



The
Jesuits

CALLINGS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT VOCATIONS

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Learning to hear God's ever-deepening call

By Rick Ralphson, SJ

A call – if from God – always deepens.

Take Peter, for instance. First Jesus calls him from the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Mt 4:18). Jesus then calls him, among other things, to cure the sick and cleanse lepers (Mt 10:8). He next calls Peter to take up the cross (Mt 10:38), walk on water (Mt 14:29) and gaze on God's glory (Mt 17:2). If that was not enough, Jesus invites him to a final meal (Mt 26:18) – and even though Peter denies knowing Jesus, Jesus singles Peter out to call him as shepherd of the people (Jn 21:15-19).

Christ similarly keeps calling me more deeply into relationship with him, speaking to me differently at different times. Sometimes His words surprise me – a voice out of the blue talking directly to me. Other times the voice comes directly from Scripture – words that so directly relate to my experience that I feel deep within my being God communicating with me.

Regardless of how they are heard, the words always strike a chord within me. Sometimes I react with acceptance, other times with doubt; but always the words stay with me, burning in my mind and heart. Over the years, spiritual directors, friends, and other people who know me well have helped me confirm that these words are from God. They help me overcome my doubt.

My call began in my youth, a time when the generosity of my grandfather and the faith of my grandmother were always examples for me, prompting me to reflect on how I too might be generous in my own life. Later, on a high school Kairos retreat during the junior year (1990-91), I felt a profound desire to be a priest. I can't



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RICK RALPHSON, SJ PARTICIPATES IN THE MASS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AT MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL IN MILWAUKEE.

articulate it clearly, save to say that it was like hearing an internal voice from the depths of my heart.

Nearly four years passed, during which I completed my pre-med requirements, participated in a variety of service projects, met the Jesuits of Creighton University, and made numerous retreats – one of them in fall 1995 when I joined several other students, my girlfriend of a year included, on my second silent directed retreat.

One morning, while on that retreat, I felt a longing to converse with Christ. So, I put on my windbreaker, spontaneously placed a Bible in my pocket, and planned to walk to a favorite prayer spot to have this colloquy. On the path there, however, I heard a word: "Stop." So I did. With birds flying overhead and colorful leaves falling to the ground, Jesus said: "Listen to the birds singing my praises and the leaves bowing before me." I listened and looked in amazement. After a few minutes, I was ready to proceed to that favorite prayer spot, though. (I did not quite get it!)

Jesus had other plans. He asked me to turn around. Perplexed but ready to do so because, after all, I was on retreat, I did. He spoke again, "If you really want to know me, be with me in my passion." I instinctively reached into my pocket and realized why I had placed that Bible there. I opened the Scriptures to the gospel of John. Never before had I felt so present with Jesus as I prayed over God's Word. I had hoped that it would never end.

When the other disciples and I were fearful of the unknown and locked in the upper room, Jesus came and stood among us. He gifted us with peace. He then said – and these words are →

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forever etched in my mind and heart: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20:21). I slammed shut the Scriptures and screamed, “I am NOT going to be a Jesuit!”

Clearly, Jesus called me. He called me in a way that I had been feeling for years, but that moment in the upper room marked the crystallization of the call. Both my deepest desires, to be in close connection with the Christ, and dreadful fears, to let go of my own particular plans, met in that moment of prayer.

Then, in 1997, after continually hearing the call from Christ – and with the assistance of spiritual directors, a variety of service work, and countless conversations with close friends – I was able to not only hear the call, but answer it. That is when I entered the Jesuits.

But, to my surprise, there was more.

After two years at the Jesuit Novitiate in St. Paul – and with no shortage of stories from this time either – I pronounced vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, studied the humanities for a year, and then joined 40 Jesuit scholastics at Loyola University Chicago to study philosophy and theology.

There, the call continued to deepen.

On a particular wintry Chicago morning, after having reached Loyola’s Water Tower Campus, I walked toward the John Hancock Center for my Spanish class. Numbed by the cold, I decided to rest inside the University chapel for a moment. I walked to a spot near the Blessed Sacrament, bowed, and spontaneously said to the Lord: “I want to know you better.” No sooner did the words leave my lips when the living Jesus responded: “If you want to know me, then know the poor, my people.”

This time I did not panic. Confident that I had tapped into truth, the words were a confirmation of all that I had been recently studying. The most recent General Congregation of the Jesuits states, “Friendship with the poor makes us friends of the eternal King” (GC 34 [33]). Moreover, the Dominican theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez professes, “The preferential option for the poor is ultimately a question of friendship” (*America* 2/3/03).

In addition, I had been working as a community organizer of the working poor on Chicago’s South Side. Along with fellow Jesuits, I had lived, studied, and worked with the poor in Mexico and Bolivia as well.

A few months after this so-to-speak second call, I spent a week living and working in various Washington D.C. homeless shelters while lobbying for the economic rights of the poor.

I began more explicitly to confront the destruction of economic violence and to become increasingly more aware that I lived in a nation that annually spends hundreds of billions of dollars on its military while over thirty-four million of its citizens choose between food, clothing, and shelter.



RICK RALPHSON, SJ ARTICULATES A POINT WHILE TEACHING A CLASS AT MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL IN MILWAUKEE. RICK IS AT MARQUETTE FOR HIS REGENCY, A TIME IN JESUIT FORMATION WHEN MEN LIVE IN APOSTOLIC COMMUNITIES AND WORK FULL-TIME ALONGSIDE OTHER JESUITS AND LAY PEOPLE IN SCHOOLS OR OTHER MINISTRIES. FOR MORE ON REGENCY, SEE THE CURRENT EDITION OF JESUIT JOURNEYS, OUR PROVINCE MAGAZINE.

While in the van returning from my brief experience in Washington, I started to pray – and began thinking of my moment with the disciples in the upper room. I was again afraid. How am I to work for justice with such odds stacked against it? Who am I, a beneficiary of the system, to challenge economic injustice? But Jesus said to me, “Rick, remember that I first gave you the gift of peace.” He was easing my fears. But there was more: I felt deep within the call to be peacemaker, just as Christ is peacemaker (and the source of all peace).

Like Peter on the shore of Galilee’s Sea, Jesus continues to call me in ways that I could never have imagined years ago. He calls me to friendship with the poor in a world that daily replays the story of Dives and Lazarus (Lk 16). He calls me to embrace the gift of peace within myself, especially when I allow self-doubt to overshadow me, and to make peace in a world that embraces the falsity that might makes right.

What is next? I am unsure about the specifics – and still too frequently clutch onto my own plans – but I rest assured that my call will only deepen.

After all, it is from God, the source of all. **E**

Come to our Ordination Mass and reception this June in Milwaukee

Please join us for one of the most important events in the life of every Jesuit priest – Ordination. Our Ordination Mass will be held this year at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, June 10 at Gesu Church in Milwaukee.



CASEY BEAUMIER, SJ



MARK CARR, SJ

Casey Beaumier, SJ and Mark Carr, SJ will be ordained to the priesthood. Both are in their final year of theology studies at the Jesuit School of Theology in Weston, Massachusetts. A reception follows the Ordination Mass.

Please also join us for their First Masses on Saturday and Sunday following ordination. The time, location, and other details of these events will be posted on our web site as they become available.

Ambivalence and discernment often go hand-in-hand

Fr. Warren Sazama, SJ

DIRECTOR OF VOCATIONS – WISCONSIN PROVINCE



As a vocation director, I hear a lot about ambivalence. Ambivalence comes from two Latin roots “ambi” meaning “both” and “volo” meaning “wish” or “desire.” So, an ambivalent person desires two incompatible things. The result can be an uncomfortable, confusing experience about which way to turn. While more pronounced in some discerners than others, I have come to believe that ambivalence is generally present to a degree in all those discerning a possible religious or priestly vocation.

This kind of confusion is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, it often is normal and healthy. The key is how the discerner deals with it, a process involving the discernment of spirits – determining which inner movements and desires are from God and which are not.

While discerners can experience ambivalence about all three of the vows religious take (poverty, chastity, and obedience), my experience is that the deepest ambivalence is most often felt regarding the vow of chastity, and understandably so. As is explicated in Pope John Paul II’s “theology of the body,” we are made male and female with a complementarity intended for union and procreation. The desire for marriage and family is imprinted deeply within our physiology. To sacrifice this is no trifling matter. In fact, I would have questions if this were not a concern for a discerner at least at some point in their vocational discernment process.

This concern, while almost always present to at least some extent, is often felt most acutely at two points – the early stages of the vocational discernment process and the time of application. Usually when I talk with people considering religious life or priesthood, one of their first stated dilemmas is the choice between family and religious life. Their task then is to discern which of these two desires is their deepest desire and call. If they genuinely discern over time that religious life is their deepest desire and God-given call, then they usually experience relative peace about that decision. This peace is seen from an

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Ignatian perspective as a confirmation from God of their decision.

So it would seem that all is well at this point, and that all a candidate has to do is follow through on the decision to apply and live happily ever after in their God-given vocation in life. Much to their consternation, however, this is not always the end of the story.

While some do go through with the application and acceptance process without wavering and enter with relative calm, others do not. Sometimes their former ambivalence about celibacy resurfaces, occasionally quite powerfully, and disturbs their peace of mind and resolve.

Why is this? Has their discernment process gone awry? Have they made a poor decision? Is God not really calling them to religious life? Is their decision to apply and enter not being confirmed by God?

I have come to believe that these inner disturbances and feelings of deep ambivalence at the time of application, and even acceptance, usually do not mean that they don’t have a vocation or that God is not confirming their decision. Rather this sense of inner anxiety, heaviness, darkness, sadness, or doubt about their decision strikes me as a re-emergence of their original ambivalence. Something deep inside them screams out, “What are you doing?” – “Do you really want to give up the opportunity for a life companion and children?” – “Can you live without sex?” – “Are you crazy?”

This ambivalence may not be experienced as strongly if a person’s initial discernment process has been thorough, but it is usually present at least to some extent. Some discerners even fall in love with someone at this time.

The re-emergence of ambivalence is, in my view, normal and healthy when it does occur. As mentioned, the desire for a life companion, children, and a sexual partner is deeply embedded in our human nature. In fact, it never entirely goes away even in happy, mature religious and priests. One of the best, most candid talks I ever heard on celibacy during my Jesuit formation was by two Jesuits psychiatrists, the late Fr. Jim Gill, SJ and Fr. Ned Cassem, SJ. They reminded us that the sacrifice made in celibacy is not a one-time experience but involves an ongoing grieving process which manifests itself in different ways at different times in the life of a religious or priest.

Missing a romantic partner might be most vividly felt in a younger person. In midlife, missing a life companion and children

see **SAZAMA** on back page →

APRIL 15-17

SPRING COME AND SEE WEEKEND

at the Jesuit house of studies at Loyola U. in Chicago. This weekend is for all inquirers interested in learning more about Jesuit life and training. You'll spend the weekend with young Jesuits in training, who will share their vocation stories and experiences of Jesuit life and formation. We'll begin with Mass at 5 p.m. on Friday and end with lunch on Sunday.

JUNE 10

JESUIT ORDINATIONS at 7:30 p.m. at Gesu Church in Milwaukee, WI. There will be a simple meal beforehand and a reception after. The ordinands will be: Casey Beaumier, SJ (who taught at Creighton Prep in Omaha) and Mark Carr, SJ (who taught at Marquette High in Milwaukee). You are also welcome to attend their First Masses on Saturday and Sunday. Please let us know if you need a place to stay overnight.

JUNE 17 - JULY 31

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 25-27

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. (Travel days are June 24 and June 28).

AUG 13

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 these events, and we are happy to help with travel costs to and from these events if needed.
Please contact Fr. Sazama, SJ.

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might become more prominent. As a religious gets older, missing grandchildren might be most felt.

In this light, the sometimes deep ambivalence felt around the time of application, and even after being accepted into a novitiate or seminary, can be seen as an anticipatory grieving of the things to be given up not just at entrance to religious life, but over the course of one's evolving life stages. These sacrifices are real, and no good purpose is served by glossing them over.

A self-aware person feels these things, and self-awareness is essential to being a good religious or priest. And so this anticipatory grieving is not a bad thing or a sign that one doesn't have a vocation to religious life or priesthood. If acknowledged for what they are and taken to God in prayer, these feelings will pass and the previous peace and confirmation will re-emerge at an even deeper level.

Such feelings might, and probably will, return from time to time throughout one's life as a religious or priest. Missing the things that one has chosen to sacrifice, however, can be taken to God in prayer. This can continue to be a place to meet and welcome God more deeply into one's life, and lead to deeper personal peace and intimacy with God.

You might be wondering at this point why the Church requires celibacy of her priests and why religious life with the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience has arisen from the earliest times within the Church and endured to the present time. While the Church has not always required celibacy of her priests, celibacy and priesthood do fit well together. Moreover, celibacy is an intrinsic part of religious life as it has developed within the Church from the third century onward.

The rationale for celibacy is the subject of other articles but suffice it to say here that celibacy is a sacred, time-honored, life-giving vocation within the Church intimately associated with religious life and priesthood. It is a way of loving and self-giving based on Christ's example and counsel (Mt. 19:12). It has borne much fruit and been the way of life of many great, joyful saints throughout the history of the Church to the present day, with perhaps the most renowned modern example being Mother Theresa of Calcutta. While it involves real sacrifices, as do all meaningful commitments, if lived well, religious life is a wonderful, rewarding, joyful life of service that is a true gift to the Church and the world. **G**



CALLINGS
A NEWSLETTER ABOUT
VOCATIONS

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