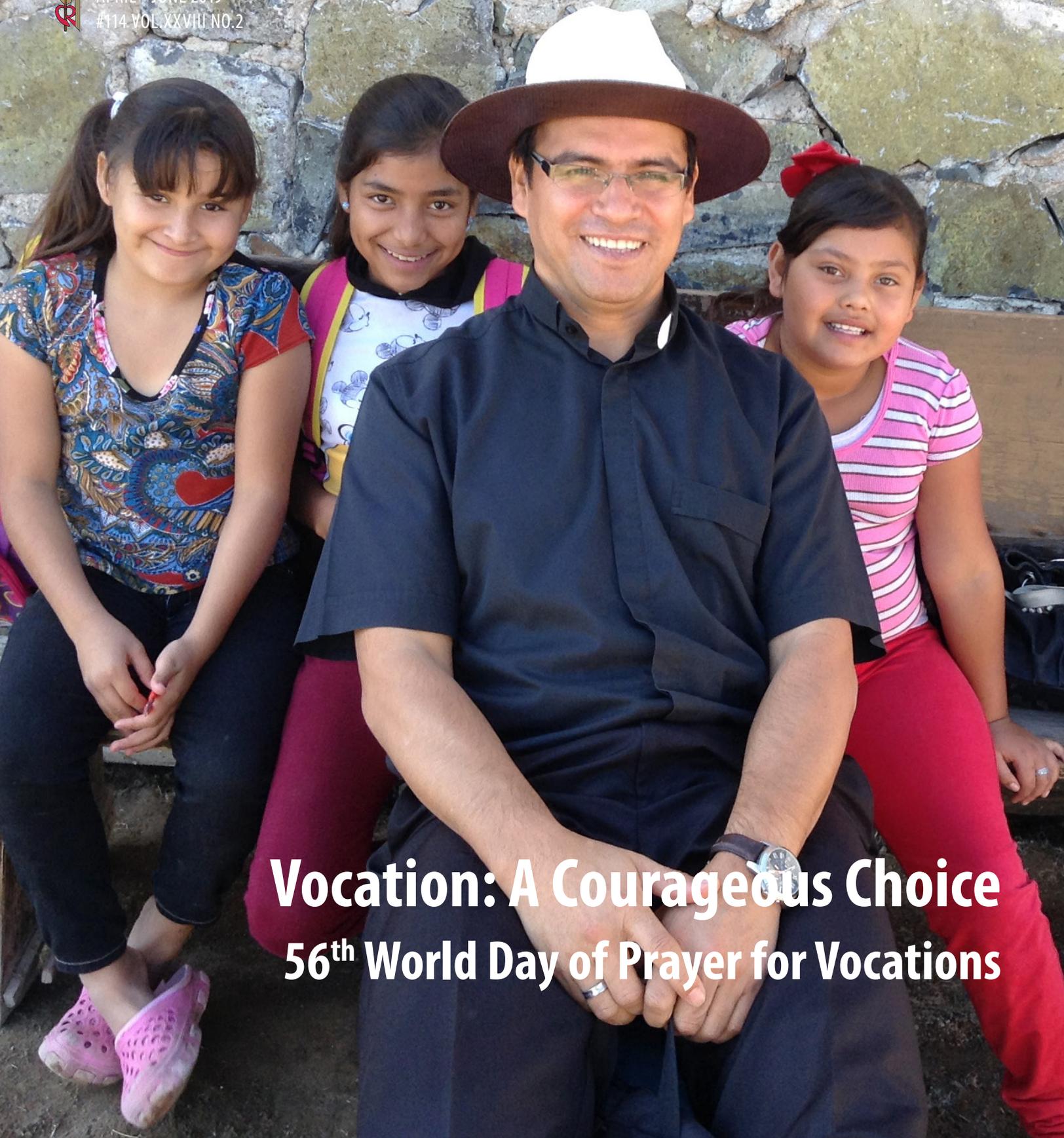


Vocations and Prayer

The Catholic Magazine on Vocation Ministry

APRIL - JUNE 2019

#114 VOL. XXVIII NO. 2



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Discernment, Support, Intercession

The Power of Prayer



Photo by Josh Root

By *FR. ANTONIO FIORENZA, RCJ*

Every year the Church dedicates a day to prayer for vocations to the priestly ministry and consecrated life. It is the fourth Sunday of Easter, Good Shepherd Sunday, willed by Pope Paul VI as World Day of Prayer for Vocations (WDPV). The whole church kneels down to beg the Lord of the harvest that he will send laborers into his harvest (cf. Mt 9: 35-38; Lk, 10: 2).

The WDPV is a sign of the Church's faith in the power of prayer.

Pope Francis in his message for the 56th WDPV says, "The Lord's call makes us bearers of a promise and, at the same time, asks of us the courage to take a risk, with him and for him."

Each of us carries within ourselves a "promise," that is a vocation to be discovered and lived. Prayer is an indispensable help to hear and understand the call of God. In encountering the Lord, in dialogue and personal relationship with him, prayer helps us to discern God's will and reveals us to ourselves.

"In encountering the Lord, some may feel the attraction of a call to the consecrated life or to the ordained priesthood" – explains Pope Francis in his message, and admonishes us: "It is a discovery that can excite and at the same time frighten us," because "many kinds of interior resistance can stand in the way of making this decision."

The value of prayer is also manifested when facing the challenges of God's call. In fact, not only does it help us to discover the promise of God inscribed in our heart, but also to overcome the obstacles that prevent us from embracing and living it fully. With the support of prayer, we are enabled to abandon everything to follow the Lord, to put ourselves completely at his service, and to share his mission in the world.

I believe that if we ask priests, missionaries, religious men and women, and lay people who are involved in the work of evangelization and in the service of others, we will get from them a convincing testimony on how prayer helped in the discovery and realization of their vocation.

The WDPV reminds us first of all of the importance of prayer in vocation discernment and underlines the urgency of educating young people to prayer as a Christian lifestyle. In fact, the Pope writes in his message: "There is a need for a youth ministry and vocation promotion that can open the way to discovering God's plan, above all through prayer, meditation on God's word, eucharistic adoration and spiritual accompaniment."

The WDPV yet reveals another important aspect of prayer. It is also an intercession, an insistent and trusting request of what is necessary for our salvation. The WDPV is a strong, persevering and confident cry that rises from every Christian community to implore from the Lord of the harvest the gift of numerous and holy vocations to the priestly ministry and to the consecrated life, which are indispensable for the life of the church.

From the history of the ancient people of God, Israel, and from the history of the new people of God, the Church, we know that God hears the cry of his people and comes to their aid. ■



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U.S.A. Delegation
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Subscriptions
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Printing and Design
Challenge Graphics, North Hills, CA

Subscription Rates
Single Copy \$5.00
One-year subscription \$18.00
Two-year subscription \$30.00
International:
One-year subscription \$25.00
Two-year subscription \$44.00

Vocations and Prayer is published quarterly by the Rogationist Fathers, U.S.A., in cooperation with:

ROGATE ERGO/ MONDO VOC
Via dei Rogazionisti, 8
00182 Rome, ITALY

ROGATE ERGO Asia
24 Calcutta St., Merville Park,
Parañaque,
Metro Manila 1700 - PHILIPPINES

ROGATE
Rua C. Ferreiro Carnero, 99
02926 Sao Paulo - S.P. BRAZIL

Manuscripts, letters to the editor, articles for publication are solicited from all those who wish to cooperate in vocation ministry. All inquiries should be addressed to:

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Cover photo:
By Fr. Francisco Javier Lopez, RCJ

The Courage to Take a Risk for God's Promise

Message of Pope Francis for the 2019 World Day of Prayer for Vocations



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

After the lively and fruitful experience of the Synod devoted to young people last October, we recently celebrated the Thirty-fourth World Youth Day in Panama City. These two great events allowed the Church to be attentive both to the voice of the Spirit and to the lives of young men and women, their questions and concerns, their problems and their hopes.

Building on what I shared with the young people in Panama, I would like to reflect, on this World Day of Prayer for Vocations, on how the Lord's call makes us bearers of a promise and, at the same time, asks of us the courage to take a risk, with him and for him. I will do this by reflecting briefly with you on these two aspects – promise and risk – as they appear in the Gospel account of the calling of the first disciples by the sea of Galilee (Mk 1:16-20).

Two pairs of brothers – Simon and An-

drew, and James and John – are going about their daily tasks as fishermen. In this demanding work, they had learned the laws of nature, yet at times, when the winds were adverse and waves shook their boats, they had to defy the elements. On some days, the catch of fish amply repaid their efforts, but on others, an entire night's work was not sufficient to fill their nets, and they had to return to shore weary and disappointed.

Much of life is like that. Each of us tries to realize his or her deepest desires; we engage in activities that we hope will prove enriching, and we put out on a "sea" of possibilities in the hope of steering the right course, one that will satisfy our thirst for happiness. Sometimes we enjoy a good catch, while at others, we need courage to keep our boat from being tossed by the waves, or we are frustrated at seeing our nets come up empty.

As with every call, the Gospel speaks of an encounter. Jesus walks by, sees those

fishermen, and walks up to them... The same thing happened when we met the person we wanted to marry, or when we first felt the attraction of a life of consecration: we were surprised by an encounter, and at that moment we glimpsed the promise of a joy capable of bringing fulfillment to our lives. That day, by the sea of Galilee, Jesus drew near to those fishermen, breaking through the "paralysis of routine" (Homily for the XXII World Day for Consecrated Life, 2 February 2018). And he immediately made them a promise: "I will make you fishers of men" (Mk 1:17).

The Lord's call is not an intrusion of God in our freedom; it is not a "cage" or a burden to be borne. On the contrary, it is the loving initiative whereby God encounters us and invites us to be part of a great undertaking. He opens before our eyes the horizon of a greater sea and an abundant catch.

God in fact desires that our lives not become banal and predictable, imprisoned

by daily routine, or unresponsive before decisions that could give it meaning. The Lord does not want us to live from day to day, thinking that nothing is worth fighting for, slowly losing our desire to set out on new and exciting paths. If at times he makes us experience a “miraculous catch,” it is because he wants us to discover that each of us is called – in a variety of ways – to something grand, and that our lives should not grow entangled in the nets of an ennui that dulls the heart. Every vocation is a summons not to stand on the shore, nets in hand, but to follow Jesus on the path he has marked out for us, for our own happiness and for the good of those around us.

Embracing this promise naturally demands the courage to risk making a decision. The first disciples, called by Jesus to be part of something greater, “immediately left their nets and followed him” (Mk 1:18). Responding to the Lord’s call involves putting ourselves on the line and facing a great challenge. It means being ready to leave behind whatever would keep us tied to our little boat and prevent us from making a definitive choice. We are called to be bold and decisive in seeking God’s plan for our lives. Gazing out at the vast “ocean” of vocation, we cannot remain content to repair our nets on the boat that gives us security, but must trust instead in the Lord’s promise.

I think primarily of the call to the Christian life which all of us received at Baptism. It teaches us that our life is not a fluke but rather a gift: that of being God’s beloved children, gathered in the great family of the Church. It is precisely in the ecclesial community that the Christian life is born and develops, especially through the liturgy. The liturgy introduces us to God’s word and the grace of the sacraments; from an early age, we are taught the art of prayer and fraternal sharing. In the end, the Church is our mother because she brings us to new life and leads us to Christ. So we must love her, even when we see her face marred by human frailty and sin, and we must help to make her ever more beautiful and radiant, so that she can bear witness

to God’s love in the world.

The Christian life thus finds expression in those decisions that, while giving a precise direction to our personal journey, also contribute to the growth of God’s kingdom in our world. I think of the decision to marry in Christ and to form a family, as well as all those other vocations associated with work and professional life, with the commitment to charity and solidarity, with social and political responsibilities, and so forth. These vocations make us bearers of a promise of goodness, love and justice, not only for ourselves but also for our societies and cultures, which need courageous Christians and authentic witnesses of the kingdom of God.

In encountering the Lord, some may feel the attraction of a call to the consecrated life or to the ordained priesthood. It is a discovery that can excite and at the same time frighten us, since we feel called to become “fishers of men” in the barque of the Church by giving totally of ourselves in commitment to faithful service of the Gospel and our brothers and sisters. Such a decision carries the risk of leaving everything behind to follow the Lord, to devote ourselves completely to him, and to share in his work. Many kinds of interior resistance can stand in the way of making this decision, especially in highly secularized contexts where there no longer seems to be a place for God and for the Gospel. Places where it is easy to grow discouraged and fall into the “weariness of hope” (Homily at Mass with Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Movements, Panama, 26 January 2019).

And yet, there can be no greater joy than to risk one’s life for the Lord! I would like to say this especially to you, the young. Do not be deaf to the Lord’s call. If he calls you to follow this path, do not pull your oars into the boat, but trust him. Do not yield to fear, which paralyzes us before the great heights to which the Lord points us. Always remember that to those who leave their nets and boat behind, and follow him, the Lord promises the joy of a new life that can fill our

hearts and enliven our journey.

Dear friends, it is not always easy to discern our vocation and to steer our life in the right direction. For this reason, there needs to be a renewed commitment on the part of the whole Church – priests, religious, pastoral workers and educators – to provide young people in particular with opportunities for listening and discernment. There is a need for a youth ministry and a vocational promotion that can open the way to discovering God’s plan, above all through prayer, meditation on God’s word, eucharistic adoration and spiritual accompaniment.

As was made clear several times during the World Youth Day in Panama, we should always look to Mary. Also in the story of this young woman, vocation was both a promise and a risk. Her mission was not easy, yet she did not allow fear to prevail. “It was the ‘yes’ of someone prepared to be committed, someone willing to take a risk, ready to stake everything she had, with no more security than the certainty of knowing that she was the bearer of a promise. I ask each one of you: Do you see yourselves as bearers of a promise? What promise do I bear within my heart to take forward? Mary’s would undoubtedly be a difficult mission, but the challenges that lay ahead were no reason to say ‘no.’ Things would get complicated, of course, but not in the same way as happens when cowardice paralyzes us because things are not clear or sure in advance” (Vigil with Young People, Panama, 26 January 2019).

On this World Day of Prayer for Vocations, let us join in prayer and ask the Lord to help us discover his plan of love for our lives, and to grant us the courage to walk in the path that, from the beginning, he has chosen for each of us.

*From the Vatican, 31 January 2019
Memorial of Saint John Bosco*

FRANCIS

Make a Promise, Take a Risk:

A Reflection on Pope Francis' Message for the 2019 World Day of Prayer for Vocations



Photo by Valentin Antonucci

By WILLIAM REISER, S.J.

In the course of this year's message the Holy Father cited his address to young people at the recent World Youth Day in Panama City, the homily he gave while in Panama at a Liturgy for Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Movements, and his homily on February 2 for the World Day for Consecrated Life. I found it helpful to read these four pieces together. Francis' thoughts about vocations this year include a bit more than what we find in the brief annual message.

Call and promise

The scriptural platform is the calling of the four fishermen in Mark 1:16-20. "The Lord's call makes us bearers of a promise," the Pope writes, "and, at the same time, asks of us the courage to take a risk." The promise lies in Jesus' words, "I will make you fishers of men." The risk, of course, is that we don't know where the journey with Jesus will take us. Jesus may invite us into the boat, but we have no idea as to what storms or in what direction that boat may be headed. Simon and his companions may have known a lot about the lake, but they had much to learn about where the winds could take them. At one point

they nearly capsize and drown (Mk 4:38), then in the next scene they come face to face with a monster (Mk 5:2).

The primary vocation comes with baptism; it is the call to live the gospel. Later there will be the call to marry and form a family, "as well as all those other vocations associated with work and professional life." Others will be drawn to religious life or ordained ministry. Yet in every vocation there is a certain mystery. Jesus knew the disciples before they ever knew him, and the same holds true for us.

There are people, to be sure, who seem to slide into the decisions that will

shape their lives; they simply do not—or cannot—envision a life much different from that of their parents. And there are people whose lives have been shaped by biblical stories of the Spirit reaching into a person's life, calling them to a journey they never expected. Or there may be a friendship, an encounter with someone or some group that stirs us to imagine a different future; life feels joyous, exciting, and risky. But our immersion in the cosmic story of creation and mission starts with baptism, the moment when we hear, for the first time, that we were not simply born but that we were called into life for a purpose—a conviction that will ground the whole of our lives.

“As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon . . .” And so the journey starts. In the end, what vocation means is probably best heard through stories, both the ones we listen to in Scripture and the personal stories that others have shared.

The vigil with young people

In his address at World Youth Day, Francis said, “The salvation God offers us is an invitation to be part of a love story interwoven with our personal stories.” He went on to ask, “Do you see yourselves as bearers of a promise? What promise is there within my heart to take forward?” The place we go to for schooling in God's promise is the scriptural narratives that shape Christian imagination. From reading Scripture and living in a Christian community we come to realize, gradually, that God's story and our own stories are linked, that each human story, insofar as it is channeled by love, is also a story about God. Francis asked several more questions: “Is a disabled person, a frail person not worthy of love? . . . Someone who happens to be a foreigner, someone who made a mistake, someone ill or in prison, is that person not worthy of love?” Matthew 25 echoes in the background: “I was hungry, and you gave me food . . .” Then he came to his main point: “only what is loved can be saved.” And again, “Only that which is embraced can be transformed.”

The Pope is talking about dream and promise, the dream and the promise of a

different kind of world, the reality Jesus referred to as “the reign of God.” Sadly, however, many young people cannot trust that promise or believe in that dream. Why? Because, as the Pope explained in Panama, “without education it is difficult to dream of a future; without a family and without a community, it is almost impossible to dream of a future. Because dreaming of a future means learning how to answer not only the question what I am living for but also who I am living for.” Francis said that once, in answer to the question why many young people today are simply not interested in whether God exists, one young person replied, “It's because many of them feel that, little by little, they stopped existing for others.” And then Francis asked, “How can they think that God exists, if they, these young people, have long since stopped thinking that they exist for their brothers and sisters and for society?” Creation and purpose, call and mission: they must go together.

Vocation is about promise and risk. Perhaps the struggle we are faced with today is not about taking a risk but about understanding and trusting the promise. In other words, our world faces a crisis of hope. In his homily on February 2, where he reflected on Simeon and Anna in the temple, the operative words were: encounter, call, and vision. Vision is about God's future, that is, it's about God's promise. Consecrated life is “a gaze that sees God present in the world.” Francis calls it “prophetic in its simplicity.” Prophetic, because it trusts Jesus' promise, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). Prophetic, because it does not see God apart from the people.

Story, hope, and imagination are linked. Hope lives in the imagination, imagination is the home of story, and stories are what frame the Lord's promise. Whether remembering Simeon and Anna encountering the infant Jesus in the temple, or four fishermen encountering Jesus by the lakeside, or a woman of Samaria encountering Jesus at Jacob's well, it's always the story that captures us. But who will be the storytellers? For without a storyteller, imagination colors the world grey.

Bearers of a promise

“Do you see yourselves as bearers of a promise?” In other words, Francis is asking, do we see ourselves as messengers of hope? Is this hope reflected in the way we live? Does it show itself in our family life and our churches? Do we trust the story, and are we telling it with our lives?

In his homily in Panama, the Pope spoke of “the weariness of hope.” “I am speaking,” he said, of that weariness “which comes from looking ahead once reality ‘hits’ and calls into question the energy, resources and viability of our mission in this changing and challenging world.” It comes “from seeing a Church wounded by sin” and it can lead to our thinking that “the Lord and our communities have nothing to say or contribute in the new world now being born.” And the remedy, our best defense against the onset of that weariness? We need to revisit the story: the story of the disciples' first encounter with Jesus and, just as importantly, our own first encounter. For in that moment we heard ourselves invited to take a risk. And having risked everything for the sake of God's people—I think here of Paul's words to the Philippians about his losing all things and calling them rubbish for the sake of Christ—the only question now is, “Do I trust the One who made the promise?” ■



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Praying for Vocations

A Task for all of God's People



Photo by David Beale

By KATHLEEN BECKMAN

More than two thousand years ago, the evangelist Luke recorded the Eternal High Priest: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matt 9:38). Christ mandates believers to intercede for vocations because they are essential for the vital work of salvation. Scripture reveals that the Lord taught one program regarding vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life—that of prayer. Its primacy cannot be overstated. Prayer is the spiritual work that undergirds all else. Temporal works must flow from prayer because vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life

are God's initiative, not man's.

It is through the power of prayer that those seeking the priesthood and the consecrated life are sustained and nurtured. It is through the grace of daily prayer that you will partake in the work of building the culture of vocations. You can be a prayerful participant in the priest's ordination. Christ and His Church have always taught the fundamental importance of communal and personal prayer.

Ministerial priests and laity are distinctively tasked with building up the kingdom of God. Priests are ontologically configured to Christ, the Head; the lay faithful make up Christ's Body. This implies mutual honor for

the Body of Christ. "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12:26). It would be unfitting for lay faithful to draw from the goods of ministerial priesthood without reciprocal spiritual return to them.

"Behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves," Christ said (Luke 10:3). Today believers experience the weight of witnessing to Christ as "lambs in the midst of wolves," for the enemies of Christ are many, cunning, and unrelenting. Foremost, priests experience the weight of lifting the Cross of Jesus in a faithless world, where they are a sign of contradiction. The Church is the target of calculated persecution and evil.

The Church beseeches the laity to embrace our mission as intercessors. "But our prayer to God does not consist of words alone; the words must lead to actions so that from our praying heart a spark of our joy in God and in the Gospel may arise, enkindling in the hearts of others a readiness to say yes," wrote Pope Benedict XVI.

Present challenges in the Church and the world call forth a new movement of intercessory prayer, an army of prayer groups and individuals who will say yes to helping the priests to push back the tsunami of sin and evil. At stake is the salvation of souls and the evangelization of future generations. This is the hour for which we are chosen. The battle is the Lord's (see 2 Chron. 20:15), but we're His essential soldiers. The Foundation of Prayer for Priests, (www.foundationforpriests.org), a private association of the faithful founded in 2013, is a response to the need for more intercessory prayer, coupled with the offering of reparation and of daily sacrifices for the sanctity of priests and vocations.

Holy Orders: Necessity, Beauty, Challenge

Christ calls forth a communion of people, relationships of love in which people contribute with complementary gifts to build up the human family. Jesus sets the example on several occasions in the Gospels when He humbly accepts the help of others and commissions people to assist in His work. The Lord never intended for priests or laity to walk alone or apart. Like the human body, Christ's Mystical Body is beautifully integrated: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes Holy Orders as "the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to His apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry" (no. 1536). In presenting himself for Holy Orders, a man steps out in faith, into a mystery far greater than himself. It takes fortitude for a man to enter the seminary and be ordained in this age. What makes

possible the total gift of self to God? Only love. A person in love with God "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7).

The life that priests give to us is Christ-life: His body and blood for food, His mercy for forgiveness, His word that protects, His love that heals, His truth that sets us free.

Priests Affect Our Growth in Holiness

St. Peter taught, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy' " (1 Pet. 1:14-16). Intercession for priests has everything to do with the universal call to holiness.

If we desire to be inspired by holy priests, we also should mirror holiness for them. Writing to priests about their effect on others, Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen wrote, "Every slightest failing on our part brings the community under the judgment of God. Every least increase of priestly virtue brings it blessing." Mutual support is vital. Have we grown comfortable with receiving the goods of the priesthood without reciprocal charity and service?

When I travel to speak at conferences and parish missions, people often ask me, "What about our families?" I reply, "Praying for priests is a service to the family." Vital to each family member are the sacramental goods of the Church. We are serving the spiritual life of the family when we pray for priests and vocations. God is never outdone in generosity. For many years, it has been my experience that when I pray first for God's intentions for His priests, the Lord abundantly blesses my family.

St. Matthew wrote, "And He said to them, 'It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you make it a den of robbers" (Matt. 21:13). Let us preserve the Church as a "house of prayer" and be people of deep communion with God. Only then will we be lights in the darkness (see Matt. 5:14), salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13), warriors for Christ.

Pope Paul VI exhorts the laity on obligations to their priests, "The Christian faithful, for their part, should realize their obligations to their priests ... sharing their cares, they should help their priests by prayer and work insofar as possible so that their priests might more readily overcome difficulties and be able to fulfill their duties more fruitfully."

Praying for Vocations: A Daily Privilege and Responsibility

- Pray daily for a greater response to the call from God for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life.
- Pray daily for the perseverance and the outpouring of graces for seminarians, priests, deacons and those in the consecrated life.
- Include vocation intentions in your morning offering.
- Recite a vocation prayer each day.
- Pray the Rosary for vocations or a decade of the Rosary daily.
- Pray for vocations in front of the Blessed Sacrament.
- Include vocations in your Mass intentions.
- Offer a share of your sufferings for the perseverance of priests, deacons, and men and women in the consecrated life.
- Create a simple family prayer corner (home oratory), with pictures of priests and seminarians; and say a prayer for them as a family. Encourage your children to consider a vocation to the priesthood or consecrated life. Teach children about the Church's saints who were priests and religious.
- Offer some form of fasting for vocations.

Note: This article is adapted from the book, "Praying for Priests: An Urgent Call for the Salvation of Souls" by Kathleen Beckman, published by Sophia Institute Press, 2018, (www.sophia institute.com) ■



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Prayer is the Secret of any Vocation Ministry

A Conversation with Fr. Bruno Rampazzo

Superior General of the Congregation of Rogationists

By VOCATIONS AND PRAYER EDITORIAL STAFF

Father Bruno Rampazzo, a Rogationist priest, was born in Campodoro in the province of Padua (Italy) on January 1, 1957. He was ordained on June 29, 1984 in his hometown of Barbano di Grisignano di Zocco (Vicenza, Italy) by the Bishop of Padua, Msgr. Filippo Franceschi. In 1987, after obtaining his degree in Dogmatic Theology and having begun the priestly ministry in Naples, he was sent to the mission in the Philippines, where he stayed for over 25 years. There he dedicated himself to works of vocation animation, and later was in charge of St. Anthony's Boys Village in Silang (Cavite). Subsequently, he was appointed director of the Rogationist Academy in the same city. He was the Major Superior of the Philippine-Indian Delegation for three consecutive terms before being elected Vicar General of the Congregation in 2010. Six years later, during the General Chapter of 2016, he was elected Superior General of the Rogationists. He is currently making the rounds in Canonical Visitation to the different communities of the entire Congregation, spread out in 28 countries around the world.

Recently, the editorial staff of *Vocations and Prayer* magazine had the opportunity to ask Father Bruno about the state of vocations in his congregation.

What is the mission and charism of the Rogationists?

Following the teachings of our Founder, Saint Hannibal Maria Di Francia, the Rogationists commit themselves to obey the command of Jesus, expressed in the Gospels of Matthew (9:37-38) and Luke (10:2): "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest." Precisely for this reason, aside from the three vows proper of the religious life, they add a fourth vow of the 'Rogate' (in Latin, pray), which consists in: offering their prayer every day so



that holy vocations would be born and developed in the world and in the Church; spreading this command of Jesus by promoting in the Church a culture and pastoral care for vocations based on prayer; and committing themselves as good workers of the Gospel to help in the evangelization of the poor, especially orphans and the poor.

Where are the Rogationists present around the world?

The Rogationists are present in 28 countries and are organized into 7 major circumscriptions. The Saint Hannibal Province includes the communities present in Southern Italy and in Albania; the Saint Anthony Province includes the communities present

in Northern Italy and the Rogationist presence in Spain, Portugal, England, Poland, Germany, Slovakia, Iraq, Jordan and Colombia; the Saint Luke Province comprises the communities present in Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and in Angola; the Saint Matthew Province encompasses the communities of the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Australia and Papua New Guinea; the Province of St. Joseph brings together the Rogationist Communities present in Cameroon, Rwanda and France; the St. Thomas Province is composed of the communities of India and Sri Lanka; finally, the Delegation of Our Lady of Guadalupe includes the communities of California (USA) and Mexico.

Can you share with our readers about the activities of the Rogationists in the U.S. and Mexico?

The "Our Lady of Guadalupe" Delegation includes the communities of the United States and Mexico. Recently, the Rogationists celebrated the 50th anniversary of their presence in the United States. In fact, over the years the Rogationists have worked to spread the command of the Rogate also in North America. They are currently active in three parishes, two in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and one in the Diocese of Fresno, in Sanger. They also take care of the spiritual formation of young people and seminarians. About ten years ago, the Rogationists opened a seminary in Tonalá, Mexico, in the metropolitan city of Guadalajara, which currently welcomes 10 seminarians who are preparing to embrace religious life. Thus, present in four communities, they are engaged in the parish apostolate and in the diffusion of the Rogationist charism, especially through Vocations and Prayer magazine, and with the publication of prayer aids and books on vocations ministry in English and Spanish.

Are you seeing an increased interest in vocations to religious life in your congregation around the world? If so, is it mostly young people who are considering a vocation?

Vocations to religious life are going through a global crisis, however the Lord does not cease to sow the seeds of vocation in the heart of the young. It is above all the

example and testimony of those who dedicate themselves to restoring dignity to the most abandoned people in the peripheries of the world, which provoke among today's youth a question about the meaning of their existence. The closer one gets to the mystery of mercy and compassion of the Heart of Christ, the more one finds enthusiasm to follow him. This interest is observed particularly in South East Asia, India and in some parts of Africa and Brazil, where we are present.

In which places of the world have your congregation seen the greatest increase in vocations?

The Rogationists are growing well especially in Asia and Africa, two continents of hope. Last year, the first four religious of Vietnam were ordained priests. Throughout the Congregation we have had over 20 priestly ordinations last year.

What about vocations (in your congregation) to religious life in the United States and Mexico?

The Rogationists so far have had several difficulties in their vocational development in the United States and Mexico. It appears that young Mexicans see with greater interest and are more attracted to the diocesan life or religious consecration in larger orders and with greater history. However, for us, Rogationists, in recent times there are concrete reasons for hope: Our first Mexican priest is currently the Superior of our community in Guadalajara; another young Mexican is currently undergoing his novitiate formation in the Philippines, while three young seminarians are being prepared for this year.

As a superior general you have several meetings with superiors of other congregations around the world. What is your impression about the general trend of vocations to men religious life?

In general, we are witnessing an alarming decline in vocations to religious life, especially in the West and in Europe. More often words such as resizing, closing, and merging are used both for activities as well as for houses or even congregations with

similar charisms. But if such is the scenario of the institutes of male consecrated life, it certainly becomes dramatic for female institutes of consecrated life, experiencing a more drastic decrease in vocations. Despite the evident numerical decline in vocations to the consecrated life and the priestly ministry, today we are called to look at the reality with hope and prophetically read the signs of the times. Through the challenges of the present moment, the Lord certainly calls us to put ourselves enthusiastically at the service of the Gospel, seeking new expressions of the apostolate and service to the poor.

According to your experience and charism, what are the main points for an effective pastoral care for vocations to religious life and priesthood today?

I would like to repeat an expression said by my founder, Saint Hannibal Mary Di Francia, to his spiritual sons and daughters: "Fall in love with Jesus Christ!" A vocation ministry that does not start from an intimate union with Christ is destined to sterility. The Lord desires that vocations are above all obtained and accompanied through prayer, which will however be all the more effective if it is followed by the joyful witness of life. Prayer allows one to know and makes one's own the interests of the Heart of Jesus. And the priest, the consecrated person must increasingly be a pastor according to the Heart of Christ, at the service of God and of his brothers, especially of the needy or weak.

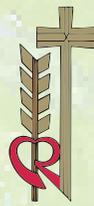
How are the activities of the pastoral care for vocations organized in your congregation?

Our vocation ministry is based above all on the prayer to the Lord of the harvest, practiced daily in every Rogationist community and disseminated in the apostolate of the same communities. Vocational pastoral activities, most often organized by specialized teams, are many: formation of groups or cenacles of prayer for vocations, diffusion of the charism of the Congregation through the press and the media, and catechesis and spiritual retreats for adolescents and young people. Finally, there are also experiences of sharing with the Roga-

tionist Communities engaged in specific pastoral activities with young people and in the missions.

How has the Rogationists charism influenced the celebration of Word Day of Prayer for Vocations in the Church?

The establishment of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations by Paul VI in 1964 is the result of a movement of the idea about the importance of prayer for the gift of vocations to the priestly ministry and to the consecrated life. This movement matured during the Vatican Council, but began many years earlier, especially in the mind of the nineteenth century Popes. A strong push in this movement certainly came from the testimony and teaching of Saint Hannibal Mary Di Francia, who made the prayer for vocations the purpose of his life. He even founded two religious families, the Rogationists and the Daughters Sisters of the Divine Zeal, with this specific mission in the church. Again, to spread the charism of prayer for vocations in the Church, Saint Hannibal established the lay association "Union of Prayer for Vocations." He personally met the Popes of his time, encouraging them to promote the prayer for vocations throughout the Church, as commanded directly by Jesus. The World Day of Prayer for Vocations can therefore be considered the culmination of the dream of Saint Hannibal. We Rogationists consider it and celebrate it as a "Rogationist" day par excellence. ■



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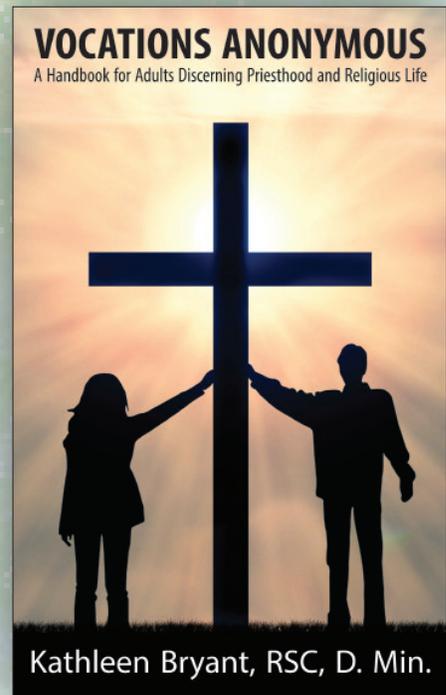
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Empowering Young People to Lead in Our Parishes

A Formula that Works Well



Photo by Jebyun Sung

By JOHN M. RINALDO, D. MIN

My days as a junior high adolescent are days that I'd rather forget. They were truly not my best. Looking back, I'd argue they were probably my worst. 7th grade in particular was quite difficult. I was just a young boy trying to discover his identity. And that identity was to be discovered by trying to be cool (and hanging out with 8th graders).

While I was searching for who I was, I was enrolled in my parish's faith formation program. Like many 7th graders at the time, I had no desire to be there. Mom made me go. My desire to not be there was so strong that instead of spending 90 minutes in faith formation, I regularly spent 90 minutes in the bathroom. I literally locked myself in one of the parish bathrooms and ate candy. What can I say, I came prepared.

Church was not my thing. Dare I say, church was not cool. I was the last person you'd want to be a leader in ministry.

A few years later, as a sophomore in high school, I received the graces that come with the Sacrament of Confirmation. Something changed in me that day. I wasn't able to articulate the change at the time, but it was a change.

Shortly after, my youth ministry leader saw something in me. Potential? Perhaps. Gifts? Maybe. Energy? For sure. Whatever it was, she was drawn to invite me to be a leader in the youth ministry program. I don't remember if my "yes" was enthusiastic or not. But I did say yes.

I jumped in with two feet! I began to help lead youth ministry and confirmation sessions. My youth minister mentored me and helped me become the best leader I could be. She sent me to a ton of Diocesan leadership training events for young people. The Diocesan Director of Youth Ministry saw something in me. He asked me to be a leader in the Diocese. I said yes.

Over 25 years later, I look back at those

experiences and realize just how greatly they shaped me. When I was 16, one person in the Church asked me to lead. Then another. From there, I went to Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and was heavily involved in Campus Ministry. Leaders in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles invited me to help lead events and trainings for them. I kept saying yes.

Then, as a senior in college, one of my greatest mentors asked me a simple question: "John, did you ever think about going in to youth ministry as a career?" I was 21 years old and six months out from graduating. Did I ever think about it? No. Was I thinking about it now? Yes.

And here I am, 20 years later and still serving in ministry as my full-time career and my true vocation because people simply asked me to lead.

I share this story not to glorify me and my "yes." Actually, this really isn't a story about me at all. This is a story of six particular

people, leaders in the Church, who took the time to get to know me: my youth ministry leader; my diocesan leader; my confirming Bishop; two college campus ministers (one was a priest and the other was a nun), and an Archdiocesan lay employee.

When leaders in the Church ask the question how we can empower our young people to lead in our parishes, we mystify it. We make it a difficult question with even more difficult solutions.

I would argue that empowering young people to become leaders in our parishes is not that difficult. It does require work. It does require a change of attitude. But it is not difficult.

Looking back at my experience as a young person, I recognize a formula that worked very well with me.

1. Get to know young people

Young people want to be known. They desire community. They desire to be loved. They desire to be needed. Therefore, as leaders, our priority needs to be building relationships with the community. Take the time to get to know young people. Interact with them in meaningful ways. After Mass, during youth ministry events, or even out at the grocery store. Take interest in them. Let them share their story. Let them know that you think they are important.

2. Look for their gifts and strengths

While you are getting to know young people, start to think about what gifts and strengths they have as they share their lives and stories with you. Don't fall into the trap of thinking there are leadership gifts and there are non-leadership gifts. All gifts can be used in leadership in some way. That might mean that you and I have to be creative on how we use those gifts, but their gifts can certainly be used for the Church.

3. Invite them to lead

That's it. Just ask. You'll be surprised at how often young people will say yes. Why? Because they know that being a leader is important. And they value that it is you who

is asking. You have taken the time to get to know them, their strengths, and gifts. Now, an important leader in the Church (you) is asking them to help. They will often say yes. To sweeten the deal, when you are inviting them into leadership, name the gifts and strengths you see in them and share with them why you think they would be great in helping with a particular leadership role.

4. Encourage them

The biggest mistake pastoral leaders make after we invite someone into leadership is that we leave them alone. We expect them to thrive (or survive) on their own. That's not how it works. We think our work is done once we get them to say yes. Actually, that was the easy part. Now, our job is to mentor them, give them the skills they need to achieve, and affirm them.

These four steps are true accompaniment. This is exactly what those six leaders did with me as I was coming of age in the Church. Was it always easy? No. Was it messy? Yes. Was it worth it? Absolutely.

I pray that every young person has Church leaders in their lives who know them, believe in them, pray for them, and invite them in to this amazing ministry of Christ.

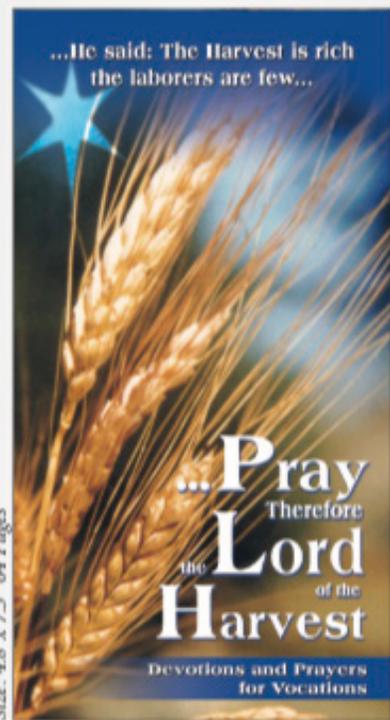
You and I are called to be those leaders. ■



JOHN M. RINALDO, D. MIN

Is a coach and trainer for the Parish Success Group. John earned his Doctor of Ministry, D. Min. in Leadership and Organizational Development from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, as well as a Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry from Santa Clara University.

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Freedom to Serve

1. INTRODUCTION

(From the Message of Pope Francis for the 56th World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2019)

"The Lord's call is not an intrusion of God in our freedom; it is not a "cage" or a burden to be borne. On the contrary, it is the loving initiative whereby God encounters us and invites us to be part of a great undertaking. He opens before our eyes the horizon of a greater sea and an abundant catch."

Brothers and sisters: let us offer this holy hour to ask for the strength to respond to God's call in our lives and to intercede for those whom God calls to ministry in the Church as Priest, Sister, Brother or Deacon.

2. EXPOSITION

*O salutaris Hostia quae caeli pandis ostium;
Bella premunt hostilia, da robur, fer auxillium.*

*Uni trinoque Domino sit sempiterna gloria,
Qui vitam sine termino nobis donet in patria. Amen.*

Another Eucharistic hymn may be sung

3. ADORATION

V. O sacrament most holy, O sacrament divine,

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

Lord Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, you bring pardon and peace to all who trust in you. It is hard to believe that the stone of the tomb was removed by the strength of new life, your life. But our doubts vanish every time you approach us and say, "Look at my hands and feet: I am here in person."

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

Yes, Lord Jesus, you are flesh and bones. Your hands are still bleeding, but with those hands we rise when we fall. Your feet still hurt, but with those feet you accompany us when we rise. Your side is still open and from that side emanates the force that allows us to always keep walking forward. It is your hands and your feet, it is your pierced heart that give us new life, the power of the resurrection.

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

With you we are strong, Lord Jesus. With you we come out of death. With you our lives are made new.

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

4. SILENT ADORATION AND/OR SONG**5. READING AND MEDITATION**

Choose one or more readings from the list at the end of this insert. A homily and a short period of silence or personal meditation, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary may follow.

6. INTERCESSIONS

The spotless Lamb of God takes away the sins of the world. Let us, therefore, humbly ask him, saying: **Lamb of God, hear us.**

- Son of God, you were raised from the dead to lead us into life, bless and sanctify all the children of your Father.

- Build up the faith of your pilgrim Church on earth, that it may bear witness to your resurrection before the whole world.
- Send into our hearts the spirit of the Gospel, that we may walk in the way of your commandments, today and forever.
- Come to heal a world wounded by division, for you alone can transform our hearts and make them one.
- Give us strength to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.
- Strengthen the weak, console the sorrowful, and give hope to the dying.
- You showed yourself to your apostles and breathed the Holy Spirit on them, renew in us the presence of the same creator Spirit.

Now let us offer the prayer Christ has given us as the model for all prayer: **Our Father...**

7. PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Loving God, the provider of all our needs, we, your faithful people, ask that you bless this parish and our (arch)diocese with an increase of men and women for priestly and committed lay ministry. Provide from among us those who will lead and work with us in priestly and consecrated service. As you call, may you also provide the context for listening so that they may respond with generosity and joy. Form our hearts so that we may be people given to Gospel living and generous for Christian service. Help us all to discern and pursue our vocation in life with strength and courage, making of us a priestly people. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

8. BENEDICTION

Tantum ergo Sacramentum veneremur cernui:

Et antiquum documentum novo cedat ritui:

Praestet fides supplementum sensuum defectui.

Genitori, Genitoque laus et jubilatio,

Salus, honor, virtus quoque sit et benedictio:

Procedenti ab utroque compar sit laudatio. Amen.

V. You have given them bread from heaven,

R. Having all sweetness within it.

V. Let us pray.

Lord our God, in this great sacrament, we come into the presence of Jesus Christ, your Son, born of the Virgin Mary and crucified for our salvation. May we who declare our faith in this fountain of love and mercy drink from it the water of everlasting life. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

9. REPOSITION AND CONCLUDING SONG

The Divine Praises may be found at the end of this insert.

Courage to Follow Jesus

1. INTRODUCTION

(From the Message of Pope Francis for the 56th World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2019)

"The Christian life finds expression in those decisions that, while giving a precise direction to our personal journey, also contribute to the growth of God's kingdom in our world. These vocations make us bearers of a promise of goodness, love and justice, not only for ourselves but also for our societies and cultures, which need courageous Christians and authentic witnesses of the kingdom of God."

Brothers and sisters, let us pray during this holy hour for the courage to follow Jesus on the path he has marked out for us, for our own happiness and for the good of those around us.

2. EXPOSITION

*O salutaris Hostia quae caeli pandis ostium;
Bella premunt hostilia, da robur, fer auxillium.*

*Uni trinoque Domino sit sempiterna gloria,
Qui vitam sine termino nobis donet in patria. Amen.*

Another Eucharistic hymn may be sung.

3. ADORATION

O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament divine,

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Bread of Life from heaven. We are blessed by your presence among us.

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

You are the Christ, the Risen One, the Friend who out of love offered yourself without measure, the Lamb who bravely faced death, the Lord who rose to life from the grave.

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

You are among us, Risen Lord, in the Bread of the Eucharist. You live in the midst of your people, in the small and the humble. You came so that all of us may have life and have it in abundance forever.

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

You gave yourself as food for the life of the world. Those who believe in you will have eternal life.

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

4. SILENT ADORATION AND/OR SONG

5. READING AND MEDITATION

Choose one or more readings from the list at the end of this insert. A homily and a short period of silence for personal meditation, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary may follow.

6. INTERCESSIONS

Jesus is risen from the dead, and leads his flock to eternal blessings. With faith, we now bring our needs to the Father through him, saying. **Risen Lord, graciously hear us.**

- That Church and government leaders alike may continuously learn from the Good Shepherd, who is ready to give his life for

the sheep, let us pray to the Lord.

- That many young men may hear and respond to God's call to serve Him as priests and deacons, let us pray to the Lord.
- That there may be an increase in vocations to the religious life, and that all who are consecrated to God's service in religious communities may be blessed, let us pray to the Lord.
- That seminarians may persevere in their formation and one day, by God's grace, come to the altar of the Lord as priests, let us pray to the Lord.
- That Jesus, the Good Shepherd from whose hand none can be snatched away, may protect all children in danger or are in need of a loving family, let us pray to the Lord.
- That those who have died may be led by the Good Shepherd to the waters of eternal life, we pray to the Lord.

Now let us offer together the prayer our Lord Jesus Christ taught us: **Our Father...**

7. PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd. You know each of us and you call us by name to serve in faith. Help us respond generously to your voice. Give courage and guidance to those you call to the priesthood and the diaconate, to religious life and lay ministry, so that they may respond wholeheartedly and serve devotedly. You live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

8. BENEDICTION

Tantum ergo Sacramentum veneremur cernui:

Et antiquum documentum novo cedat ritui:

Praestet fides supplementum sensuum defectui.

Genitori, Genitoque laus et jubilatio,

Salus, honor, virtus quoque sit et benedictio:

Procedenti ab utroque compar sit laudatio. Amen.

V. You have given them bread from heaven,

R. Having all sweetness within it.

V. Let us pray.

Lord our God, you have given us the true Bread from Heaven. In the strength of this food may we live always by your life and rise in glory on the last day. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

9. REPOSITION AND CONCLUDING SONG

The Divine Praises may be found at the end of this insert.

Mary's Yes, our Model

1. INTRODUCTION

(From the Message of Pope Francis for the 56th World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2019)

"Vocation was both a promise and a risk in the story of Mary. Her mission was not easy, yet she did not allow fear to prevail. "It was the 'yes' of someone prepared to be committed, someone willing to take a risk, ready to stake everything she had, with no more security than the certainty of knowing that she was the bearer of a promise. "

Brothers and sisters, let us pray during this holy hour, through Mary's intercession, that the Holy Spirit may provide us with wisdom, courage, and the desire to accept God's plan in our lives.

2. EXPOSITION

*Adoro te devote, latens deitas,
Quæ sub his figuris vere latitas;
Tibi se cor meum totum subjicit,
Quia te contemplans totum deficit.*

*Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur,
Sed auditu solo tuto creditur.
Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius;
Nil hoc verbo Veritatis verius.*

*Jesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio,
Oro, fiat illud quod tam sitio:
Ut te revelata cernens facie,
Visu sim beátus tuæ gloriæ. Amen.*

Another Eucharistic hymn may be sung.

3. ADORATION

V. O sacrament most holy, O sacrament divine,

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

Lord Jesus Christ, we adore you here in the Blessed Sacrament. As we kneel before you, we recognize you as the creator of life. We thank you and praise you for the lives you have given to us and those we love.

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

Be the delight and pleasure of my soul, my strength and salvation in all temptations, my joy and peace in every trial, my light and guide in every word and deed, and my final protection in death.

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

O boundless charity! Just as you gave us yourself, wholly God and wholly man, so you left us all of yourself as food so that while we are pilgrims in this life we might not collapse in our weariness but be strengthened by you, heavenly food.

R. All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

4. SILENT ADORATION AND/OR SONG

5. READING AND MEDITATION

Choose one or more readings from the list at the end of this insert. A homily and a short period of silence for personal meditation, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary may follow.

6. INTERCESSIONS

The Holy Spirit raised the body of Christ to life and made it the source of life. With joy in our hearts let us call upon the risen Christ, saying: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

- For all who minister in the Church, that they may be sustained in witnessing to Christ Jesus and preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all nations, let us pray to the Lord.
- For Christians around the world, that we who were baptized into his death take seriously our duty to bear witness to Christ in our lives, let us pray to the Lord.
- For all families, that spouses, parents and children, brothers and sisters, and other relatives may treat each other with the love Jesus modeled with his disciples, let us pray to the Lord.
- For those who day after day put into practice the mission of building up the Body of Christ, that they may be blessed in their work, let us pray to the Lord.

Let us again offer our praise to God and pray in the words of Christ: **Our Father...**

7. PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Lord and Master of the harvest, enlighten many generous young people with the light of your Holy Spirit and through the powerful intercession of your beloved mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, increase the fervor of your love in these hearts that you choose for your service as a priests, deacons, religious men and women. You live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

8. BENEDICTION *(Tantum ergo – St. Thomas Aquinas)*

Down in adoration falling / this great Sacrament we hail.
Over ancient forms of worship / newer rites of grace prevail.
Faith will tell us Christ is present / when our human senses fail.

To the everlasting Father / and the Son who made us free,
And the Spirit God proceeding / from them each eternally,
Be salvation, honor, blessing, might and endless majesty. *Amen.*

V. You have given them bread from heaven,

R. Having all sweetness within it.

Let us pray.

Lord our God, you have given us the true Bread from Heaven. In the strength of this food may we live always by your life and rise in glory on the last day. We ask this through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

9. REPOSITION AND CONCLUDING SONG

The Divine Praises may be found at the end of this insert.

GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

1st Glorious Mystery: The Resurrection of the Lord

Jesus is the Risen One, he is the God of life and joy. His Resurrection is a guarantee of ours. Through Mary's intercession, let us for young people, so that in their search for guidance for their future, they may find the fullness of happiness in the Risen Jesus, and follow him with the full dedication of their lives.

2nd Glorious Mystery: The Ascension of the Lord

As he leaves the earth, Jesus entrusts the Apostles with the mission of preaching the Gospel to all people. From this moment on the Church is missionary. Sent from God to be a universal sacrament of Salvation, the Church strives to proclaim the Gospel to all men and women. Through Mary's intercession, let us ask the Lord to awaken the missionary vocation in the hearts of many committed young people.

3rd Glorious Mystery: The Coming of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit grants particular gifts and distributes them as he wants, so that each of the baptized also contributes to the edification of the whole body in charity. Through Mary's intercession, let us pray for the candidates for Confirmation and for the newly confirmed, that they may be granted the light necessary to discover their vocation, their particular ministry in the community.

4th Glorious Mystery: The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Immaculate Virgin, being preserved from every stain of original sin, as she finished the course of earthly life, was assumed body and soul to heavenly glory. To be brought to heaven at the end of time is the vocation of all the baptized. Through Mary's intercession, let us pray for those called to the priesthood and to the religious life, that they may be inspired by Mary and want to be like her, bearers of grace and salvation.

5th Glorious Mystery: The Coronation of the Virgin Mary

The Immaculate Virgin Mary is exalted by the Lord as Queen of the Universe that she may resemble her Son more fully. The baptized, like Mary, are called to be like her Son; in holiness, in the fullness of Christian life, in the perfection of love. Through Mary's intercession, let us pray that all Christians, laity, priests and those in consecrated life, may collaborate in the construction of the Kingdom of God, each according to their vocation.

Optional invocation after each decade:

V. O Mary, Mother of the Church,

R. Pray for us and obtain for us many and holy vocations.

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

1. Loving and merciful Father, listen to the prayers of your people, and make the seed that you planted ripen in the field of your Church. May many of your people choose to serve you by dedicating themselves to the service of their brothers and sisters. Raise up ministers worthy of your altars who are ardent but kind servants of the Gospel. May those who follow the footsteps of Christ, your Son, grow and provide by

their way of life

a convincing sign of your kingdom for the Church and for the world. May all the ministers of your Church increase in numbers, be persistent in their prayers, and perform their ministry with generosity and concern towards others. Father, keep them faithful to the call of the Gospel. May the world see in them the living image of your Son, Jesus Christ, who is Lord forever and ever. *Amen.*

2. We thank you, Lord Jesus, for knocking at our door. Sometimes we are distracted or there is too much noise and we do not hear your call. We know you call "silently," because screaming doesn't get things done. That's why listening to you implies being attentive, enjoying the silence, listening to what our hearts say. You live inside us and you call us to grow and be happy with you. You invite us to meet you, to listen to you, to find you in others, in nature, in as many gifts as life offers us. You are present in everything and invite us to listen to your call. *Amen.*

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE READINGS

Genesis 12:1-4	The call of Abraham
Isaiah 6:1-8	The sending of Isaiah
Jeremiah 1:1-10	The call of Jeremiah
1 Samuel 3:7-9	The call of Samuel
Matthew 19:16-30	Come, follow me
Mark 10:17-31	We have left everything
Luke 5:1-11	The call of Simon the Fisherman
John 1:37-39	Come and see
John 12:24-26	Whoever serves me must follow me
Acts 6:1-7	The need for assistants

THE DIVINE PRAISES

Blessed be God.
 Blessed be his Holy Name.
 Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.
 Blessed be the Name of Jesus.
 Blessed be his most Sacred Heart.
 Blessed be his most Precious Blood.
 Blessed be Jesus in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.
 Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.
 Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy.
 Blessed be her holy and Immaculate Conception.
 Blessed be her glorious Assumption.
 Blessed be the name of Mary, virgin and mother.
 Blessed be St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse.
 Blessed be God in his Angels and in his Saints.

May the Heart of Jesus in the most blessed Sacrament be praised, adored and loved with grateful affection at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even to the end of time. *Amen.*

FR. PETER QUINTO, RCJ

Is a Rogationist priest and assistant pastor at St. Jane of Chantal Catholic Church in North Hollywood, California.

Cultivating Vocations

A Deeper Relationship with Christ



Photo: Anthony Del Anio

Fr. STEVEN BORELLO

I recently attended our regional gathering of vocation directors. The experience was consistent throughout our region, the number of men applying for seminary and the number of openly discerning candidates for the future is down. Now, there are plenty of places for me to place blame and to explain why this is the case, but the Lord is asking me to focus on the reality that only He can cultivate a vocation in a man or woman's heart. As we continued our conversation at the regional gathering, we acknowledged that all the candidates we meet will need to strengthen their sense of faith and deepen their relationship with God. Their lack of relationship prevents them from having the capacity to hear God's call and respond.

Recognizing that many of the young men and women in discernment need help creating space to grow in their relationship with God and learn how to listen, the Diocese of Joliet began the Totus Tuus program the summer of 2011. Totus Tuus sends college aged men and women in teams of four into a parish for a week at a time. This experience allows them the opportunity to share the love of God, their faith and teach a

different pillar of the Catechism each year. Each day, a team has two periods of prayer, one before the first through sixth grade session and one after. In the evening, they join a family for dinner and return to the parish to walk with seventh through twelfth graders. It began in the Diocese of Wichita and continues to thrive throughout the Midwest and other regions of the country. Totus Tuus provides men and women the time necessary to begin hearing God's voice during their training and continues to facilitate a life of prayer throughout the summer. Over the course of the nine years that the Diocese of Joliet has participated in Totus Tuus, approximately 65 men and 55 women have given at least one summer to serve God, teaching his children.

For many of the men and women, Totus Tuus provided their first encounter with God's love for them in an experiential way. Many of the teachers shifted their college careers, their vocations, or their plans after college because of the experience teaching Totus Tuus. While half of the men who taught were already seminarians, it helped them to discern God's call more clearly in their life. Recently, the Diocese of Joliet has asked discerning men and women to

spend a summer teaching with Totus Tuus. The fruit of our labors is real. Over the program's lifetime in the Diocese of Joliet, 5 men have entered seminary, a number have gone on to spend time as FOCUS or NET missionaries, and 4 of our most recent seminarians participated in Totus Tuus while in grade school and high school. Likewise, several women went on to serve as FOCUS and NET missionaries and our third woman just entered religious life.

To help men and women discern well their vocations, a space needs to be created in their lives where they can experience God and learn to walk in relationship with Him. Totus Tuus is one of the most fruitful programs the Diocese of Joliet employs to provide that experience. It also provided our youth (almost 3000 last year) an opportunity to meet seminarians from the diocese. ■



FR. STEVEN BORELLO

Is the Director of Vocations for the Diocese of Joliet-in-Illinois. Before becoming the Director of Vocations, he served three years at St. John Vianney College Seminary in St. Paul as a formator, spiritual director and instructor.

A Unified Pastoral Care of Vocations

A Relevant Choice



Photo by Vladislav Babienko

FR. ANTONIO FIORENZA, RCJ

In this column, *Vocations and Prayer* features articles about the vocational activities of the Diocesan Vocation Centers and of the Vocation Centers of male and female Religious Institutes. Our purpose is to provide a venue for sharing different experiences, and implicitly to promote the “unified” vocation ministry proposed by the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Optatam Totius*, 2) and re-proposed in all subsequent Church documents dealing with this topic. The U.S. Conference of Bishops promotes a “unified” vocation ministry, which takes care of vocations to priesthood and consecrated life.

In the various articles published so far in the *Vocations Director’s Corner* column, activities promoting a “unified” vocation ministry by Diocesan Vocation Centers are clearly missing. The same could be said of the Vocation Centers of different male and female Religious Institutes present in the Dioceses.

Some of those responsible for vocations ministry believe it is more effective to concentrate on one’s own garden because of concrete results being obtained. Collaboration and sharing are viewed with little confidence because of the risk

of remaining on a theoretical level.

Personally, I am convinced that a “private” and “isolated” vocation ministry, in the long run, becomes sterile because it lacks deep roots and ends up being just an activity of “recruitment.” Every pastoral action/vocation activity needs deep theological and ecclesiological roots that can grow only in a context of ecclesial communion.

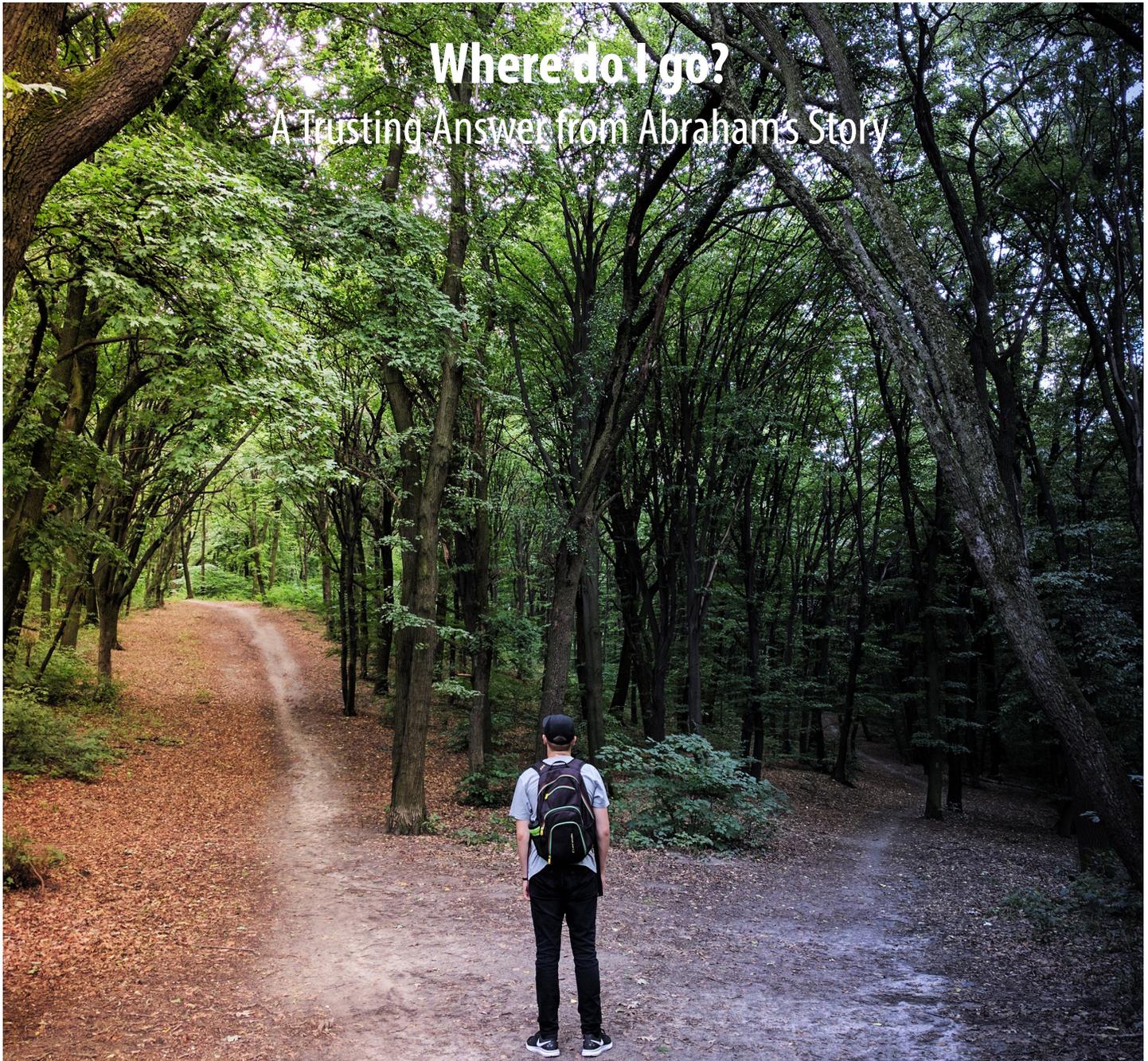
Hence the need for Diocesan Vocation Centers to be organisms and structures for the animation and support of vocation ministry in the Dioceses. They should be a point of reference and coordination for different vocation promoters, be it that they are diocesan or male and female religious.

Some guidelines for a common formative journey among operators and vocation promoters in a Diocese could be the following: organizing conferences or seminars on the pastoral care of vocations incarnated in today’s social, cultural and ecclesial local context; updating about the Church’s teaching with regard to the promotion of vocations; deepening on the theology and spirituality of vocation; promoting a vocations culture

and the primacy of prayer in the pastoral care of vocations; knowing the world of young people; learning about the contribution of psycho-pedagogical sciences to vocation discernment; etc. Equally important could be organizing days of retreat and moments of prayer spent together among vocational promoters.

In terms of practical activities of vocation promotion, it would be useful to organize common vocation promotion meetings, with the participation and collaboration of different vocation promoters present in the Diocese. These activities should not limit the validity and opportunities for each diocesan or religious vocations promoter to organize vocation animation meetings specific to the diocesan seminary or religious institute.

The cultural and spiritual preparation and the grace of communion and sharing give strength and enthusiasm to the vocation promoters and make their vocational proposal more effective. ■



Where do I go? A Trusting Answer from Abraham's Story

By Fr. RENZO GERARDI

Where are you going? I want you to ask yourself where you are going. And I want to help you answer this question by introducing you to Abraham, who is God's friend.

Let us read from the book of Genesis 12:1-5:

The Lord said to Abraham: "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your fa-

ther's house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and will curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you." Abraham went as the Lord directed him, and Lot went with him. Abraham was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. Abraham took his wife Sarai, his brother's son Lot, all the possessions that they had accumulated, and the persons they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for

the land of Canaan.

I do not know who or what Abraham was before he was called by God. Perhaps, he was an idolater. And I do not know why God chose Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans to leave or why he brought him to Palestine. Perhaps, God chose Abraham because he had a plan of salvation tied to those new lands.

What is certain is that God's speech, which is so sudden and surprising, begins

with the request for a radical break with all natural ties: "Leave the country, the homeland, your father's house." Leave your land, your relationships, and your family. God knows that separating from all these natural ties is extremely painful. Abraham must leave absolutely everything behind him and rely on God's guidance. Of that new "country," he only knows that God wants to give it to him.

And Abraham "leaves."

Called to follow Him

Do you think the Bible tells us this story just because we come to know something more about that holy man of Abraham? It is clear that this is not the case.

Bede, a doctor of the Church, wrote that "all the children of Abraham's promise should seek to emulate him, including us."

Do you believe and do you think that sacrifice to follow God is really possible? Do not tell me it is hard. I know. You are attracted by so many things, by instantaneous and pleasant sensations. And you do not always find the right path. Faith is not easy.

Abraham is presented by Genesis as one who blindly obeys, without saying anything. He is the man of unconditional faith. But you do not accept orders unconditionally. You want to discuss, think about, and understand things. I cannot blame you. It is God who created you to be intelligent. He gave you reason. And it must be used. But you want to play "arm wrestling" with God. What do you hope to get? Do you not realize that you risk wasting a precious opportunity?

The story of Abraham is the story of an appointment that God gave to man: "abandon your certainties, your comfort, and agree to follow me to happiness, for which you trust me." Is it true? Abraham knows that you can trust that word. Have the Jews not experienced this many times throughout the course of their history? Abraham's story, after all, is their history. Have we not experienced it ourselves, as Christians, so many times? You can trust

God.

But what will people say! Perhaps, "what a fool, at his age, he leaves everything behind ..." to which we respond, "nothing is impossible for God, on the condition that we truly believe in him."

God asks you to accept the impossible, to recognize that, through him, nothing is impossible. He will always succeed, even when all your hopes are dead, to give you what you dare not ask him, if it is for your own good.



God invites us to a journey

If you met him - and you have met God - do not stop. You cannot stay still when you meet God. You have to get up and follow him.

If to the question "Where am I going?", you answered "I'm going towards evil, towards a bad life, etc.", it is clear that I would be afraid for you. But believe me, I would be more afraid if you replied: "I'm not going anywhere. I'm standing here quietly." I would be afraid of your timidity.

Are you afraid that God does not provide? He provides, fully. He does not limit himself to fulfilling only half of your desires. He completely fulfills the desires of your heart. Do you want to be happy? He promises a "great" people, a "great" name, and a blessing! That is happiness!

If you read the book of Genesis and continue with the story of Abraham, you will see that it was not easy for him either. You will see that temptation was always lurking.

Abraham's nephew, Lot, does not go beyond a certain limit. He stops early. Deserters are not lacking on the roads traveled by the people of God. It is sad, but it is true. On the contrary, is this option not the sign of authentic freedom given to us by the Lord? He does not force us to follow him. But know what awaits you.

Dear friend, God chooses who he wants. God invites us to a journey. The invitation is not based on the value of those chosen, but on love, which needs to be spread and nurtured.

He invited you. Your faith is expected as a free answer. He does not promise you anything right away. He wants to educate you to trust him. But know that God is faithful to his promises. Trust him.

Credit: Gerardi, Renzo. A Time to Reflect. Spiritual itinerary for young people. Editrice Rogate, Roma. ■

Translated from Italian by Stephan Llerena



FR. RENZO GERARDI

Is professor Emeritus of Moral Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Lateran University (PUL). He was Dean of the Faculty of Theology from 1994 to 2000 and from 2006 to 2012 and Pro-rector of the PUL from 2014 to 2018.

"As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace."

1 Peter 4:10



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Romans 12:1-2

St. Paul's Plan of Discernment

What, How, Why?

By Sr. Emily Beata Marsh, FSP

"I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect."

"...be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God..." This passage from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans could also be known as St. Paul's plan of discernment!

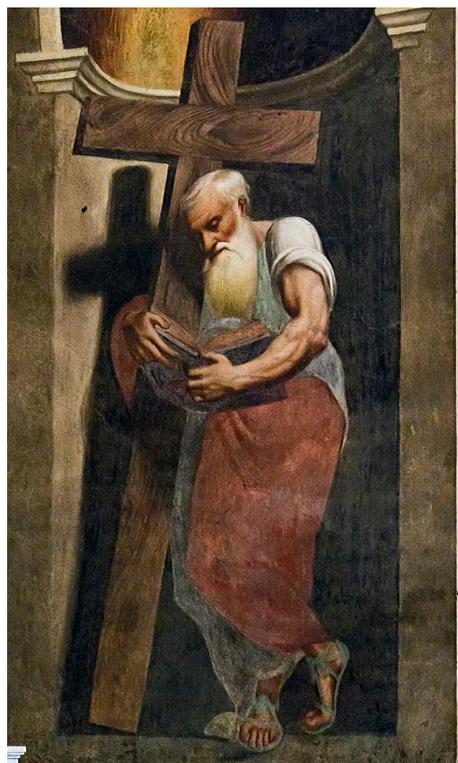
The Letter to the Romans is the most theological and the most developed of St. Paul's letters. In the twelfth chapter, St. Paul is putting everything in the context of worship. Our life, our vocation, our work, and our prayer are all directed to the greater goal of worshiping God. Even more, our life, our vocation, our work, and our prayer are meant to become worship.

We can also look at this verse through the lens of discernment. Through this lens, St. Paul offers the what of discernment, the how of discernment, and the why of discernment—all in one short verse!

The what of discernment: "the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect." St. Paul is very clear about this. Discernment always has to do with the will of God. While this is obvious, it can also be easy to forget! We can get caught up in the nitty-gritty of discernment: should I go out tonight, or stay in? Should I take this new job, or not? Should I move, or stay where I am? Should I be a priest or a sister, or get married?

These questions are helpful, but they are not the true what of discernment. As St. Paul unequivocally states, the what of

discernment is the will of God! The main, overarching question of discernment is always, always this: what is the will of God in this situation? Or, put another way: what does Jesus want in this situation? Bl. James Alberione, the founder of my community, wrote that the will of God is God's highest act of love for us. So, put yet another way, the overarching question of discernment is this: how does God want to love us and move us to love him in this situation?



Besides keeping this running in the background of our prayer, it can be helpful to have even a visual reminder. At various times in my life, I have put a sign above my desk or a background on my phone with the words, Jesus, what do you want? Ask Jesus to inspire you with a way to keep his will in the forefront of your mind and heart.

The how of discernment: "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be trans-

formed by the renewal of your mind." So much has been written about how to discern. St. Paul takes a very straightforward approach. For him, transformation is the key to discernment. Transformation has two phases: first, "do not conform yourselves to this age." That is, transformation in view of discerning the will of God means taking off the "glasses" through which we normally view the world. In other words, put on the glasses that God uses to view the world. God wants to renew our minds, our wills, and our hearts...how? By living in us! Focus your life, your prayer, your every day on letting God live in you, and your discernment will unfold naturally!

The why of discernment: "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship." I think that the "why" of discernment can be forgotten as often as the "what" of discernment. Why do we discern? In other words, why do we ask God what he wants of us and how we can carry it out? Just because we should? No. St. Paul tells us that we discern in order to offer ourselves. Radical self-offering is the ultimate end of discernment. "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice"—let your life become worship, let your life say, "I love you" to God whose life constantly whispers "I love you" to you.

Jesus, let me follow you and pursue your will—the "what" of discernment. Let me be transformed—the "how" of discernment. Let me offer myself as spiritual worship—the "why" of discernment. I offer you my discernment, my desires, my whole life. Amen. ■



SR. EMILY BEATA MARSH, FSP

Professed her final vows in June 2018. Sister Emily is currently the National Vocation Director for the Daughters of St. Paul.

The Origin and Purpose of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations

The Role of Hannibal M. Di Francia

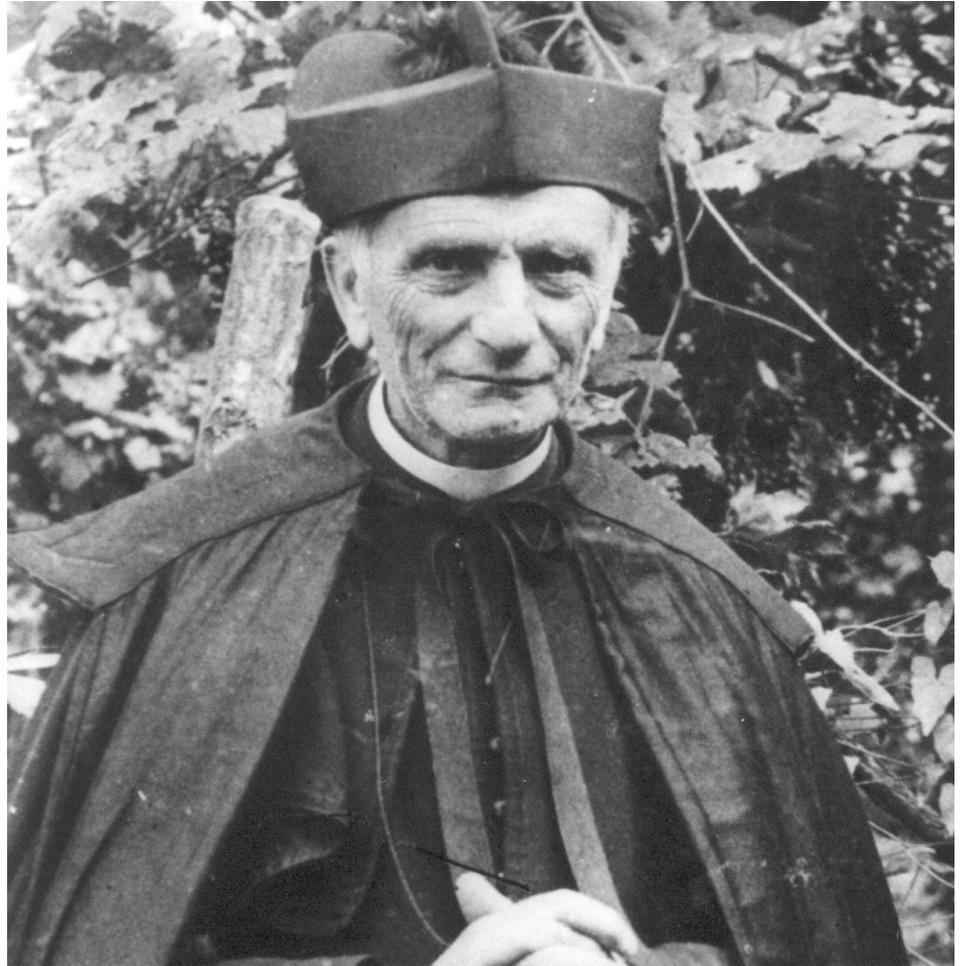
By VOCATIONS AND PRAYER EDITORIAL STAFF

The invitation of Jesus, Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest (Mt 9.39), implemented mainly in the form of prayer for the sanctification of the clergy, from 1920 onwards, can be found in several books of some prominent figures of the Church and bishops, from one end to another of the Catholic world. Of course, in this respect, it is acknowledged even in the Papal Magisterium that has addressed with increasing frequency the invitation to pray for vocations.

Pius XI (1922-1939) in his Encyclical *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii* insisted forcefully on the need to use the great means of prayer to get the gift of vocations.

Pius XII (1939-1958), firstly, with the *Motu Proprio* "Cum nobis" on November 4, 1941 constituted the Pontifical Society for Ecclesiastical Vocations, to which he entrusted the task of promoting the prayer for priestly vocations in all parts of the world. Then, with the Apostolic Exhortation "Menti nostrae" on September 23, 1950, he urged the bishops to take care of the problem of vocation precisely because it is "intimately connected with the future of the Church." He also exhorted the faithful to make use of the humble and trustful prayer commanded by Jesus (Luke 10: 2) as "the surest way to have numerous vocations."

John XXIII (1958-1963) was also along this line, and, in addition to numerous interventions on the topic of vocations, through the Pontifical Society for ecclesiastical vocations, he urged the institution in Italy of "National Day for ecclesiastical vocations." The Pope's dream was to extend the proposal to various Episcopal Conferences so that the initiative would reach a level of harmony throughout the Christian world, something in fact that was done by his successor.



Pope Paul VI (1963-1978), indeed, after just seven months of Pontificate, on Saturday, April 11, 1964, the eve of the second Sunday after Easter, called the Good Shepherd Sunday (today, in the renewed liturgical calendar, is the fourth Sunday of Easter), addressed the faithful throughout the world, with a radio message, saying:

"Pray the Lord of the harvest to send workers to his Church (cf. Mt 9: 38) (...) From the soul may the heartfelt invocation to the Lord spring out, according to Christ's invitation. (...) Therefore, may this Sunday, which, in the Roman Liturgy takes from the Gospel the name of the Good Shepherd, see merged into a single throb of prayer numerous arrays of Catholics around the world, to invoke from the Lord workers needed for his

harvest."

With the institution of a World Day of Prayer for Vocations, however, Paul VI did not want to touch only the problem but highlight it permanently. One should not miss the fact that the initiative arose fully during the Vatican II Council, where the theme of vocations was treated in different forms and occasions.

The first World Day of Prayer for Vocations was celebrated, then, on April 12, 1964, but, even if loaded with theological sense, had no great resonance, indeed for many Christian communities it passed almost unnoticed. Gradually, over the next few years, thanks to the forceful action of some religious congregations includ-

ing the Rogationists and the Daughters of Divine Zeal, it has attracted attention until its insertion in a relevant way in the pastoral activity of the Catholic Church.

The Role of Hannibal M. Di Francia

What is the role and importance of Saint Hannibal Mary Di Francia (1851-1927)? In his early youth, during the Eucharistic adoration, he understood by divine inspiration the importance of the prayer for vocations. The gospel verses: "The harvest is plenty, but the workers are few! Pray (Rogate) therefore to the Lord of the Harvest, that he may send workers into his harvest" (Mt 9, 37-38; Lc 10, 2), became the light of his life and the prime inspiration of his apostolic work.

In 1887 he founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Divine Zeal, and, in 1897, the Rogationists of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Both congregations have a special fourth vow called "vow of the Rogate," which is to live and spread the spirit of Jesus' teachings about the need for prayer for vocations.

St. Hannibal felt the same compassion and concern as Jesus for the "exhausted and abandoned crowds, who were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt. 9, 36). Therefore he used every means to spread the "Rogate," the command of Jesus to pray the Lord of the harvest to obtain "good workers," and considered it as an effective means of evangelization and charity. He also established the "Association of Prayer for Vocations," open to all the faithful.

On many occasions, he met the Popes of his time to present his charisma and involve the whole church in this spirit of prayer for vocations. He spoke with Bishops and priests, with religious men and women, and with lay people. Let's say right away that the great merit of Di Francia was to have "discovered" and have worked hard all his life to spread this request-command of the Lord and to create among the people of God a true vocation culture.

Years after his death, John Paul II acknowledged that "from the providential intuition of Di Francia arose in the church a large movement of prayer for vocations." The same Pontiff enrolled him first in the register of the Blessed (1990) calling him 'authentic forerunner and zealous master of modern vocation ministry,' then canonizing him (2004) John Paul II gave him the well-deserved title of "distinguished apostle of prayer for vocations," with which he is entered in the Proper of the Mass.

To understand more deeply his thought, let us read a short passage from the Role of life ("The Forty Deleration") he wrote for his two religious families:

"I will unceasingly dedicate all my days and all my actions to this prayer, specifically known as the Evangelical Rogation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

According to the norms of our constitution, I will have a great solicitude and zeal that this divine mandate of Our Lord Jesus Christ, so little appreciated until now, be fulfilled everywhere, so that in all the world, all the priests secular and religious, all the Prelates of Holy Church, all the pious souls, all the virgins consecrated to Jesus, all clerics and seminarians, all the poor and children - all, all will pray the Almighty God to send, without delay numberless and active workers, either men or women, to the priesthood and religious life for the salvation and sanctification of souls, - All Souls, not even one excepted.

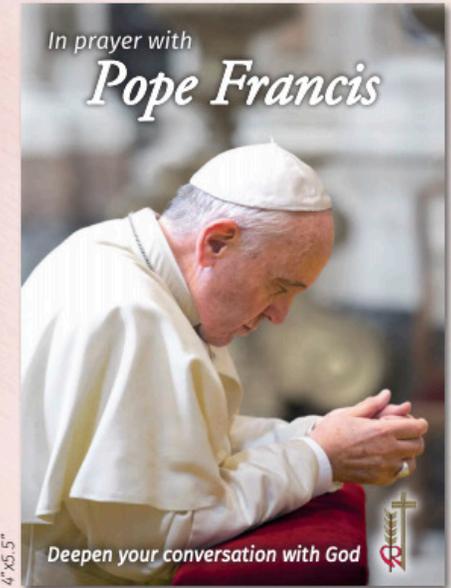
With the Lord's help, I will be ready to make any sacrifice, even by giving my blood and my life, that this 'Rogation' become universal."

His dream to make this prayer "universal" became true when Pope Paul VI (1964) established the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. ■

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My Calling

When God Filled my Void



By *SISTER BLANCA ESTELA LOPEZ, MDPVM*

Father Alberto Cuscó Mir, SJ and Mother Julia Navarrete Guerrero founded my order, the Congregation of the Missionary Daughters of the Most Pure Virgin Mary in Aguas Calientes, Mexico in 1903. Our charism is to "love and comfort the Heart of Jesus in those who suffer."

How did I hear God's call to the Consecrated Life? Every call is special; it is given in different ways, with our plans united to God's plans. When I was nine years old, I made my First Communion and I felt the call; although I did not understand it. When I saw a nun with a habit my heart became restless; I did not tell anyone because I could not interpret that God was calling me.

I turned fifteen and I joined the youth group at my local Church. I realized that there was a void that I felt desperate about. I started searching, going through difficult times because who could I have turned to? I did not know who to turn to, or who to ask. I was afraid to think that I would leave everything. I said to myself, "No, this is just a flash, an illusion of mine."

Time passed and I became increasingly uneasy. I wanted to ignore Jesus and met someone who became my boyfriend. A while passed and I told him that I felt a void, that I chose the religious life. This decision was painful for him because his plans were to get married.

I approached different congregations, filled out questionnaires, and left my contact information with the hope that they would call me to an interview, but I did not receive any answers. My suffering increased, I told myself, "It is an invention of mine, God does not answer me." My visits to the Blessed Sacrament were constant, crying and saying: "Tell me Lord what do you want from me, nobody calls me! The nuns who live here, not with them!" The most painful suffering was hearing the gospel of Mt. 10, 37-38, I felt these words strongly penetrated my core.

The sisters of my congregation were in charge of the elementary school in my hometown. One of them came to my work and invited me to start a discernment program. My mother had asked her to talk with me. I joined her sometimes and felt God was already clarifying things. I also attended a pre-life for ten days in the Congregation. I was very happy. Out of fear, I did not ask for

admission. Hours before returning home a terrible crisis happened; I kept crying.

When I met with the sister who accompanied me, she said: "Why are you crying if you have already decided? Or have you realized that you are meant to follow this vocation? God has called you to the religious life." I immediately knew I have made a bad choice, and with her help drafted a new letter to ask for admission to the Congregation. I accepted the call and surrendered. In that moment, my heart was filled with joy, even though I was very afraid of my family's reaction. What is done is done, I said. I would wait 15 days to know if I had been admitted or not.

Certainly, the acceptance letter arrived at my house. I felt that the world was turning up-side down. I told Jesus "I do not want to leave my family!" I read the letter out loud in the presence of my mother and we both cried with mixed emotions and tears of joy and sadness.

From the moment I entered my Congregation that void was filled. It has been seven years since I started this adventure and four years since I made my first profession. I am very happy because I am in the place where God called me to be, with the sisters I did not want to belong to. These were God's plans, not mine. By listening to the Charism of "love and comfort the Heart of Jesus in those who suffer," and even more so to have been consoled at a difficult time in my life by one of the sisters of my congregation, I felt that God was calling me. ■



SR. BLANCA ESTELA LOPEZ GAMBOA

Is currently a religious education teacher at St. Joseph Parish in Wenatchee, Washington. She is also involved in helping with sacramental preparation programs, accompanying the migrant community, and assisting the poor at the parish's food pantry.

To Stop Existing for Others

My Experience of Nothingness and the Light of Faith

By *ASHLEY HERNANDEZ*

Planning the pilgrimage to World Youth Day (WYD) Panama was a struggle for me. My wallet said yes, but my soul said no. My airline ticket had been reserved and my hotel room had been booked. However, two weeks prior to my departure, I told my friends that I didn't want to go anymore and that I didn't care about getting my money refunded either. The point was that I had zero interest in the pilgrimage.

My mind was made up. Despite voicing my opinion on not attending the trip, my sisters and other Church community members pushed me to go unrelentingly. They were very persistent on the matter, so I gave in. I emailed all my professors last minute and gave them notice that I was going to miss class committing to turn in the entire week of assignments before I left. This was a bit of a nuisance for me, but I got it done. I packed my bags angrily and came to the airport with a negative attitude and an angry face. Forcefully, I stepped into the airplane and as soon as we took off, felt an instant regret in my heart.

Even though I came to Panama with a sour attitude, I felt that my heart lightened up the moment we landed. This feeling was intensified when the Pope gave his homily during the Saturday Vigil. During the Pope Francis' discussion with the youth, he was asked, "Father, why so many young people today are not interested in whether God exists or find it difficult to believe in him, and they seem so bored and aimless in life?" He asked them in return, why they thought about it? One of them replied, "it's because many of them feel that, little by little, they stop existing for others; they often feel invisible."

This touched me very deeply because I felt invisible many times. Before going to Panama I got into a big argument with my mother. I was questioning my existence and my purpose in this world. Last year I



shared with my parents that I had been having bad thoughts about my life for a while, but they just brushed it aside. My mother thought I was bluffing and my father told me I shouldn't think that way, especially since I converted into Catholicism. I had nothing to offer, I thought: I am an average student and strongly dislike going to school because I feel that I'm not smart enough to finish a four-year degree. I also didn't like working because in my previous part-time job I worked as a receptionist at a retirement home. While working there, my soul felt as if it were being drained from my body due to seeing the residents' melancholy state. This affected me because I thought I would end up miserable in a wheelchair just waiting for my death. I constantly argued with my parents, because we were discussing my future career plans and how I was going to support myself after their retirement. I realized my life was self-serving life because to me there was nothing meaningful to live for. This created a feeling of emptiness and despair inside of me.

Three years ago my therapist diagnosed me with OCD and severe anxiety disorder. He just wanted to prescribe me pills and not really talk about the root of the problem, so I stopped seeing him. At this point, I felt lost and completely useless in this world. Eventually, I forgot about God's existence in this world. I was seeking answers in all the wrong places. There is a differencing in believing in God and having faith. The Pope encouraged the youth to be like Mary, who said, "May your will be done" after she was notified that she will have Baby Jesus. At that moment I felt relieved because there is nothing to be afraid of and I could truly believe that God would take care of me. God gave me the perfect parents, siblings and community members. They look after me and I truly feel that the presence of God is living within them. "God is real because love is real." This resonated within me because for the first time this got me thinking about joining a religious order.

I know to trust in God's will because his will give me true happiness and help me overcome any adversity that will arise. I'm free to choose God's love and spread it amongst my community members and everywhere that I go. This encourages me to be vocal about my problems and help out any youth that feels the same way. To let them know that they aren't alone and that God's love is within us. The pilgrimage helped me to see that God is truly present in my life and that I should seriously pray and meditate for my vocation. God isn't keeping me in the waiting room waiting for his promise. In fact, his promise is currently manifested because I chose to continue living this life in a Christian way. ■



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What Fiery Furnace are you Facing Today?

Three Faithful Fireproof Super(Natural) Heroes



Photo by Dmitry Ratushny

By DR. BRUCE L. THIESSEN, PH.D.

"On fire for the Lord," is a cliché born of the evangelical revivalism sweeping across North America and beyond during the Jesus Movement era of the late 60s/early 70s. It initially referred to someone replete with the zeal of a Holy-Spirit-filled (often new) believer.

Sadly, it became to some, an often self-righteously, gratuitously-offered litmus test for those who would, rather recklessly, quote, out of context, the scripture verse, "So then because thou

art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew three out of My mouth." Revelation 3:16 KJV. The notion, then of "Being on fire for the Lord," came to favor the flamboyant and the ostentatious extrovert, that wore, (and often flashed) his fiery faith on his sleeve, and marginalized the meek, whom Jesus promised would inherit the earth.

The Old Testament Super(Natural) heroes, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not, in any way, "on fire" for the Lord, in the sense of this relatively modern-day cliché. On the contrary,

they seem to fit the archetype of the meek, humble servant, quietly committed to serving nobody but Yahweh, their most holy King. They quietly resisted the call by the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, to bow down and worship a graven image of his likeness. As a result, King "Neb," became furious, and, quite literally, tried to set the three on fire, for the Lord they placed above him.

He, quite mercilessly, haughtily, and in an unspeakably cruel manner, had the "triplets" of trustworthiness, tossed into a fiery furnace. The King had previously

appointed them to high positions within his government. But his hot-headed, highness, in his haughtiness, first inflamed his short fuse, and then prepared the furnace for a flesh-burning event that would demonstrate to the Babylonian world just who the only one worthy of worship should be. He turned up the furnace ten times hotter than it's usual threshold. That would be the fate, and the final resting place, of those three divinely-devoted servants of the most high. Or would it?

Much to his sheer shock, and chagrin, after the dirty deed had been done, he looked into the flames of that fiery furnace, and he saw, four, not three, and one bore the likeness of the very son of God (a clear indication that Christ appeared as an apparition, long before he actually was born of the Virgin Mary, and long before, fulfilling his redemptive role, in human form, as a man, on earth).

All four men were standing and/or walking about. The three who refused to betray their allegiance to Jehovah were alive and well—fearlessly facing the flames, and, in fact, wholly engulfed in the fire, and yet, miraculously untouched and un-

singed.

This is more than just a fairy tale, like the Brothers Grimm (1812) tale of Hansel and Gretel, which features a witch that wants to fatten, up, toss in the oven, and, ultimately eat, the two innocent children who serve as the main characters. Both herald the triumph of good over evil, but the Biblical story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, represents the revelation of God as the Mighty Fortress and protector of his children.

What fiery furnace are you facing today? Is it actually a person who intends to harm you? Perhaps your struggle, or your battle is an internal one. Ephesians 6:12 reads, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places." Anxiety can feel like such a source of oppression, as can it's evil twin—depression, which feeds of the sort of utter despair and sense of abject hopelessness that is born of all possible imagined worst-case-scenarios.

Maybe your health is failing. Maybe

you've encountered the loss of a close friend or family member, and you are overcome with grief. Maybe you've lost your job, and/or you are just barely hanging by a thread, financially.

Whatever your furnace, and how ever hot your furnace is, remember, you are not alone. Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who found themselves in the presence of the son of God, who shielded them from the flames, there is someone who longs to protect and shield you. Let him into your "furnace," and, rest assured, you will not be burned. ■



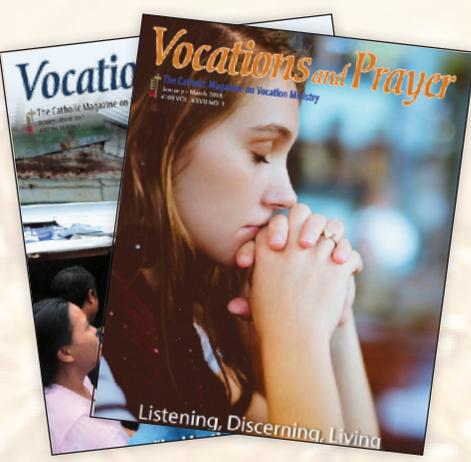
DR. BRUCE L. THIESEN, Ph.D.

Known by patients as Dr. B.L.T. is a Christ-centered psychologist, and a singer/songwriter. He presently works as a clinical psychologist for the California Department of Corrections.

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USA



Vocations Trend in the 21st Century NRVC, CARA and the GHR Foundation to Conduct a New Study

With the support of a generous grant from the GHR Foundation (Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhurst Foundation), and in collaboration with CARA (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate), the NRVC (National Religious Vocation Conference) will conduct a new study to determine vocation trends in the United States in the 21st century.

According to the NRVC, this new study will help provide "NRVC members and all those who promote vocations with clarity on the demographics and characteristics of newer entrants to religious life, what attracts and sustains membership in religious life, and changing and emerging trends."

For more information, visit <http://nrvc.net> and/or email Sr. Deborah Borneman, SS.C.M. at debbiesscm@nrvc.net

USA



The Cause of Sainthood for Fr. Tolton Archdiocese of Philadelphia Looking for a Celebration

Fr. Augustus Tolton was the first African American priest. Born into slavery, he was unable to attend a Seminary in the United States, studied to become a priest in Rome, and ministered the Black Catholic community upon his return to Illinois. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia Vocations Office in collaboration with the Office for Black Catholics organized a meeting to discuss his cause for canonization in the context of discernment of priestly vocations.

If you would like to learn more about Fr. Tolton's vocation and how he can be a source of inspiration to those discerning a vocation to the priesthood, please contact the Vocation Office for Diocesan Priesthood at 610-667-5778 or visit heedthecall.org/category/discerning.

USA



NCDVD: Upcoming Events National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors

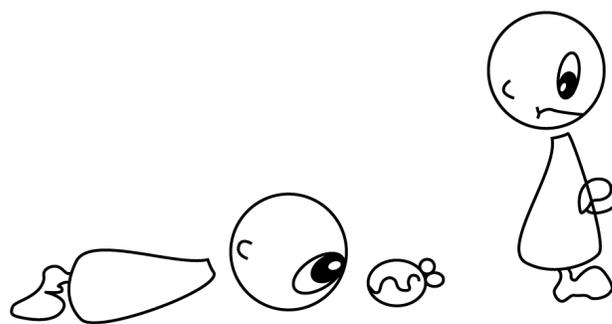
The National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors will sponsor the following events:

- Institute for Diocesan Vocation Personnel (August 23-26, 2019)
- 56th Annual Convention (August 26-30, 2019)

Both events will take place in Vancouver, Washington. To learn more, please visit the NCDVD webpage at: <http://www.ncdvd.org>

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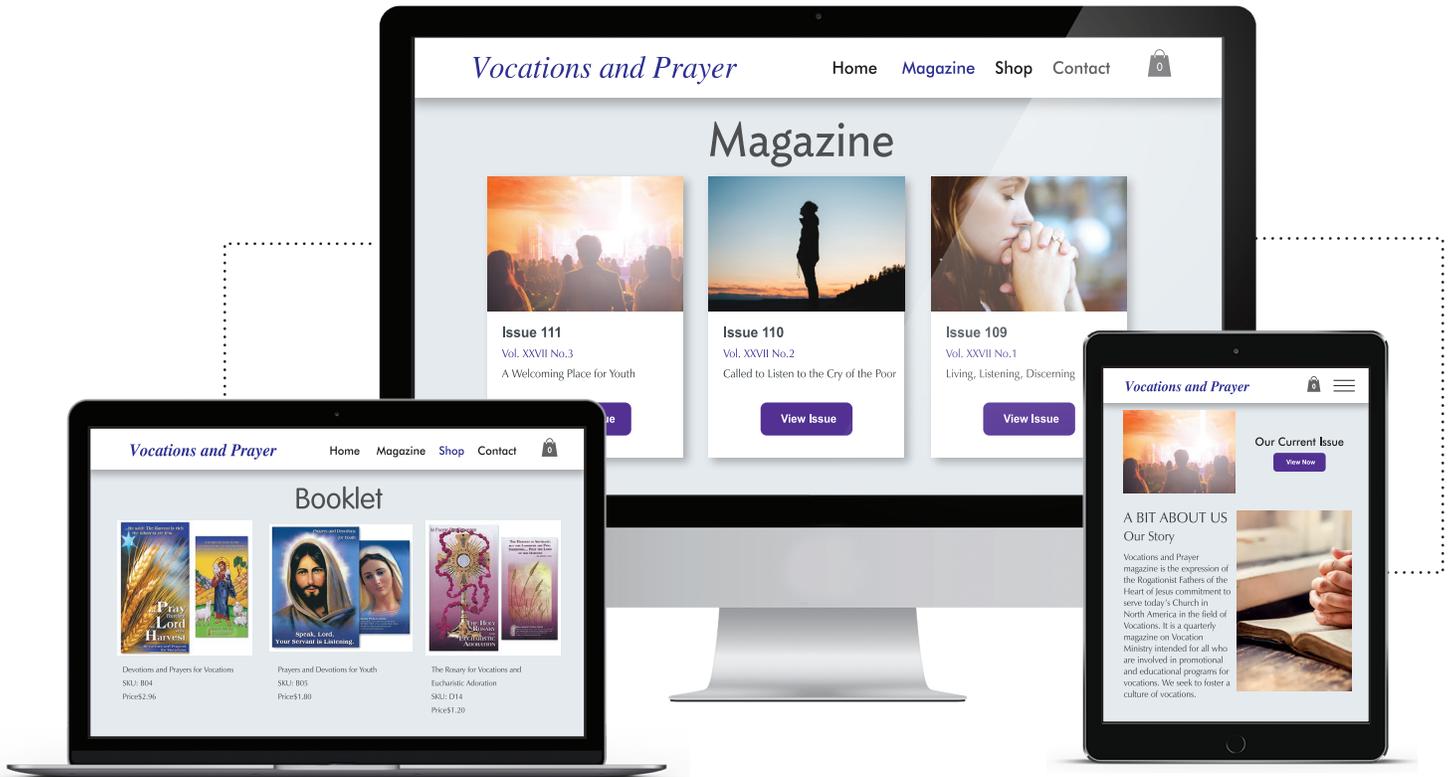
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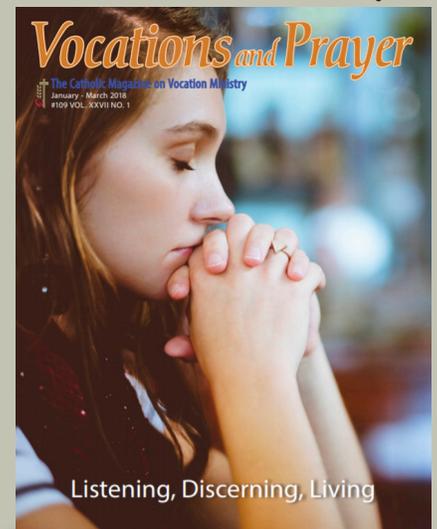
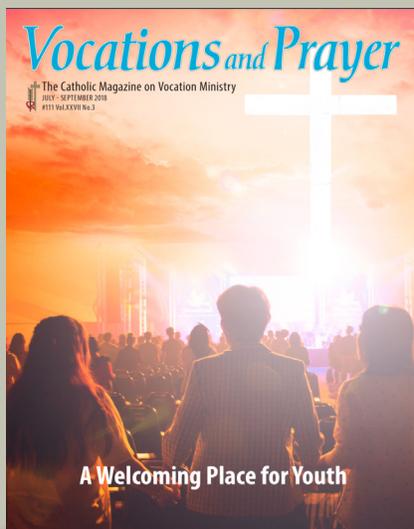
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