

APRIL 29, 2022

# Vocations



A SUPPLEMENT TO THE CATHOLIC STAR HERALD

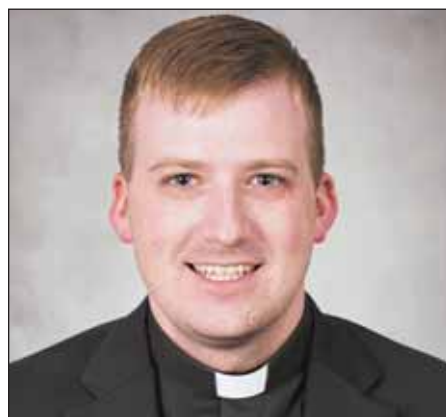
## Same mission, different paths to priesthood

*Editor's Note: Five men are scheduled to be ordained to the priesthood in the Diocese of Camden during the Ordination Mass at 10:30 a.m. May 14, Saint Agnes Church, Our Lady of Hope Parish, Blackwood.*

By Father Adam Cichoski

It is amazing to think that in just a few weeks, we will be celebrating the ordinations of five men for our Diocese! Each year, at ordination time, so many memories always come back to my time in the seminary, from those very first days of the seminary to the days right before my ordination. It is such a great trip down memory lane!

In the seven years I was in formation, I changed in so many good ways. I still remember the fear and excitement of pulling up to the seminary to move in. I also still remember the fear and excitement of moving out of the seminary, ready to begin my ministry in our Diocese. So much had changed in me over those years, as God truly formed me into His priest.



FATHER ADAM CICHOSKI

We will see this, too, in the articles from our seminarians. We have some glimpses of their journeys from that first New Seminarian Welcome Mass, to a typical day at the college seminary. We also see their formation from the classes they take to the ministries they are a part of. The lives of each of our seminarians are different, but they are all focused on the same mission: becoming the men God is calling them to be!

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Our seminarians are formed spiritually, humanly, intellectually and pastorally.

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This transformation is something that takes time and practice. Throughout the years of seminary formation, our seminarians are formed spiritually, humanly, intellectually and pastorally. They are challenged in many different ways, and they are given plenty of opportunities to grow and become the priests God is calling them to be. Their lives consist of prayer, classes, apostolic assignments, and living together with other men who are being formed with them. They pray together, they study together, and they grow together.

I often miss my days in the seminary, but I know God was using that time for something even greater for the rest of my life. In my classes and apos-

tolic assignments, I received a great taste of the opportunities I would have in the parish to share the Good News with the people in our Diocese. Now, as an ordained priest for just five short years, I see how all of those years of prayer, study and work have paid off and continue to help me on my journey.

As we prepare for the upcoming ordinations, let us take time to pray for the men who will soon be ordained and experience full-time ministry here in our Diocese – that the fire and zeal in their hearts will continue to grow and bear much fruit in their future parishes. We pray for all of our seminarians, as they continue their studies and formation, that they may always stay the course by following God's call in their lives. We pray for the men who are discerning and thinking about their vocations, may they have the courage to say "Yes!" to God and follow Him.

*Father Adam Cichoski is director of vocations for the Diocese of Camden.*

# St. Joseph's Seminary marks five generations of formation

By **Claudia McDonnell**  
Catholic New York

A spirit of gratitude and joy filled the Chapel of SS. Peter and Paul on March 25 as Saint Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie, marked the closing of its 125th anniversary year at a Mass.

"We're all part of something beautiful: the Church, the communion of saints. It started at the Sea of Galilee. That was the first seminary, and Jesus was the first rector, forming his first

priests, the Apostles," said Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, who was the celebrant at the Mass.

The seminary, at which Bishop Dennis Sullivan studied for the priesthood, has a history that predates World War I.

"It has been the school for the priesthood for five generations," said Bishop James Massa, seminary rector.

In a separate interview, Bishop Sullivan credited Saint Joseph's, say-

ing, "The seminary prepared me very well for ministry. It gave me a formation and discipline in the spiritual life, in theological life and in pastoral life."

He added that the location is also significant. Whereas seminaries once tended to be located in rural areas, Saint Joseph's proximity to New York City has offered cultural and educational benefits.

"It gives seminarians a real-world experience," Bishop Sullivan said, explaining that young men often serve

in homeless shelters or addiction facilities, which "give them a sensitivity to people who are suffering in that way, which will be helpful in their priestly ministries."

Bishop Massa noted that the training of priests has developed over the years to meet changing times and needs.

"Priests do not exercise their ministry in isolation anymore," he said. "They work with well-formed deacons, well-formed lay catechists and other parish leaders."

He noted that the seminary is "blessed to have the participation of other dioceses." Seminarians are now enrolled from the Archdiocese of New York and also from the dioceses of Brooklyn; Rockville Centre; Camden, N.J.; and Bridgeport, Conn.

One such seminarian is Timothy Mulranen, who is studying first theology for the Camden Diocese. "Serving the people of God in one of the biggest cities in America will help me serve the people of South Jersey in the urban, suburban and rural areas," he said.

"For example, my apostolate this year is serving at the homeless shelter in the South Bronx. Driving from Yonkers to the South Bronx really helped me come out of my comfort zone to serve the people of God, which is important to get accustomed to if God wills for us to serve his people as priests. Seeing those who are homeless in a big city really gave me a clear understanding of the real struggles of the poor," he said.

Thomas Piro of the Diocese of Camden is in his first year of studies at the seminary.

"It's been very welcoming and very supportive of my vocation," he said. "The faculty always has our backs and challenges us to be good Christian men and holy priests." He added that the seminary leaders encourage "fraternity and spending time with each other in the chapel, in class and outside the seminary."

Transitional Deacon Logan Nilsen, who is in his fourth year of theology and scheduled to be ordained to the priesthood in the Diocese of Camden in May, called Saint Joseph's "an iconic seminary."

*(continued on page S4)*



Following the "common sense" spirituality of the gentleman saint, Francis de Sales, and infused by his optimism and conviction of God's infinite love for us and all of Creation, the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales serve in schools and universities, parishes, chaplaincies (police, hospital, prison), retreat ministry and missionary work in other countries. We invite others to "take hold and never let go" as was Francis' motto, to "do the ordinary, extraordinarily well," living in God's presence in the present moment. To learn more about this humble and gentle call to "Live + Jesus," visit us at [oblates.org](http://oblates.org) and [oblates.us](http://oblates.us).



## On page S1

Photo by John Kalitz

The five men scheduled to be ordained priests for the Diocese of Camden in May serve during the 2021 Blessing of the Sea in Wildwood. From left, Deacons Stephen Robbins, Christopher Myers, Paul Abbruscato, Logan Nilsen and Cesar Pirateque.

# Words of Encouragement

## Knights' Seminarian Letter Project promotes faith, fellowship

By Christina Leslie  
Correspondent

Walt Whitman once wrote, "The art of art, the glory of expression, and the sunshine of the light of letters, is simplicity." The 19-century poet and essayist might well enjoy the simplicity and glorious expressions of faith emanating from the pens, pencils, even crayons of youth in the Diocese of Camden as they engage in the annual Knights of Columbus Seminarian Letter Project.

The project, instituted in 2000 by the New Jersey State Council of the Knights, facilitates students in Catholic schools and parish religious education programs to send letters and cards to men studying for the priesthood. Created by John Tirado, a Knight of the Saint Jude Council 12092, Bellmawr, the project both nurtures vocations in the young and provides men journeying to the priesthood prayerful support from their future flock.

### Hometown Hero

The Seminarian Letter Project can be a two-way, faith-based street, explained Joseph Polidoro, past Grand Knight of Saint Margaret Council 13259, Woodbury Heights. "The best way to support the Church is to support a priest, and in order to have priests, we need seminarians," Polidoro said. "It is important for these seminarians to realize, when they become priests in a parish, they will have to minister to young kids like this, and someday the kids who write these letters will have the confidence to go to a priest for absolution. [The seminarians] can be role models."

The council has partnered with students of Saint Margaret Regional School, Woodbury Heights, in the project for the past decade. Principal Sister Michele DeGregorio, FMIJ, asks students in kindergarten through eighth grade to write to the seminarians during Catholic Schools Week's unit on vocations.

"I assign a seminarian to each grade, as well as priests who once served in the parish and the religious teachers. Students write letters and draw pictures, and send them spiritual bouquets," Sister Michele said. "It makes the children aware that all of us are called to live out holiness, and that there are young men answering the call."

This year, the messages of support and gratitude found their way to one of their own.

"We sent letters to seminarian Timothy Mulranen, who is a first-year theology student

[at Saint Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y.]" Sister Michele said with a smile. "He is a graduate of Saint Margaret School, and his mother still works here in the office."

### Real Encounters

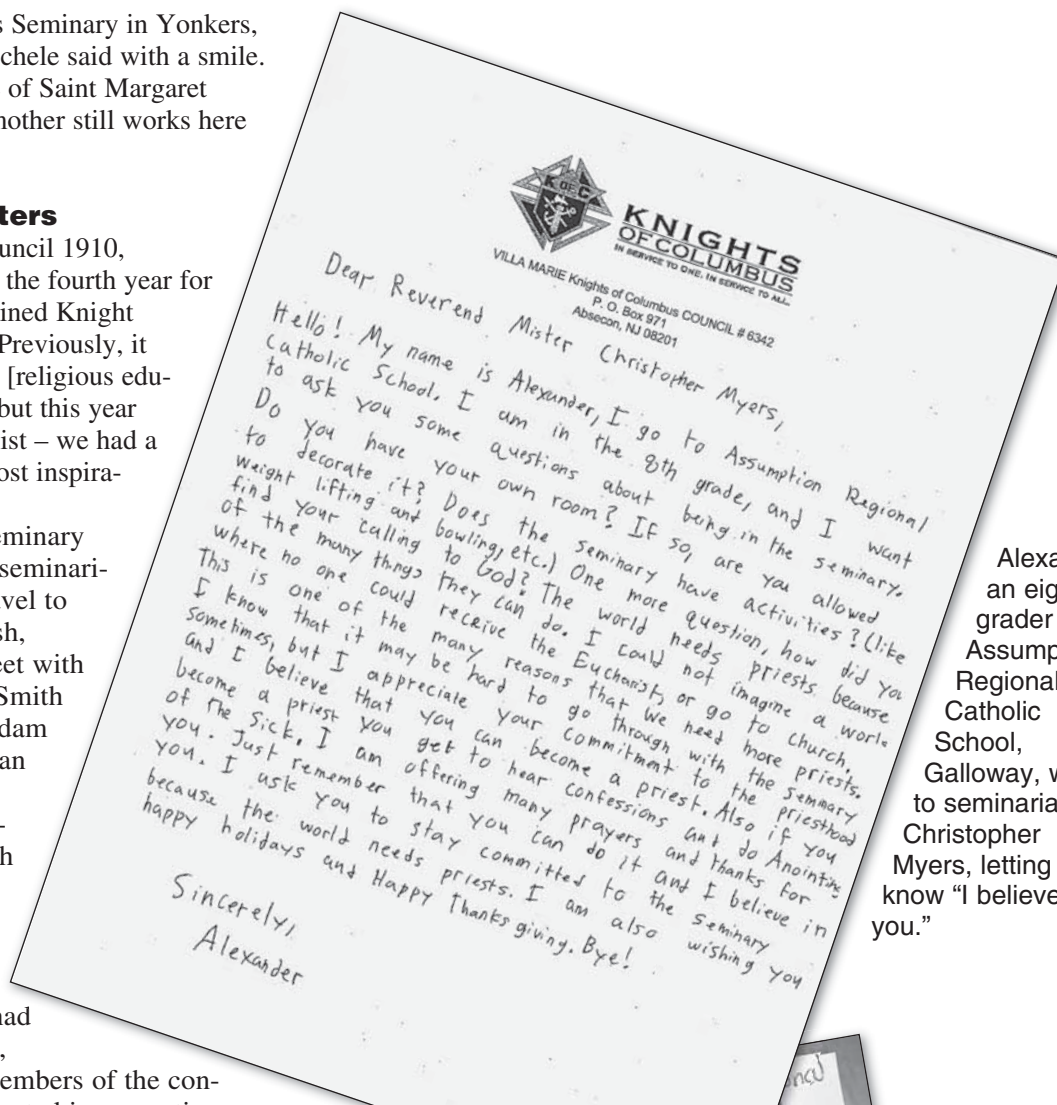
For Liberty Council 1910, Bridgeton, this is the fourth year for the project, explained Knight Stephen Smith. "Previously, it was just with our [religious education] students, but this year we had a little twist – we had a contest for the most inspirational letters."

Due to their seminary class schedules, seminarians could not travel to Holy Cross Parish, Bridgeton, to meet with the children, so Smith invited Father Adam Cichoski, diocesan director of vocations, to concelebrate a Mass with pastor Father Matthew Weber. After Mass, students from Bishop Schad Regional School, Vineland, and members of the congregation participated in a question-and-answer period about what it is to live as a priest and seminarian, complete with personal anecdotes.

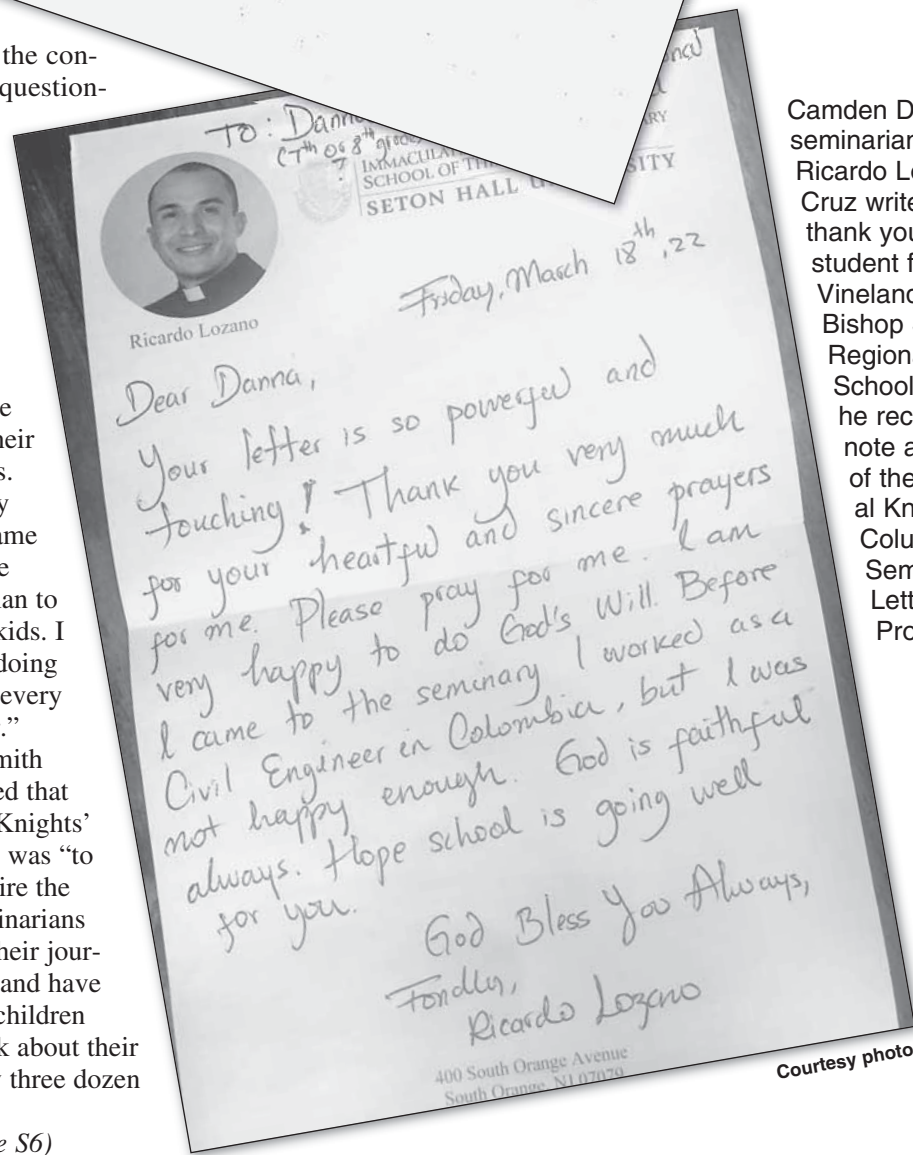
"The kids were spellbound," Smith recalled. "Father Adam told a story about how he used to box, and the kids were at the edge

of their seats. They became more human to the kids. I am doing this every year." Smith added that the Knights' goal was "to inspire the seminarians on their journey and have the children think about their

Catholic faith." The roughly three dozen



Alexander, an eighth-grader from Assumption Regional Catholic School, Galloway, writes to seminarian Christopher Myers, letting him know "I believe in you."



Camden Diocese seminarian Ricardo Lozano Cruz writes a thank you to a student from Vineland's Bishop Schad Regional School after he received a note as part of the annual Knights of Columbus Seminarian Letter Project.

"It makes the children aware that all of us are called to live out holiness."

Sister Michele DeGregorio,  
FMIJ

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Courtesy photos

# Surrendering to Lord leads to peace, deacon vocation

By Deacon Fernando S. Encarnado

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

Before leaving Philadelphia and living in New Jersey, my wife and I prayed for two things: a good church and a good school for our two kids.

Our prayers were heard and answered. In summer 2003, my family moved to Blackwood. We found a nice church (Our Lady of Hope Parish) and a good Catholic school for my children. We thanked our Lord and Mama Mary for these great blessings he had bestowed to my whole family. The first three months being in our parish, our pastor asked my wife and I if we wanted to become Eucharistic Ministers. We were both surprised that for all the number of years living in Philadelphia, we never had the opportunity to serve the Church in any capacity. After that, my whole family became active in the parish and my children became members of the choir.

In 2006, my pastor asked if I wanted to become a permanent deacon. Me a deacon? No way, was my response, as I explained to him that I had two small children and didn't think I could do it. I was scared and felt unworthy. My pastor told me to pray for it and discern. I went home that night, and I couldn't sleep. I needed some spiritual help.

The first thing I did was visit my parish's Saint Jude Church after work and pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament in our Adoration Chapel. This is one of those things I have learned is necessary to be in continual



Courtesy photo

Deacon Fernando S. Encarnado poses for a photo with his family, all of whom became involved in their parish, Our Lady of Hope, Blackwood.

prayer with the Father. Not only does this keep our hearts and minds open to the Holy Spirit's leading, but it also allows the Spirit to speak on our behalf: Romans 8:26-27 states, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches the hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.”

The Holy Spirit started to work in me, showing me my childhood days. I started remembering those things I did each morning as an altar server, how I wanted to become a priest when I grew up. I started thinking of all the blessings, and the good life that God has given me. Because of this, I offered myself and decided to join the formation of the diaconate for the Diocese of Camden.

In June 2007, I was accepted to the

formation. It was an interesting journey. I met a lot of good guys who had a similar life journey. Each of them had the love for our Lord and love to serve our Mother Church. I learned a lot about Holy Mass, the sacraments, Canon Law and the importance of prayer.

In October 2008, my wife got sick and was admitted to the hospital. I started to worry about a lot of things: her health, our financial needs, the tuition for my two kids, our mortgage, the car insurance, even my acceptance as a diaconate candidate. All these things starting to bother me so much – to the point where I could not sleep anymore. I would be working in the day, and sometimes my mind was not working in a positive way. The worst was when my telephone would start to ring; I would be so scared to pick it up.

One evening, I was so exhausted that I did not even realize I had fallen asleep. While sleeping, I had a dream that I heard a voice saying, “SURRENDER EVERYTHING TO ME, AND I'LL TAKE CARE OF IT.” I can still remember to this day that in my dream I was crying and saying, “Lord I surrender everything to you.” The next day, I received the peace I was looking for.

In May 2015, I was ordained as a permanent deacon. Although I stopped my studies for 1 1/2 years because of my wife's illness, I did not stop my dream to serve our Lord and his people. Today, my wife is in remission; she's receiving treatment every month. My two children have graduated from college, and both are employed.

As the Spirit has guided me to this

## DID YOU KNOW?

The World Day of Prayer for Vocations is May 8, also known as Good Shepherd Sunday. The purpose of this celebration is to publicly fulfill the Lord's instruction to, “Pray the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest.” (Mt 9:38; Lk 10:2). While appreciating all vocations, the Church concentrates its attention this day on vocations to the ordained ministries (priesthood and diaconate), consecrated life in all its forms (male and female religious life, societies of apostolic life, consecrated virginity), secular institutes in their diversity of services and membership, and to the missionary life.

For more information, visit [uscbb.org](http://uscbb.org).

experience, the only thing that I can do is to be confident that the Spirit will lead me safely through whatever challenges life brings my way.

I committed myself as God's servant, someone who is ready to serve my Church, parish and my beloved brothers and sisters. Praise and thanks to our God and through the loving intercession of my Mama Mary.

Deacon Fernando S. Encarnado serves in Our Lady of Hope Parish, Blackwood.

## Camden's seminarians tout benefits of N.Y. seminary

(continued from page S2)

“As you walk down the main hallway, the pictures of all the graduating classes are hanging up, and you immediately get the sense of the impact that Saint Joseph's Seminary has over the Church in the United States. It has meant a great deal to me to be a part of the seminary community over these last four years.”

He added that Saint Joseph's has strengthened his vocation “through the support, guidance and fatherly figures of the priests at the seminary, and in other assignments. ... I have seen numerous examples of being a good father in the parish and have received the formation and teachings that, God willing, will help me to be a good priest as well.”

Catholic Star Herald staff reports contributed to this article.



A statue of Jesus stands outside at Saint Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y.

CNS photo/Chaz Muth

# Deacon Pirateque finds faith in the fields

By Transitional Deacon  
Cesar Pirateque

As a transitional deacon assigned to Saint Clare of Assisi Parish, I was blessed to participate in moments of grace in the rural part of our Diocese.

Spanish-speaking people, mostly from Mexico, gathered for Holy Mass on the farms. These were only men, and they spent their day picking vegetables and working the fields. It is very hot, and it is very hard work that these men do to bring food to our tables. The Holy Sacrifice of Mass was offered in Spanish, and I was privileged to preach the homily and to serve at the Mass.

I served two Masses, and then the third encounter was a Liturgy of the Word. This gave me the opportunity to engage with the men more deeply. I asked them questions and responded to what they said. The men participated in a conversation, and this allowed me to see their unique faith.

It is important that I do not simply give them information, but rather, through a process of questioning and dialogue, they come to conclusions and they hear each other speak. It is so important that the Church reaches out to them since they may not have transportation or any way to get to Mass. They expressed why they came to the United States and why they work so hard: It is always for their families. They truly love their families and

carry out very difficult work out of love.

I believe that what I learned from the people is that we must accompany them with faith in Christ, to help them grow and to have a faith that is not only cultural, but which engages them as people of dignity as they are created in the image and likeness of God. This opportunity reminds me that we are all part of the Mystical Body of Christ. I cannot help to think when I look at the vegetables on my plate, that they were brought to my table through the real sacrifice of real persons. These men are my brothers. The Church in the United States is an immigrant Church, and throughout her history, the Church continues to grow in understanding that though very different, we are one Body in Christ.

I am learning so much as a deacon, and the Lord is giving me the grace to realize that the unity of the Church goes beyond cultural limitations. It is so important that the pastor of a parish be the unifier of the parish in faith, doctrine, truth and charity. This is what I aspire to be one day. My heart was touched in the vegetable fields. I am blessed in my assignment at Saint Clare of Assisi Parish.

*Transitional Deacon Cesar Pirateque, fourth theology, Immaculate Conception Seminary, Seton Hall University, South Orange, serves in Saint Clare of Assisi Parish, Gibbstown.*



Photo by/Foto de John Kalitz

Transitional Deacon Cesar Pirateque proclaims the Gospel.

El Diácono Transitorio Cesar Pirateque proclama el Evangelio.

## El Diácono Pirateque encuentra la fe en los campos

Por el Diácono Transicional  
Cesar Pirateque

Como Diácono de transición asignado a la parroquia de Santa Clara de Asís, tuve la bendición de participar en momentos de gracia en la parte rural de nuestra Diócesis.

Personas de habla hispana, en su mayoría de México, se reunieron para la Santa Misa en las granjas. Estos eran solo hombres, y pasaban el día recogiendo verduras y trabajando los campos. Hace mucho calor y es un trabajo muy duro el que hacen estos hombres para traer comida a nuestras mesas. El Santo Sacrificio de la Misa se ofreció en español y tuve el privilegio de predicar la homilía y servir en la Misa.

Serví dos Misas, y luego el tercer encuentro fue una Liturgia de la Palabra. Esto me dio la oportunidad de comprometerme más profundamente con los hombres. Les hice preguntas y

respondí a lo que dijeron. Los hombres participaron en una conversación, y esto me permitió ver su fe única.

Es importante que no les dé simplemente información, sino que, a través de un proceso de cuestionamiento y diálogo, lleguen a conclusiones y se escuchan unos a otros. Es muy importante que la Iglesia se acerque a ellos, ya que es posible que no tengan transporte ni forma de llegar a Misa. Expresaron por qué vinieron a los Estados Unidos y por qué trabajan tan duro: es siempre es por sus familias. Aman verdaderamente a sus familias y realizan trabajos muy difíciles por amor.

Creo que lo que aprendí de la gente es que hay que acompañarlos con la fe en Cristo, para ayudarlos a crecer y a tener una fe que no sea solo cultural, pero que los comprometa como personas dignas por haber sido creados a imagen y semejanza de Dios. Esta oportunidad me recuerda que todos

Estoy aprendiendo mucho como diácono, y el Señor me está dando la gracia de darme cuenta de que la unidad de la Iglesia va más allá de las limitaciones culturales.

somos parte del Cuerpo Místico de Cristo. No puedo evitar pensar cuando miro las verduras en mi plato, que fueron traídas a mi mesa a través del sacrificio verdadero de personas reales. Estos hombres son mis hermanos. La Iglesia en los Estados Unidos es una Iglesia inmigrante, y a lo largo de su historia, la Iglesia continúa creciendo en la comprensión de que, aunque muy diferentes, somos un Cuerpo en Cristo.

Estoy aprendiendo mucho como diácono, y el Señor me está dando la gracia de darme cuenta de que la unidad de la Iglesia va más allá de las limita-

ciones culturales. Es tan importante que el párroco de una parroquia sea el unificador de la parroquia en la fe, la doctrina, la verdad y la caridad. Esto es lo que aspiro a ser algún día. Mi corazón fue tocado en los campos de vegetales. Soy bendecido en mi asignación en la Parroquia de Santa Clara de Asís.

*El Diácono transitorio Cesar Pirateque, cuarta teología, Seminario Inmaculada Concepción, Universidad de Seton Hall, Sur Orange, sirve en la Parroquia Santa Clara de Asís, en Gibbstown.*

# New book points to need for racial reckoning in women's religious orders

By Carol Zimmermann  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON – Shannen Dee Williams describes her upcoming book about Black Catholic sisters as a “labor of love.”

Her book, “Subversive Habits: Black Catholic Nuns in the Long African American Freedom Struggle,” which comes out in May, is the result of more than a dozen years of research and oral history interviews.

It recounts not only how Black sisters were front-runners in pushing for desegregation in society at large but how they also had to do that on a very personal level in their push to get accepted into predominantly white religious orders and to persevere in their vocation when some of them endured not just prejudice but outright bullying in these orders.

Williams, an associate professor of history at the Marianist-run University of Dayton in Ohio, and a columnist for Catholic News Service, interviewed women religious and pored through the archives of many congregations for her work.

Putting all of it together gets to some “true truths,” she said, using one of Sister Thea Bowman’s expressions. The Franciscan Sister of



CNS photo/Lisa Johnston, St. Louis Review

Roneisha Simpson, a junior at Cardinal Ritter High School in St. Louis, speaks with Sister Mary Antona Ebo after the Franciscan Sister of Mary addressed students at the school Feb. 14, 2013. Sister Ebo was one of six women religious working in the Archdiocese of St. Louis who responded to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s request to march in 1965 in Selma, Ala.

Perpetual Adoration pioneered the rights of Black Catholics and her sainthood cause is being considered by the Vatican.

In a February interview, Williams said the idea for the book sprang from her own lack of awareness of Black

sisters and once she started looking into them, she unearthed stories that had long been kept silent and women who were eager to share them.

These are stories we need to champion, the author said, “not only within the Church but also within our socie-

ty,” noting these women religious are the “forgotten prophets of American Catholicism and democracy.”

Williams said the stories are painful in many ways because they seem to go against who Catholic sisters are but she says recounting them is part of a first step toward healing. She said many of the sisters she spoke with told her they were glad someone was interested and had been waiting for someone to come to them.

She presented some of her initial findings at a 2016 assembly in Atlanta for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, saying she needed help with this project. Several communities stepped forward and one gave her a grant.

In recent years, she has been invited to speak to congregations across the country about how to look into and address their own links with racism. Some have started this examination by scouring their archives for details of excluding or mistreating women of color or relying on the labor of enslaved people.

Williams has urged congregations to recognize that “every community story is different” and that they need to find out exactly what they did. “You need

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## ‘World needs priests,’ youth say in letters to seminarians

(continued from page S3)

letters composed by the students were filled with admiration for those studying for the priesthood as well as their wishes for the men’s continued spiritual strength.

Ricardo Lozano Cruz, studying second theology at Immaculate Conception Seminary at Seton Hall University, South Orange, recently responded to one of his student pen pals with a handwritten note.

“Thank you very much for your heartfelt and sincere wishes for me,” Lozano wrote. “I am very happy to do God’s will.”

### ‘Stay Committed’

Had he not met his wife in college, Thomas Kohler might well have chosen to pursue life as a priest himself.

“All through grade school, I wanted to be a priest,” the Deputy Grand Knight of the Villa Marie Council 6342 admitted. “I played ‘Mass’ in my basement with my five siblings and used Kool-Aid for the wine and pressed white bread for the hosts.”

Kohler’s vocational journey took a

turn toward marriage and fatherhood, and the Knight still remains active in his faith. A strong proponent of the Seminarian Letter Project from its inception, he shared some excerpts of the 105 letters sent to the Diocese’s seminarians by the Absecon council and written by students of Assumption Regional Catholic School, Galloway.

Student Nicole’s letter was addressed to Thomas Piro, studying first theology in St. Joseph’s Seminary. She wrote, “We need priests because they teach us about our Father and we get our sins absolved. We need priests to anoint the sick and teach us about God and get the community together.”

Christopher Myers, studying fourth theology in Immaculate Conception Seminary at Seton Hall University, received encouraging words from another student. After asking the seminarian how his room is decorated and whether he liked different activities, young Alexander wrote, “I know that it may be hard to go through with the seminary sometimes but ... I ask you to stay committed ... because the world needs priests.”

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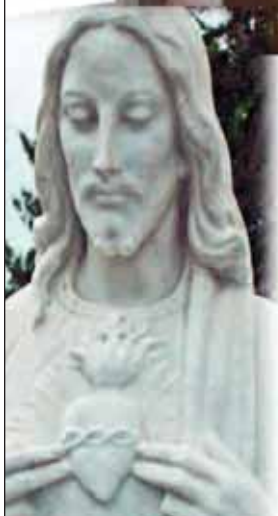
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**"They saw where He was staying and they stayed with Him."** John 1:39

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# Deacon Robbins: *The privilege of ministry to sick*

By Transitional Deacon  
Stephen Robbins

I recently read a beautiful little book by Father Leo Trese called “Vessel of Clay.” It tells the story of an entire day in the life of a priest – hour by hour – from a priest’s perspective. He describes each apostolic task in a very honest, deeply reflective, humble and sometimes even humorous way. I would highly recommend it to anyone considering a vocation. One of the sections of the book that struck me most was Father Trese’s account of going to visit the sick. While on his way to visit a sick parishioner, he reflects:

“Only with the passing years did I recognize the truth that now seems so obvious – that I am with Christ, that I am Christ, on these calls. He need not be with me sacramentally. Whether I go to administer Holy Communion, or only to give a priestly blessing and a cheerful word of encouragement, I am conscious of the almost physical nearness of my Master. This indeed, I have discovered, is the charity that covers a multitude of sins. Where once I closed my ears to casual reports of illness and suffering, I have learned now the joy of searching them

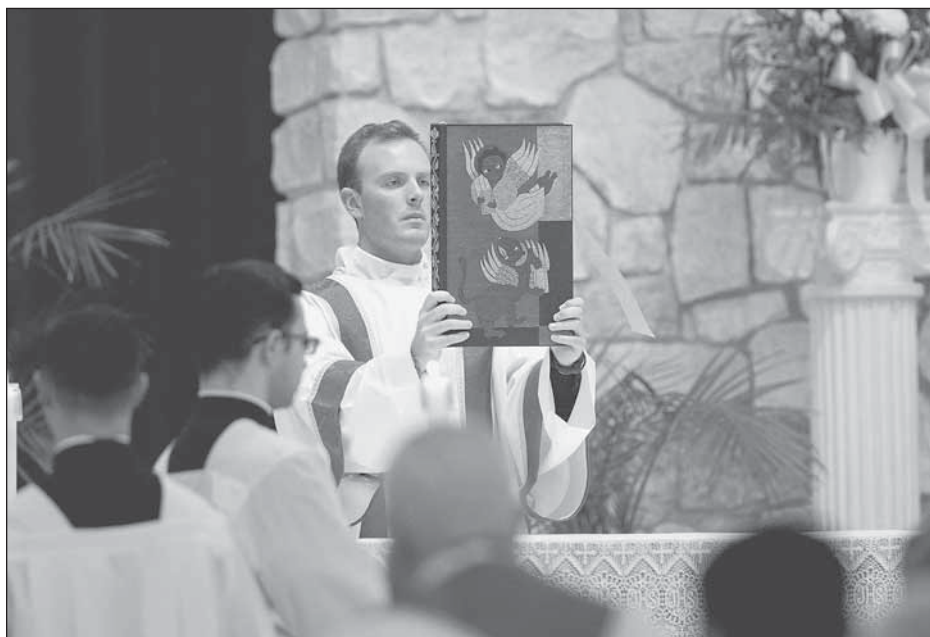


Photo by Dave Hernandez

Transitional Deacon Stephen Robbins serves as the deacon of the Word during the annual Chrism Mass celebrated April 12 in Saint Agnes Church, Our Lady of Hope Parish, Blackwood.

out. It is He who has taught me the pleasure of walking in unexpectedly on an illness that was not deemed serious enough to ‘need’ the priest; it is to Him that I humbly refer the grateful surprise that is mirrored in suffering eyes.”

What a beautiful description of a priest’s ministry to the sick! I remember very distinctly being so moved as a child by the presence of one of our parish priests at the hospital when my mother was battling a brain tumor. It was just as Father Trese says: as if

Christ Himself has been there in our moment of trial!

At my parish assignment this past summer, I had the great privilege to be able to visit some of our parishioners in a nursing home and bring Christ to them in the Eucharist every week. It was one of my favorite and most fulfilling things I was able to do. When people are sick, suffering or alone, the visit of a priest (or deacon, in my case) means the world to them, because it reminds them that He who loves them with a love beyond all telling is ALWAYS with them and has not abandoned them in their suffering. There is nothing more humbling and satisfying than Christ making Himself present to His people through us, His “vessels of clay.”

I very much look forward to making visits to the sick one of the top priorities of my ministry as a priest. For anyone discerning a vocation to the priesthood, you have these and so many other beautiful encounters that lie ahead of you!

*Transitional Deacon Stephen Robbins, fourth theology, Saint Joseph’s Seminary, Yonkers, N.Y., serves in Saint Damien Parish, Ocean City.*

# First weeks at seminary a worthy learning curve

By Nicholas Esposito

When one enters into a new phase of life, there is always a mixture of emotions. Some experience happiness, others experience nervousness, one might be anxious about what is to come.

Some people have a combination of many emotions – this was my case as I began my time at seminary. It was a mixture of happiness, excitement and nervousness. This was the first time in my life that I would be living somewhere other than with my parents. Coming from a household where I was an only child to a house where I gain 12 brothers is a big transition. It takes time to get settled and used to new people and new routines. Through patience and prayer, the first two weeks went very smoothly.

On Aug. 8 of last year, Bishop Dennis Sullivan celebrated a Welcome Mass for the new seminarians of the Diocese. This event marked the beginning of my seminary formation. After the Mass and luncheon, all the seminarians of the Diocese of Camden departed for a four-day retreat. This retreat offered me an opportunity to get to know even better the other seminarians of the Diocese. This retreat also provided an opportunity to spend



Photo by John Kalitz

Nicholas Esposito poses for a photo with Bishop Dennis Sullivan during a Welcome Mass for the Diocese’s new seminarians that was celebrated last August in Christ our Light Church, Cherry Hill.

time with Jesus each day. Praying the Liturgy of the Hours, attending Mass, Eucharistic Adoration and going to daily conferences were all excellent opportunities to spend time with our Lord and pray especially for a smooth transition into seminary.

Next came move-in day. There are many mixed emotions on that day, especially. There is sadness in leaving home, but excitement in beginning formation at the seminary. Having wanted to be a priest from the time I was

young, it was a very thrilling transition.

Among the many things I needed to get used to, however, was the schedule. Coming from summer vacation where things were more relaxed to a very regimented schedule took some time. Time management was one lesson I quickly learned. Planning ahead for school work each day, I found, is critical. One of the worst things is to procrastinate because as the work piles up, so does the stress level. Finding that balance in school work, prayer

and community is very important. Having a schedule planned every day helps me not to fall behind in my studies or prayer.

One of the many blessings of being in seminary is the ability to spend so much time in prayer. Morning, evening and night prayer, daily Mass, and Eucharistic Adoration are just some of the many opportunities we have to grow closer to Jesus. Whenever I have a long day or there is something on my mind, I look forward to bringing those problems to prayer and asking for the Lord’s help. However, I also find it very important to bring to prayer the many blessings God has bestowed on me that day and thank Him.

Looking ahead, I am very optimistic. There are already many wonderful blessings that have come from formation so far. I can only see many more graces in the future. Seminary is truly a beautiful time in which the Lord accompanies us in the good and bad times. He is there for our successes and failures. He is with us always.

*Nicholas Esposito is first college, the College Seminary of the Immaculate Conception at Saint Andrew’s Hall, Seton Hall University, South Orange.*

# St. John Vianney a perfect example of priestly heart

By Timothy Mulranen

During the time of the pandemic quarantine, one of the books I read was “The Curé of Ars: Patron Saint of Parish Priest,” which is about Saint John Vianney and written by Father Bartholomew J. O’Brien.

I began to find an interest in the life of Saint John Vianney when I had two opportunities to venerate his actual heart, which is enclosed in a reliquary. This was a campaign sponsored by the Knights of Columbus that would allow the reliquary to travel to many cities across the United States. It was a very unique experience, and I highly recommend doing an internet search for a picture of the major relic.

Reading the story of Saint Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney gave me a sense of what the priesthood truly is and what it really means. At baptism, we are not only cleansed of original sin and brought into the new life of Christ, but we also partake in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The “Catechism of the Catholic Church” explains that when a person is baptized, they “share in the priesthood of Christ in his prophetic and real mission” (1268). By our baptism, we become part of the “common priesthood” (1286) of Christ by giving witness to the faith in all that we do.

But, when a man is ordained a priest, he is ordained in *persona*



Photo by Dave Hernandez

Seminarian Timothy Mulranen serves during the 2021 Ordination Mass for new priests of the Diocese.

*Christi Capitis* (the person of Christ the Head) so that Christ may act through the priest to give the faithful, his children, the graces we need to attain supernatural life with Him. Priests are merely an instrument!

When the priest uses the first-person term – during absolution and during the consecration at Mass – he is acting in the name of Christ and not of himself. Priests should not only act in *persona Christi Capitis* during the sacraments, but must act like Christ in all that they do in and outside of the parish grounds.

Saint John Vianney’s example is

how the priesthood should be lived out as Christ intended. His lifestyle was very simple and genuine. He literally “put on Christ” in everything that he did. He gave up most everything he owned to people in need. He even gave up his own bed to someone who needed it more, and he ended up sleeping on the floor using a log as his pillow. He used his very own money to start a school for orphan girls. He also used his money to build up his parish church so that the faithful could have a place to give glory to God.

It was through his lifestyle that he was able to convert the people of Ars,

hence the name Curé. He had no tactic or outlined plan to convert people – he just lived the example of Christ, which drew people to conversation. He was a very “real” person because he literally gave himself up – all of himself – to Christ! Nothing he did was of himself, but of God.

For Saint John Vianney, it wasn’t so much his words and knowledge that led people to Ars (even though the Holy Spirit did help him with the knowledge to preach). It was through his very own person that led people to conversion or to come to him for confession. Because of this, he would be in the confessional for 16 straight hours or more.

All sorts of people came to him for confession, including very high bishops. This goes to show that academics are not a priority to become a priest. God used whatever He gave him as a means to bring people to conversion, in and outside of Ars.

Priests aren’t called to be celebrities; they are called to be instruments of God’s love and mercy to all people.

Through Saint John Vianney’s testimony, it makes saying “yes” to God all the more rich and beautiful because God will use whatever talents He gave each and every one of us to do His will as long as we give Christ our all!

Timothy Mulranen is first theology, Saint Joseph’s Seminary, Yonkers, N.Y.

## Public response: ‘I am not becoming a priest’

By Thomas Piro

On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus Christ was betrayed by Judas, one of the twelve. The Gospel of Saint Luke tells us Jesus was being taken to the house of the high priest. Peter, the chief apostle, followed him from a distance.

Although he attempted to follow the Lord as he entered his Passion, Peter was confronted by those around him.

“This man was also with him.”

“You are also one of them.”

“Certainly, this man also was with him; for he, too, is a Galilean.” These three statements from the local people put Peter on the spot.

Is he a follower of Jesus or not? Peter answers all three accusations with “I am not.”

When I was in high school, my classmates would often say that I would be a priest one day. It also was kind of the joke that I was the class priest since I would always set up for school liturgies, serve at the parish as an altar server or an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, and

knew a good deal about the faith.

Although my classmates picked up on the not-so-subtle hints that I was discerning the priesthood, I always gave a straightforward answer when they asked me if I was entering the seminary: “I am not.”

Like Saint Peter, I followed the Lord from a distance. I loved reading the Scriptures, discussing the faith, participating in the liturgies, but once confronted with the question, “Are you going to become a priest?” I echoed the words of Saint Peter: “I am not.”

Like Saint Peter, I had a fear. His fear was persecution; my fear was others thinking I was weird. The fact of the matter is, I denied Christ by denying my vocation out of fear. I was so fearful of announcing the thought of the priesthood that I did not tell anybody about it. Not even my parents! I think many young men suppress the vocation of the priesthood out of fear of what their peers will think. They are afraid of people labeling them, losing friendships, or possibly being disowned by family members.

I would be lying if I said that none of these thoughts were in my head while secretly discerning. Eventually, however, I had to tell my parents, siblings and other family members about my decision to enter the seminary. As I informed each of them, I remember feeling uneasy. I thought they were going to try to talk me out of it.

Surprisingly enough, I did not receive one single objection about my decision. Everybody was supportive of me.

Whenever I think back about suppressing my vocation in public, I realize I had nothing to fear. I’m sure Saint Peter, after being filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, regretted denying Christ and his vocation to be a disciple.

In the end, I should have just owned up to my vocation and said, “Yes, I am a follower of Jesus Christ. Yes, I am entering the seminary because I believe He is calling me to be a priest.” Do not be afraid to embrace your vocation.

Thomas Piro is first theology, Saint Joseph’s Seminary, Yonkers, N.Y.

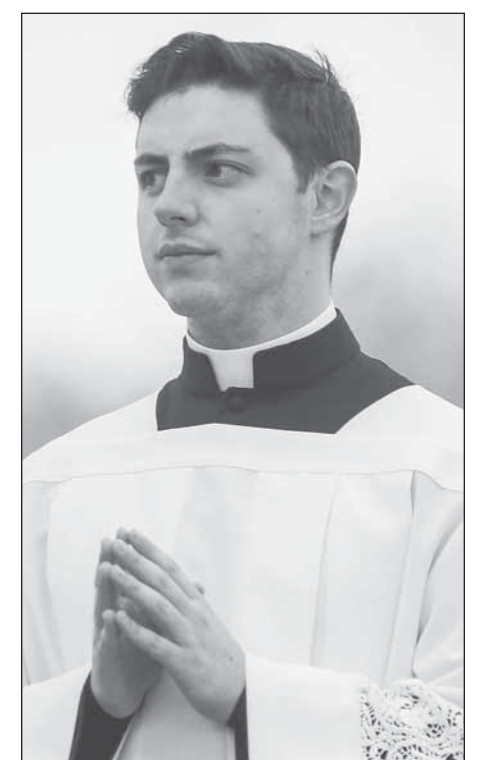


Photo by Rich Hundley

Seminarian Thomas Piro serves during the iRace4Vocations Mass held April 3 at Cooper River Park, Pennsauken.

# A day in the life studying for the priesthood

By Jacob Simila

I didn't know what to expect when I arrived at St. Andrew's College Seminary. I knew in one sense that it would be like a typical college experience. You take a variety of classes, both related and unrelated to your major, while pursuing a bachelor's degree.

But much unlike the standard college experience, those at seminary are being formed to be good Catholic men. Not knowing what a typical day would be like, I was quite happy once the semester began and I was able to spend a few weeks at the college seminary.

Almost every day starts early in the morning. We wake up and say Morning Prayer together. This is a part of the Divine Office, or Liturgy of the Hours, a prayer intended to dedicate each hour of the day to God. Next is daily Mass. This will generally be celebrated by one of the three resident priests, with the other two concelebrating. Seminarians are responsible for various parts of planning for the Mass. This could include selecting hymns, making sure the proper readings are ready or preparing items in the sacristy.

After Mass, men will typically eat breakfast and socialize at the house before leaving for the day. This is a great opportunity for seminarians to interact with their peers as well as some of the priests before classes.

The classes are a mixture of philosophy, theology and some general core classes. The evening, with few variations, will consist of a Holy Hour, Evening Prayer and possibly a community dinner, with the day ending around 9 p.m. in Night Prayer.

Seminary is a place to study for and discern if God is truly calling you to the priesthood. There are many Catholic men out there who think they may be called to enter but are hesitant to take the next step. I can now say from personal experience that seminary is a great place to both improve yourself intellectually as well as spiritually. I would recommend any man



Photo by John Kalitz

Jacob Simila poses for a photo with Bishop Dennis Sullivan during a Welcome Mass for the Diocese's new seminarians that was celebrated last August in Christ our Light Church, Cherry Hill.

thinking about the priesthood to contact their vocations director or local parish priest to get more information.

*Jacob Simila is first college, the College Seminary of the Immaculate Conception at Saint Andrew's Hall, Seton Hall University, South Orange.*

## Airport chaplains offer sacraments, a listening ear to travelers

By Janet Jones  
*Catholic News Service*

HIGH HILL, Texas – Just about every kind of person can be found in an airport – from vacationers heading for a little piece of heaven to business people whose schedules seem like hell on earth.

The concourses are a limbo of sorts as people wait to get to their destinations.

If any travelers are carrying around too much emotional baggage, they might find an airport chaplain to lighten the load.

Father Charlie Samperi recalled a man who saw his priest's collar and approached him because he was weighted down with the need for reconciliation.

The priest, pastor of Saint James the Apostle Parish in Spring, Texas, said they found a quiet spot off the concourse where he heard this man's confession. "He just unloaded, and it was a wonderful confession," he said, adding that it had been a long time since the man had received the sacrament of reconciliation.

Father Samperi serves in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, which hosted a retreat for Catholic airport chaplains earlier this year. The retreat was held virtually the past two years because of the coronavirus pandemic, and the chaplains said

they were happy for their own getaway and face-to-face time with colleagues from around the country.

Father Michael Zaniolo ministers at Midway and O'Hare airports in Chicago and is the president of the National Conference of Catholic Airport Chaplains. He recalled being drawn to the ministry as a young priest while leading a group of boys in an exploration of the priesthood. To demonstrate the different types of ministry, he took them on a field trip to an airport. The priest serving as chaplain seemed to have had an effect on everyone, he said.

"I thought, 'This is a great place to be a priest,'" he told *The Catholic Lighthouse*, newspaper of the Diocese of Victoria, Texas.

In the spirit of "synodality," or becoming a listening Church, it fits right in. "We literally are walking with these people," Father Zaniolo said.

During his airport rounds, people who are fearful of flying will approach. "You give them a blessing, and it's like a burden has been lifted off their shoulders," he said. "Within just a few moments, you can have an impact on someone."

Deacon Alfred Mitchell who ministers at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, one of the world's busiest, said he never knows how a day at the airport will go. The retreat, he said, offered

participants quiet time to reflect as well as time to undergo training.

During the retreat, Bishop Brendan J. Cahill of the Diocese of Victoria celebrated Mass for the chaplains. "You are striving to get us to go beyond making any exceptions, finding people where they are ... people who work at the ticket counter, business people traveling eight months a year who want someone to talk to, where people may often feel forgotten."

"We are constantly trying to see who's in the shadows, who may feel forgotten, and who I can be present to and listen to, to bring them the heart of Jesus, and, as we come to realize, to experience the heart of Jesus through them," he said.

The chaplains said some airports offer Masses during the week and distribute ashes on Ash Wednesday for travelers who cannot make it to church. Chapels are often shared with other faiths that provide chaplains as well. Between formal services, they simply visit with anyone who wants a clergyman to talk to.

Deacon David Reiser, chaplain at Charlotte Douglas International Airport, in North Carolina, said their motto is, "We loiter with purpose."

*Janet Jones is editor of The Catholic Lighthouse, newspaper of the Diocese of Victoria.*

# Stories of Black religious need to be championed, author says

*(continued from page S6)*  
to collect your own stories," she's told them.

"Just because a white community is willing to educate Black children does not mean that they are automatically committed to racial justice," Williams said, noting that some religious communities had "anti-Black admissions policies" in place prior to desegregation laws.

The untold number of Black women who were rejected from religious orders are lost vocations that the church should reckon with, Williams said.

But also, if a congregation accepted a Black woman, it didn't mean they were "being racially progressive," she added.

Part of what pioneering Black sisters went through including Sister Bowman, were abuses "designed to drive them out of religious life," Williams said, stressing that these stories are painful but imperative to hear.

"It's gut-wrenching. It's hard," she said.

For example, she said some orders that allowed Black sisters would not

touch their utensils or use the same cups. They also required Black sisters to profess their vows separately in segregated ceremonies.

She said that was the experience of Sister Antona Ebo, a Franciscan Sister of Mary, known for marching with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., in his 1965 march on Selma in Alabama.

The sister, who died in 2017, also spoke out in 2014 at protests in Ferguson, Missouri, following the shooting death of a Black man by a white police officer.


Sister Antona's training and profession of vows took place separately from the white women who entered the order at that time.

The stories Williams heard from Black sisters who experienced prejudice and white sisters who witnessed it shows "heartbreak, built on top of heartbreak on top of heartbreak."

She said the models for the Church now come from primarily Black congregations, such as the Oblate Sisters of Providence, who have been working for racial equality for 200 years.


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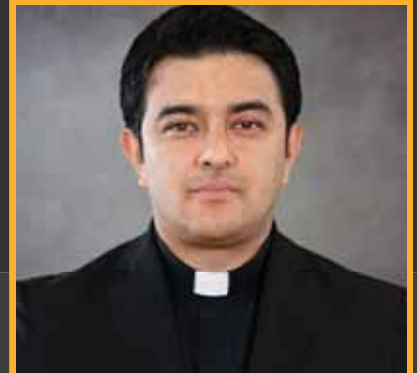
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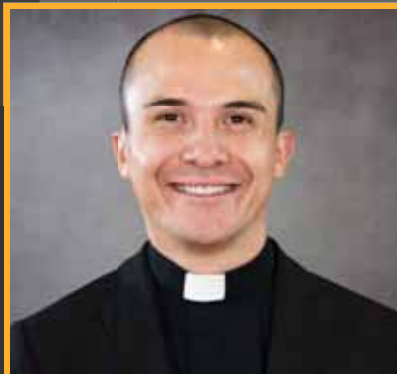
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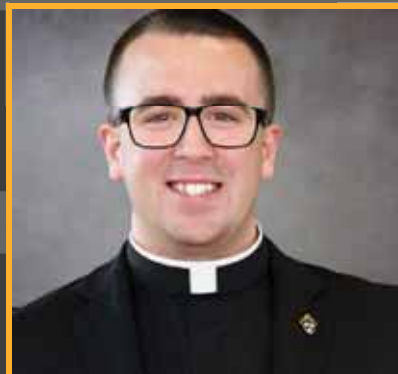
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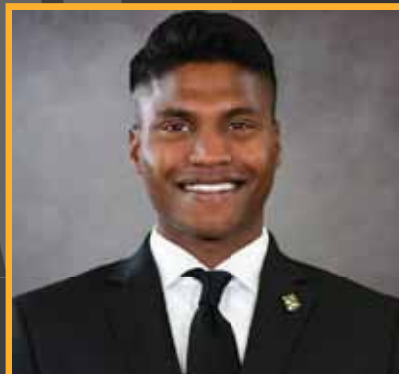
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