



CALLINGS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT VOCATIONS

In the inspirational company of amazing people

By Fr. Jim McDermott, S.J.

Life, Milan Kundera writes, is like the first day's rehearsal for a play. "We live everything as it comes, without warning, like an actor going on cold." The plot or course of our lives is not given to us in advance; rather, each moment occurs all of a sudden, unexpectedly. It's always a mystery, a surprise, unknown.

I never planned to be a priest. Never had a vision, never heard a voice. As a child, my imagination was captivated by fantastic things: extraterrestrial life and light sabers, the hunt for archaeological relics and comic book super heroes. The nerdy Peter Parker, misunderstood by his peers; Luke Skywalker, searching the stars for a better life – with them, I identified. With Jesus, with priests... not too much.

I first met the Jesuits at Marquette University, where I attended college. Frankly, I kept as far from them as I could. Priests – the black outfit, the vow of celibacy, belief in a human being as God – I just didn't get it. Get real.

But a strange thing happened. I got this job working as a resident advisor in a 12-story, beer can-shaped building that housed 720 freshmen guys. Chaos with a zip code. 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Yet in that most unexpected of locations, I found myself in the company of an amazing group of people – 22 RAs, a Jesuit chaplain, an assistant hall director and a hall director, each of them more outstanding, talented and nicer than the last. It was the most dynamic and solid group of people I had ever met. Working with them, while trying to be a support to the students on my floor, persistently challenged me to grow up and think of others first.

Yet I found myself incredibly happy. Somewhere amidst the fake IDs and midnight fire alarms, I found my niche. My two years as an RA were the most positive experience of my college life.

They left me hungry for more. As I approached my graduation, I began to actually talk to the chaplain in my hall; one year later, I entered the Jesuits.



PHOTO BY FR. DON DOLL, SJ

"The future has been and remains in part a mystery. Stepping forward keeps calling on faith."

That was almost 12 years ago. Much could be said of the time in between. Not all of it would be rosy. To keep moving forward without always knowing for sure I've made the right choices; to continue trying to let go of fears and let God into my life; falling in love; wishing to be held in the arms of another. This mixture of slapstick and mystery, suffering and offering, grief and loneliness and love which is my life... it has not always been easy to accept.

And yet the grace has remained. Last June I was ordained a priest. I left good friends, a wonderful community, and a very fine

institution (The Weston Jesuit School of Theology) to move back to Milwaukee for the first time since college and begin work at Gesu Parish. Beginning again.

But in my heart I am surrounded by people from all over the world whom I admire and care about. Some, Jesuits like me, ordinary men who give their all, stumble at times, and try their best to love and pray and be God's good servants. My friend Charles Hervieux, a Jesuit from France, who scrubbed the bathrooms until they shone, always tripped when he came into a room, and learned each day a new American colloquialism. (Have you ever heard →

of a 'pig in a poke?') My old rectors, Pat McCorkell, Paul Harman, Bill Pauly, and John Privett; they teach me still about laughing at yourself, being patient, appreciating a good Manhattan, and loving well. Br. Bill Foster, a man of many cigarettes and few words, in whose quiet presence I found myself so readily at home. So many great Jesuit professors, and the dear friends with whom I was ordained last year – Jeff McDougall; John Thiede; Mike Guzik; Boom Martinez; Ron Gonzales; Greg Lynch; Chris Manahan; Roger de la Rosa; Jeremiah Lynch. As kind and crazy and colorful a bunch of Jesuits as ever there were.

Also, so many colleagues, students, mentors, and friends – remarkable individuals, who have loved me unreservedly, and with abiding patience and humor. Joe Ecklund, Ken Anselment, Pat Souders, Mike Stang, Tim Machan, Mike and Jill Shashaty, Bob Brave Heart, Roger White Eyes, April Cortier, Dino and Courtney Pinto, Heather Sierra, Francine Parmenter, Danielle Deon, Shanell and Shavonna Stampley, Luella Edwards, Emily Rauer, Megan Fox, Francine Cardman, Betty Smith, John



FR. GREG LYNCH, SJ, FR. CHRIS MANAHAN, SJ, FR. JIM MCDERMOTT, SJ AND FR. JOHN THEIDE, SJ ENJOY A LIGHT MOMENT DURING THE HOMILY AT THEIR ORDINATION MASS LAST JUNE.

Stachniewicz; my parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents, brother and sisters and their families – their names rise in me like prayers. In my mind these people surround me. They are my communion of saints. They encourage me, and they give me hope.

At my vows, nine years ago, the homilist told the

congregation, “These men have no idea what they are in for.” It’s true we didn’t. The future has been, and remains in part, a mystery. Stepping forward keeps calling on faith. My students used to ask, why do it? But I see the faces of men and women I dearly love, people who have loved me. And I am grateful. **G**

A weekend of rest, reflection, discernment, and fun!

There is already early interest in the Wisconsin Province’s annual Summer Come and See Vocation Days, a vocation discernment opportunity for high school students and college freshmen and sophomores held in June at the Loyola Villa in Waupaca, Wisconsin.

“This is becoming a very popular event because not only is it a great learning opportunity,



it’s also a very fun time in a really great environment,” says Fr. Warren Sazama, SJ, province vocation director.

The three-day gathering is geared especially for younger candidates interested in taking a closer look into whether they might have a vocation as a Jesuit priest or Brother.

“This is one of our ‘intro’ events, similar to the Loyola Come and See Weekend, but geared for younger men,” Fr. Sazama says. “It’s a time for candidates to learn more about the Jesuits, meet young Jesuits in formation, and get a better idea of whether Jesuit life might be for them. They’ve read and talked about it, but this is a chance to experience it a bit and talk to actual Jesuits about their lives, their vows, different ministries, community life, and the joys and the satisfactions as well as the challenges.”

Attendees should plan on arriving at the site on the afternoon or evening of June 18th. Full activities are scheduled from Saturday, June 19 through Monday, June 21. You should plan on leaving on the morning of June 22. While at



Waupaca you will hear from young Jesuits who will tell their vocation stories and share how they decided to become Jesuits. The weekend program includes presentations, prayer, and opportunities to share personal thoughts and questions. Recreational opportunities include group gatherings, sailing, water skiing, team sports, and just plain rest and relaxation time.

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. Address information is listed in the Calendar of Events on page 4 of this newsletter. **G**

10 Reasons to be a Religious or a Priest Today

Fr. Warren Szama, SJ

DIRECTOR OF VOCATIONS – WISCONSIN PROVINCE



I feel sad when people hear I'm a vocation director and say, "That must be a tough sell." They are surprised when I tell them that it's not as tough as they might think and that many quality people are expressing interest and are joining religious communities and diocesan seminaries. And it's really not a sell at all, it's a matter of helping them hear more clearly how God is calling them.

When people ask how it's going, I tell them while we're not getting the same numbers of entrants as in the '50s and '60s, we're doing significantly better than in the '90s. The Jesuits, for example, started this year with 105 first- and second-year novices in the U.S. and Canada – 58 this year and 56 last. Our Jesuit novitiate in St. Paul, Minnesota is literally overflowing. We had to rent space in a nearby apartment building to accommodate everyone. This past year had the largest entrance class in the U.S. and Canada in 10 years, with the previous year having been the second largest. The foreseeable future appears bright.

So why, especially in light of recent turmoil in the Church, are healthy, young adults with good options choosing religious life and priesthood in significant numbers, and why might you consider this option? In the tradition of David Letterman, though not with his wit, let me give you 10 reasons to become a religious or priest today.

1) Because you want to and feel called to be a religious or priest. This is the inescapable main reason. Although the call is

not always loud and clear, the best sign that God is calling you to be a religious or priest is that you feel a desire to do so. Questions arise: What way of life will make you most alive and happy? What do you want to do with your life? Early on, God might only be calling you to consider the possibility, which, if nurtured, could develop into a deep desire. Is the thought of being a religious or priest attractive to you? Do you feel drawn to consider it? Do you feel happy and peaceful when imagining yourself as a religious or priest? These are all initial signs that God might be calling you.

2) Because being a religious or priest is the best way for you to love. The three main ways of loving in the Church are (1) marriage (for the majority of people), (2) single lay life, and (3) religious life or priesthood. While marriage is a very particular way of loving one family, religious life and priesthood are ways of celibately loving in a more universal way. For some people, the thought of focusing their loving, generative energy on one specific family feels too limiting. They feel called to love more expansively, to be free to touch many people's lives. If being a religious or priest is the best way for you to share your love with the world, I hope and pray you follow that call. If there's a better way for you to love, do it.

3) Because being a religious or priest is the best way for you to share your gifts in service and make the world a better place. We all have special God-given gifts and talents. What is the best way for you, given your temperament, personality, and spirituality, to share your unique gifts in service? If you believe that you can make your best contribution to the world as a religious or priest, that is a sign that God might be calling you.

4) Because as a religious or priest you can make a tremendous, unparalleled difference in thousands of people's lives for the rest of your life. As a Jesuit

for 40 years and a priest for 27, the Lord has been able to use me to touch thousands of lives, in often-profound ways. For example, as vocation director, I'm privileged to mentor hundreds of men and women, helping them figure out what God is calling them to do with their lives. I'm also honored to help many college students each year grow closer to God in a renewed prayer life on Busy Student Retreats and in spiritual direction. As a priest, I have had the opportunity to help people go through major life passages such as marriage, birth, and dying in the context of faith and the Church's rich rituals and forgive sins in the name of Christ. I can't imagine another way of life in which I could have as profound an impact on the lives of so many people.

5) Because being a religious or priest is an extremely joyful, fulfilling, satisfying way of life. What could be better or more satisfying and bring more joy than having the opportunity to be God's instrument in helping people come closer to God and grow in their faith? Moreover, as a member of a religious community, I have lifelong brothers, friends, and companions with whom to share life, ministry, and my religious calling. As a Jesuit, I have been blessed with the profound heritage of Ignatian spirituality which has greatly enriched my own life and given me so much to share with others seeking to enrich their lives. I cannot imagine a richer, more satisfying, happier, more meaningful life.

6) Because the life of a religious and priest is completely structured toward union with God and service of others. Think about it. What other way of life is entirely set up to help you come closer to God and serve your neighbor? I honestly can't think of one. As a religious, the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience free you to go wherever you can be of most service without considering anything else. You don't have to say no to an opportunity to serve because the salary is too *see SAZAMA on back page* →

JUNE 18 - AUG 1

SIX WEEKS A JESUIT program in the Chicago-Milwaukee areas. This is an opportunity to live in a Jesuit community and work in a Jesuit ministry with other men considering the Jesuits. It is an excellent way to get a better feel for what it might be like to be a Jesuit.

JUNE 18-22

VOCATION DAYS at our Jesuit vacation spot on the Chain of Lakes near Waupaca, Wisconsin. These days are for younger candidates who are high school age or college underclassmen

(having just finished sophomore year of college or younger). This will be a chance to get to know the Jesuits better in the relaxed atmosphere and beauty of our rustic Loyola Villa. 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. We'll be driving a van up from Milwaukee on Friday evening and back on Tuesday morning.

For those who need to fly, please fly into the Appleton, WI

airport on Friday evening (June 18) and fly out on Tuesday morning (June 22).

AUG 14

FIRST VOW CELEBRATION in St. Paul, MN. Join us for the joyful celebration of the first vows of our second year novices from our St. Paul novitiate community. It will be held at 9 a.m. at St. Luke's Church on Lexington and Summit Avenue. We also hope you can join us for the reception, which includes lunch, after the Vow Mass at noon on Saturday. Please let us know if you'll need overnight lodging on Friday or Saturday nights.

Ongoing Vocation Discernment Groups

We have two discernment groups for men considering the Jesuits.

Milwaukee group

Contact Fr. Jim Flaherty, SJ at Marquette University
(414) 288.5000 or
james.flaherty@marquette.edu

Omaha group

Contact Fr. Dick Hauser, SJ at Creighton University
(402) 280-3010 or
hausersj@creighton.edu

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. Sazama, SJ.

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low to support you and your family or because it doesn't fit in with your spouse's or children's needs and plans. You have access to your community's or diocese's resources to prepare yourself for the ministry you're called to. I look at my married friends, and while many of them are admirably holy, my lifestyle offers me far more structures, time, and opportunities to develop my faith and prayer life. There is simply no other lifestyle I know of that comes close to offering as many wide-ranging and deep ways of fostering spiritual growth, union with God, and unrestricted opportunities for service.

7) Because must not there be voices to speak of the things of God in the world? As a very young man, I attended the First Mass of a newly ordained priest. I remember vividly how simply, humbly, and honestly he questioned how he or anyone else could ever presume to be a public man or woman of God? And his humble, honest answer to that penetrating question was, "Must not some among us speak of the things of God? If not those of us who, though unworthy, feel so called, then who?" His comments struck a deep chord within me and seemed to be profoundly true. I thought, "While none of us is worthy and none of us can presume to do this unless called by God, where would we be if no one responded." The mystery of the Incarnation is that God depends on weak human beings like us to do His work in the world. We are the hands, mouth, and feet of Christ.


8) Because the world needs witnesses to transcendent values. While this reason is closely related to the previous one, it has a

different emphasis. It's true that religious and priests speak of the things of God in a unique way and with a unique authority ("Sister – or Brother or Father – said, ..."). However, their whole lives – their vows, their sacrifices, their dedication to God and neighbor in an obvious and public way – if lived authentically, point to the absolutely central place of God in our human existence far beyond what words alone could ever express. If not for God, why do all this?

9) Because the Church and world are immeasurably richer with the presence of religious (and the Church absolutely depends on priests for her sacramental life). While the Church and world could go on without the presence of religious, I believe both would be much poorer without them. This is perhaps the hardest point to make, because you can't miss something you haven't experienced, and unfortunately all too many young people today have not had the opportunity to personally get to know women and men members of religious communities. Fortunately I have, starting with the School Sisters of St. Francis who taught me in grade school and whom I also knew intimately through my aunt, Sr. Margaret Joseph Goetz, SSSF and through my Jesuit teachers in high school, and later many wonderful religious women and men colleagues and friends. There's something intangibly special about women and men who have given their lives to God and service in this radical way that is incredibly uplifting. There's an old religious word called "edify." To edify (as in 'edifice') means to 'build up.' Good women and men

religious edify us – build us up.

10) Because at this time the need for religious and priests has never been greater or the motivation more pure. In the midst of the clergy scandals that filled the media in 2002, one outstanding young man told me that this is a great time to become a religious and a priest. When I asked him why, he said that at a time like this his motives had to be pure. In the midst of all the negative publicity and even ridicule, what could motivate him other than pure motives such as the love of God, a sense of God's call, wanting to be of service, and his perception of the obvious need for good people to step forward at this time? **E**



CALLINGS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT
VOCATIONS

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