



CALLINGS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT VOCATIONS

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Search for more in life leads lawyer to Jesuit priesthood

By Greg O'Meara, SJ

It is the Monday after Easter, April Fool's Day, my brother Jim's birthday. The day began with a steady rain, and it has continued under soft grey clouds framed by evergreens and trees beginning to bud. On Harvard's campus, the magnolias are in bloom. I have spent the past days at Our Lady of Grace, the parish in a working-class neighborhood of Boston where I have served as a deacon since October. The community gathered, remembered, and prayed the central mysteries of our faith, beginning with the Mass of the Lord's Supper, going through Jesus' passion and death, and arriving at the resurrection Saturday evening and Sunday.

It has been a long Lent in the Archdiocese of Boston. Since January, the papers have continually reported on sexual misconduct by priests and the ensuing reactions or lack of action by bishops and religious superiors. The experience must have been gut-wrenching for the victims. It has been disheartening for people in the pews; it has been brutal for guys who are studying for the priesthood. This is where I live; this is where I study; it is out of this reality that I write my thoughts on how I came to enter the Society, why I seek ordination.

I am the fifth of seven brothers, a fourth-generation alumnus of Notre Dame, and a fourth-generation lawyer. I graduated from the University of Wisconsin Law School in the spring of 1985 and went to work as a criminal prosecutor in the Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office in June of that year. With the exception of a year's hiatus as an instructor at the UW Law School, I worked as an assistant district attorney until I entered the Jesuits in August of 1992. I loved my job, and I loved the people I worked with. I learned all sorts of things - how to hot-wire a car, how bank tellers

include a pack in their cash drawers which explodes and spreads red dye on money taken in a robbery, how to cross-examine witnesses and how to persuade a jury.

I also came in contact with victims of crime and defendants, often the poorest of the poor. Some were chronically mentally ill; some were beaten or abused by their family members; some had no clear memories of a stable residence or income. The criminal

justice system did not often provide a locus of vindication for these; rather, it served as a place where they could tell their story and have someone listen. In some cases, the criminal justice system did a great deal of good.

Sometimes it could do nothing. I still am troubled by a case of a three year old girl who had been sexually abused; her mother was developmentally disabled, and we could not discover the perpetrator. The only thing we could do was remove the child from the home. I began to see that my job required skills far beyond those taught in law school.

Although it was an important feature, work was not the only thing in my life. I dated a little, read a lot, went out with friends, volunteered with groups at church and with the Milwaukee

AIDS Project. Like everyone else, much of my life fell into predictable patterns. I usually went for a run every day, and later I found that the 5:30 evening mass at Gesu Church became part of my daily ritual. I don't know exactly why this final part of my schedule appealed to me. I liked the way Fr. Roc O'Connor, SJ preached, and I was intrigued by the collection of people who attended this service. There were business and professional folks like myself, students, teachers, street people, those who were →



→ FROM PAGE 1 retired. We were all longing for something I suppose, trying to fill some emptiness, maybe attempting to find some meaning for troublesome parts of our lives. This search for meaning seemed to engage me more and more. I began to realize that the important questions in my life did not have easy answers, that if I were able to describe my desires with precision, I probably was mimicking someone else's desires. My own deepest longings were hidden, inchoate, unclear. Nevertheless, I was aware that my life seemed incomplete somehow, that there had to be something more. To address this uncertainty, I recall going on retreat in January of 1989.

During that retreat, one of the preachers indicated that my challenge might be that God sometimes comes to us in ways we don't want him to, ways we feel unprepared to receive him, ways unfamiliar to us. More to the point, God may be calling us in ways we don't wish to be called, and we can fight it all we want, but we may have to embrace that call in order to maintain integrity as a person, in order to be who we are authentically. These were hard words, but they continue to make sense to me!

As I tried to sort through what would fill the gaps in my life, what seemed an authentic expression of who or what I was or wanted to be, one event

stands out. A friend of mine, Fr. John Fitzgibbons, SJ, was writing his doctoral dissertation in American Literature at Loyola University Chicago. I was passing through Chicago on my way back from doing the first round of interviews for my office at the law school at Notre Dame. John and I decided to get together for pizza and beer at a local cultural establishment. As the evening wore on, I brought up my recurring question of where I could best find meaning in my life. John shifted the conversation a little - "Isn't your question really 'How do I love other people best?'" I thought his read of my question was a bit odd at the time, but I let it pass. Fortunately, the question didn't leave me, and it settled uneasily in my soul. During the next few months, I kept coming back to it - wondering why this ostensibly simple question continued to bother me. Ultimately, I think I entered the Society of Jesus because it seemed to me to provide the best answer; it seemed that here



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was where I could love other people best.

As I try to piece together my reasons for entering the Society of Jesus 10 years ago, and with my ordination approaching in a few weeks, I think about the Gospel from Easter Sunday. I find this selection from John one of the most disturbing and disrupting passages in the Bible. It tells the frightening story of a lone woman who walks outside the city walls before dawn to the place of execution. She enters a graveyard and sees that the tomb where her master was laid has been opened, disturbed, perhaps desecrated. She runs to Peter and another disciple. They return, enter the tomb, and see burial cloths but no body. They leave the tomb shaken, confused, not knowing what had happened.

The empty grave is a sign fraught with tensions because it means that the life of Jesus is not over.

We don't control the message of Jesus any more than we control our own lives. We cannot outline the whole of Jesus with a tidy biography or capture his story in a complete documentary. The resurrection means that the New Testament is necessarily an unfinished book.

Christ's agency continues; his story continues now, today, here. Christ can and does continue to nourish us, continues to be present to us, continues to heal and hold us, continues to call us to bring forth the Kingdom in this world. There is a wildness and unpredictability to the Easter message because God remains here with us; God interrupts our plans and lives; God continually calls us to remember and to rediscover: where God is, who God is, what God calls us to. The tomb is empty because Christ is risen and is here, with us, embodied in the people of God gathered.

In light of this reality, I continue in the Society and approach ordination because this has become the place where I recognize that I best love other people. This is where I can best be part of the next chapter of God's saving work and God's healing in the world. **E**

NOTE: After his ordination in June, Greg O'Meara will teach law at Marquette University in Milwaukee.

Summer getaway offers fun way to explore possible vocation



The annual Summer Come and See Vocations Days, a great vocation discernment opportunity for high school students and college freshmen and sophomores, will be held in late June this year at Loyola Villa in Waupaca, Wisconsin.

The three-day event is designed especially for younger candidates who are high school age or college underclassmen (having just finished sophomore year of college or younger) interested in exploring more closely the possibility that they might have a vocation to be a Jesuit.

"It's a great way to learn about Jesuit life and meet other young men who are considering a vocation," says Fr. Warren Sazama, Wisconsin Province vocation director. "Our province hosts the event, but candidates from all provinces are welcome."

We'll have presentations on Jesuit life by young Jesuits in training in the mornings, daily Mass, chances for small group sharing, and plenty of time to enjoy the lakes with swimming, water skiing, canoeing, rope swing, and good Jesuit-cooked meals.

Attendees should plan on arriving at the site on the afternoon or evening of June 22. Full activities are scheduled from Sunday, June 23 through Tuesday June 25. Plan on leaving the morning of June 26. While at

FOR ADDITIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION FOR THIS EVENT AND MANY OTHERS, SEE PAGE 4.



Waupaca you will hear from young Jesuits who will share their stories of how they decided to become Jesuits.

There is no charge, and financial assistance to help cover travel expenses is available. To view a full brochure and application form on the web, go to www.jesuitswisprov.org, and click *Join Us* on the navigation bar. You will find a listing for Waupaca Days. You can also write for a brochure and application. **E**

ANSWERING THE CALL

Vocational discernment isn't for wimps

Fr. Warren Sazama, SJ

DIRECTOR OF VOCATIONS – WISCONSIN PROVINCE



As a follow-up to my previous column on combating the evil spirit in the vocational discernment process, it struck me that vocational discernment takes a lot of courage and toughness. In other words, it isn't for wimps.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, says six qualities are required in anyone who undertakes an authentic discernment process. Ignatius tells us that to have any real hope of finding God's will for us, we must be open, generous, courageous, free, reflective, and have our priorities straight. Let's address each of these qualities beginning with openness.

- We cannot find God's will for us if we enter the decision-making process with a predetermined outcome. We need to be genuinely open to whatever God might be calling us to do.
- To be completely open to whatever God wants of us takes true generosity. We need to approach our discernment process with a largeness of heart that puts no conditions on what God might be calling us to do with our lives.
- This kind of complete openness and generosity takes courage, because it is really risky to give up all control and put no conditions on what we will let God ask of us. If we're completely open, we might discover God is calling us to a life unlike what we had envisioned. Perhaps even a life of evangelical poverty, chastity, and obedience.

- To be this open, generous, and courageous requires that we be interiorly free from what Ignatius calls "inordinate attachments." If we feel that we must have (and thus are "attached to") an upper-middle class income and lifestyle, for example, we are not free to respond to a call from God to serve in ways that wouldn't fulfill this desire.

- Attaining this level of interior freedom demands that we develop a habit of prayerful reflection on our experiences and be people who look at how we experience and respond to God in our daily lives.

- Moreover, all this entails that we have our priorities straight. There's a ruthless logic in Ignatius' view of life. If the ultimate goal and purpose of our lives is to praise, reverence, and serve God, which includes serving our neighbor, then everything else in our lives must be secondary to that goal. Basically it comes down to God first, and all else a distant second - to be used and valued only to the extent that it helps us serve God.

This is true for all relationships, opportunities, and experiences. They are all means to the end of serving God and must be kept in the category of means to an end and not allowed to become ends in themselves.

If we have these six qualities by the grace of God, only then do we have a real hope of combating the wiles of the evil spirit and finding what God is calling us to.

This openness, generosity, courage, and interior freedom all demand spiritual strength and discipline. I often comment on how a call to religious life and/or priesthood is very counter-cultural in today's world. Our American culture tells us that finding happiness requires ongoing personal gratification of all our wants involving, among other things, a considerable accumulation of material

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wealth and possessions, along with power and control over people and things.

However, choosing this path as a means to happiness doesn't really give us a sense of internal peace and joy in the long run, and leaves us feeling somewhat empty within.

Christ tells us that true and lasting happiness comes from using our gifts humbly in the service of others and placing less value on much of what the world lures us with. This is not easy. The spiritually weak fall by the wayside and are tempted away.

Genuine heroes and heroines are needed in God's service today. We rightly acknowledged the heroism of the firefighters at the World Trade Center in New York City after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. They were true heroes and heroines because they set aside their own comfort and safety and put themselves at risk to help those who desperately needed them. Their heroism reminded us that the work they perform involves considerable self-sacrifice. We don't think of these as high-salaried positions with a lot of power and status, yet the work is critically important to us and rewarding to those who take it up.

A kindred heroism is required in men and women who work in service to God. Priests, brothers, and sisters labor to meet critical needs; their lives involve considerable self-sacrifice. And just as firefighters find satisfaction in their work, so too do the sacrifices made by priests, brothers, and sisters also bring tremendous rewards.

In my life as a Jesuit priest I never cease to marvel in awe as I experience people and share in their lives on an incredibly personal level during their times of joy and need. To experience God

working through me to help people find God and meaning in their lives is deeply satisfying, profoundly joy-filled, and always humbling.

We had a rare glimpse at seeing the sacrifices and rewards of these two ways of life combined in the heroism of Fr. Mike Judge, the Franciscan fire chaplain, who was killed anointing the fallen firefighters at Ground Zero shortly after the terrorist attack. He gave the ultimate sacrifice of his life. The entire nation was moved by the outpouring of admiration, respect, and gratitude shown for his ministry by the tearful firefighters both at Ground Zero and later at his funeral.

I want to be clear that I'm not advocating spiritual machismo here. Scripture is clear in telling us that God chooses the weak to confound the strong, and that our true strength is from the Lord. God's strength shines all the more clearly through our human weakness. No one can be God's faithful, joyful servant and live a life of evangelical poverty, chastity, and obedience except by the grace of God. That is true for all life's challenging vocations including marriage and parenthood.

I do mean to emphasize, however, that responding to God's call in a radical way - such as in a religious or priestly vocation - demands spiritual strength that comes from God through prayer and the Eucharist. It is not for the faint of heart.

Are you up to the heroism of the demanding call of a religious and/or priestly vocation? The answer to that question is found only after opening one's heart to God's grace and courageously facing the challenges of a searching discernment process. **E**

UP COMING EVENTS

JUNE 7

JESUIT ORDINATIONS
A Mass of Ordination will be celebrated at 7:30 p.m. at The Church of Gesu, 1145 W. Wisconsin Ave.

JUNE 23 - 25

VOCATION DAYS at our Jesuit vacation spot on the Chain of Lakes. See story at the bottom of page 2.

JULY

SUMMER IMMERSION EXPERIENCE.

Are you thinking about the Jesuits in a serious way, but don't have time for our "Six Weeks a Jesuit" program? Consider joining other Associates and Jesuits at one of two 10-day summer immersion experiences in Brooklyn, NY or Camden, NJ. These programs run concurrently on two occasions: **July 12-21** and **July 26 - August 4**. Programs include a reflection on the call to Jesuit life in the context of direct service to the poor, and conclude with a reflection weekend away.

JULY 16 - 27

CANDIDATE PILGRIMAGE to World Youth Day in Toronto. There will be men in discernment with the Jesuits from all over North America converging on Toronto for World Youth Day. We'll have a Jesuit outdoor retreat from July 16-23 at the North American Jesuit Martyrs' Shrine; some may travel by foot or canoe to Toronto carrying the World Youth Day cross. The Pope arrives on July 25th. The age range for World Youth Day is 16-35.

AUGUST 17

Celebration of First Vows.

DISCERNMENT RETREATS

Individually directed, silent discernment retreats based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius available upon request. Please see Fr. Sazama if you are interested in making the Spiritual Exercises in a three to eight day retreat.

PLEASE NOTE:

There is no charge for any of these events, and we are happy to help men with travel costs to and from these events if needed. Please contact Fr. Warren Sazama, SJ, vocation director for the Wisconsin Province, if you are interested in any of these events.

ORDINATIONS



HOSKING

O'MEARA

The Wisconsin Province of the Society of Jesus invites you to join the Jesuits, their friends, and families as **J. Martin Hosking, SJ** (now teaching at Creighton Prep in Omaha) and **Gregory J. O'Meara, SJ** (who taught law at Marquette University a few years ago as a Jesuit scholastic) are ordained to the priesthood. The Most Rev. Robert Morneau, bishop of Green Bay, will be the ordaining prelate.

A reception for those attending the Mass follows at Marquette University's Alumni Memorial Union.

You're also invited to come to a dinner beforehand. We'll meet at the Marquette University Jesuit Community at 1404 W. Wisconsin Ave. at 5:30 p.m.

FIRST VOWS

First Vows celebration in St. Paul, Minnesota. Join us for the joyful celebration of the first vows of our second year novices from our St. Paul novitiate community. They will be held at 10 a.m. at St. Luke's Church on Lexington and Summit Ave. You are welcome to attend a cookout and slideshow in honor of the vow men on Friday evening, August 16, a lunch after the Vow Mass at noon on Saturday, as well as a meal for the vow men on Saturday evening. Please let us know if you'll need lodging on Friday night.



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FR. WARREN SAZAMA, SJ

Jesuit Vocation Director for Upper Midwest and Great Plains

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