to religious life remained, but I had a lot of fear and insecurity. I didn't think I was good enough, or holy enough. I thought I was too young for such a commitment. I had planned to go to college, and that's what I did. I had hoped that college

would fill my life so much that I would forget about the convent, but the thought remained. College was wonderful, but something was missing. There was still emptiness in my heart.

I had made a plan for my life of what I thought would make me happy: college, a teaching degree, a car, an apartment and a job. I figured once I had these things I would be happy. I rented the apartment, finished college, bought the car and began teaching. But the emptiness was still there.

That year I began a formation program with the sisters. I realized that the time I spent with the sisters was when I

felt peaceful, joyful and fulfilled. I made a request to enter the community as a postulant the following year. I completed my postulancy and began novitiate. I learned about St. Francis and our foundress, Mother Mary Joseph Micarelli. I learned about the vows, prayed with the community and experienced life with the sisters. I discovered I was happy here. After completing novitiate, I made my first profession of vows.

I am grateful to the Lord for the gift of my vocation. I have experienced God working in all of the events and experiences in my life, in the good and beautiful moments, and also in the difficult moments. All of those experiences, both good and bad, have made me who I am, and I am grateful for them all. I love my sisters and my religious life. The Lord has given me beautiful ministries and opportunities to serve. I have learned so much and seen God's presence in my life and the lives of many others. It has all been a gift and a blessing.

To those who may be thinking about religious life, I encourage you to take a risk and give it a try. The Lord will not disappoint you.

*Sister Dianna Higgins, a Franciscan Missionary Sister of the Infant Jesus, is a religion teacher at Paul VI High School in Haddon Township.*

# Seminary was the best decision of my life

By Henry Laigaie

I am in my second year of formation at the College Seminary of the Immaculate Conception at Seton Hall University.

I am also a parishioner from St. Andrew the Apostle Church in Gibbsboro.

Before attending St. Andrew's, I started my religious journey at Holy Rosary Church and School in Cherry Hill. I continued my religious journey at Our Lady of Grace, Somerdale, where I completed elementary school. I selected Paul VI High School in Haddon Township and I greatly enjoyed my religious growth and experiences there.

I have been an altar server since the fourth grade and I can gladly say that being an altar server and assisting the priest in the holy sacrifice of Mass enlightened me to the path of Christ and helped me look for more in my service to the Lord.

I have been truly blessed to grow up with great priests as role models in the parish and at high school. At Paul VI, Father Robert Hughes, then the school president who also had parish duties, always had time for meaningful religious discussions.

It was Father Michael Romano, then chaplain at Paul VI, who provided me

*There are many opportunities to help men who are thinking about entering the seminary.*

with the opportunity to learn about and more fully investigate my thoughts of discernment. He also introduced me to other young men who were on a similar journey of discernment. He spent many hours with us in religious discussions and also provided pertinent information and down to earth answers to the many questions that surround discernment options.

After months of thought, many discernment group meetings and lots of prayers to Jesus and Mary, I contemplated my decision to enter the seminary. I have been in the seminary for a year and a half now and I know that this was the best decision of my life.

I am also blessed to have a loving family which has supported me all the way through my discernment. We all learned a lot about ourselves and our faith during the journey.

Many people have asked me, "Why did you choose the Diocese of Camden?"

The answer is because the Diocese of Camden is where I was born, nurtured, educated and raised in the Catholic faith. And what could be better than having the opportunity of giving back and paying it forward for all that the Diocese of Camden has provided me.

I can assure you that there are many young men out there who are being called to the priesthood and some are just not hearing the call, or they are hearing the call but afraid to act on it. You can answer the call by talking to a local priest or calling Father Romano at the diocesan Vocations Office. As St. John Paul II said, "Be not afraid."

There are many opportunities to help men who are thinking about entering the seminary. There are local discernment groups through which Father Romano provides counsel. There is also the iRace4Vocations Day which is a 5K walk and run to raise prayer pledges for an increase of prayer for vocations in the diocese,



HENRY LAIGAIE

which is an excellent opportunity to get involved.

We are also thankful to have Bishop Dennis Sullivan as a strong advocate of vocations. It has become his constant message to all the parishes he visits.

I ask all of you to pray daily that God will soon bless our diocese with more vocations. And please pray for me and my brother seminarians that we will always follow God's will, wherever that may be.

*Henry Laigaie is in Second College at The College Seminary of the Immaculate Conception at St. Andrew's Hall, Seton Hall University. His home parish is St. Andrew the Apostle in Gibbsboro.*

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# No choice but to follow God's will

By Peter Gallagher

I am a second year college seminarian attending the College Seminary of the Immaculate Conception at St. Andrew's Hall, on the campus of Seton Hall University. I live in Haddon Township and my parish is Christ the King in Haddonfield.

I can remember as early as fifth grade when I first developed thoughts of becoming a priest. I had a great experience with many of the priests at my home parish. If you had asked me in eighth grade what I was going to be when I grew up, I would have answered a priest! And if you had asked me that same question, three years later, before my senior year of high school, I would have said the same thing.

I am a proud alumnus of Paul VI High School, Haddon Township, and would testify that it was there my vocation blossomed. I was dating at the beginning of my senior year but quickly realized that I was simply trying to hide my very obvious vocation. I did not want to accept this call that God, out of his incredible love, had created me to fulfill. I was not my usual joyful self and even my running, which I took very seriously as captain of the cross-country team, was struggling.

*To discern the priesthood, one needs silence, to pray and hear God speaking in our hearts.*

One day I could not find my car keys and I found myself praying, "Please God, if I find my keys, I'll become a priest!" Finally, it took the unusual death of a longtime parishioner to realize there was no choice but to follow God's will and enter the seminary. Through the support of our wonderful vocation director and, at the time, the chaplain of PVI, Father Romano, I applied and was accepted as a seminarian. And now here I am, very happy and as joyful as ever.

I first want to thank you for all of your prayers that you have already offered for the priests of Camden and those discerning the priesthood. I ask that all of you will pray for the intercession of your parish patrons asking for more men to realize their vocation to the priesthood in our diocese.

Priests administer the sacraments, the greatest signs of God's love for us, especially the sacrament of holy

Communion. As St. Padre Pio said, "It is easier for the earth to exist without the sun than without the holy sacrifice of the Mass."

For anyone who has ever thought once of becoming a priest, I sincerely hope and pray that you have the courage to respond to God's call. The lack of priests in the world today compared to older times is most likely due to the fact that young men are not hearing and responding to the invitation from God. Society certainly makes this difficult: we are always busy and constantly distracted throughout our day. To discern the priesthood, one needs silence, to pray and hear God speaking in our hearts.

Parents, friends, parishioners of those who are discerning: please, offer all of your support. It is not our will, but God's. If you have a son, grandson or friend who happens to be called to the priesthood, be gracious for this blessing God has bestowed on the world.



PETER GALLAGHER

Temptation seeks to dissuade men discerning this vocation. We need to trust in the Holy Spirit to foster a culture of life and love, obeying all that God wants.

I am certainly not worthy of this calling to serve God as a holy priest and others may feel the same way. But, as we read in Scripture: God makes us worthy; he does not call the qualified, he qualifies the called.

*Peter Gallagher is in Second College at The College Seminary of the Immaculate Conception at St. Andrew's Hall, Seton Hall University. His home parish is Christ the King in Haddonfield.*

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