



CALLINGS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT VOCATIONS

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On the road the Ignatian way

AS A FIRST-YEAR JESUIT NOVICE, BEN OSBORNE SET OUT ON A SPRING DAY FOR A FIVE-WEEK PILGRIMAGE. INSTRUCTED TO MAKE HIS WAY ALONE INTO THE DEEP SOUTH AND WORK WITH THE POOR, HIS ENCOUNTERS WITH RACISM AND INJUSTICE OPENED HIS HEART AND EYES. UPON HIS RETURN, HE DISCOVERED GOD WAS CALLING HIM TO WORK WITH AT-RISK AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUTHS IN OMAHA. THIS ACCOUNT OF HIS JOURNEY EXPLAINS WHY.



BEN OSBORNE, SJ (RIGHT) AND MATT WALSH, SJ MEET UP ON THE RETURN LEG OF THEIR PILGRIMAGE. TYPICALLY NOVICES GO ON A FIVE-WEEK PILGRIMAGE AT THE END OF THEIR FIRST YEAR AT THE NOVITIATE. THE JOURNEY REQUIRES STRONG FAITH AND TRUST THAT GOD WILL PROVIDE THE GRACES NECESSARY FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND PERSONAL AWARENESS.

By Ben Osborne, SJ

Most of the rest of my class were really looking forward to pilgrimage. I was not. They were all excited by the stories of guys who had gone ahead of them and had graces heaped upon them over the course of five or six weeks.

I thought these stories were pretty cool too, but I still dreaded being kicked out of the house for five weeks with only my backpack, \$35 and a one-way bus ticket to Honey Hill, Mississippi. Images of myself, hungry and huddled by the side of the road and praying in the cold and rain, tormented me.

Yet I knew that God would continue to take care of me and deepen the graces of my long retreat, which I completed just a couple of months earlier. So with fears intact, but faith aplenty, I set out in late April along with my fellow Jesuit novices. Within a week I found myself in Cowerton, a little town in northeastern Mississippi, about three hours southeast of Memphis.

I showed up at St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church where I knew of a small community of women religious who had been hospitable to pilgrim

novices in the past. They welcomed me and immediately put me to work. In a town of 3,000 with only a handful of Catholics, these women were extremely active witnesses to the Gospel against the dominant culture of racism and oppression.

Besides running the parish (a priest came out on Saturday nights for Mass), they were in the process of building a community center that would, among other things, house a job-training program for teenage moms. They also ran a second-hand store and a tutoring program.

While tutoring in the after-school program, I met Levon, a 7-year-old African-American boy. Of all the people I met on pilgrimage, he made the most lasting impact. His story inflamed my spirit and my passions at the injustice I saw.

The seeds of segregation and underlying roots of racism are as alive and well as ever in Cowerton. The town has two sit-down restaurants (and a couple of others that are carryout only to avoid interracial mingling). Of those religious denominations present, all have two churches, one for blacks and one for whites. Tiny St. Joan of Arc, our Catholic parish, was the exception. ➔

→ FROM PAGE 1 A public park appeared to get mowed monthly. The city pool, which closed when it was forced to integrate in the 1960s, reopened only recently, and with reluctance, as a result of the efforts of the sisters and a group of volunteers they put together. The town also has a private park with a separate swimming pool for "members." In reality there are also separate school systems, with the black kids all in the grossly underfunded public schools and many of the white kids in private "Christian" academies.

Not long after she arrived in 1985, Sr. Darlene, assisted by members of the community, identified education as the greatest need she could most readily address. By 1987, the sisters had started their highly organized tutoring program to help support parents in the education of their children. It was there that I spent my afternoons from about 3 to 6:30 p.m.

Levon would come to the second session, which began at 5 p.m. We usually went over his spelling words, practiced reading the story he was working on in school, and reviewed some addition and subtraction flashcards.

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He impressed me as an extremely bright kid. Eager to learn, Levon was a master at sounding out words he didn't know. After two weeks of math drills together, he could readily add and subtract, rarely counting on his fingers.

I was shocked, then, to learn that he was in danger of having to repeat first grade. The school system required teachers to give percentage grades to each student and then average them together for the whole year to determine whether the

student advances to the next grade level.

Levon had some trouble in spelling at the beginning of the year, presumably because he hadn't gone to kindergarten and was a little behind everybody else. It didn't seem to matter that by the spring

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he was reading and doing math at a second grade level. Moreover, he earned perfect scores on his spelling tests all three weeks we worked together.

Disbelief, tears, and then rage welled up in me when I learned

about Levon's predicament. Here was a first grader getting hit with the residual effects of centuries of racism. Poor and black, Levon was stuck in an underfunded public school with ridiculously antiquated policies because the people in power don't have children in the public school system.

Working with Levon, all the things I'd studied over the fall and the graces of long retreat became even more real. I witnessed first-hand that injustice isn't an abstract concept. Injustice has the face of a 7-year-old who is going to have to struggle against forces he doesn't even understand yet just to get through school. While the more fortunate children he must compete against in the race of life get head starts, kids like Levon are weighted down by slow-to-die handicaps deeply rooted in injustices most of us presume are long-gone.

Instead of patting Levon on the back for a job well done and sending him on, the system was prepared to push Levon down, kick him hard, and hold him back – discourage him rather than encourage him. God is calling me as a



THE RACISM AND INJUSTICE BEN OSBORNE, SJ ENCOUNTERED AS A FIRST-YEAR NOVICE HELPED OPEN HIS HEART AND EYES TO THE FACT THAT GOD WAS CALLING HIM TO WORK WITH AT-RISK AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUTHS. HERE HE WORKS WITH STUDENTS AT THE JESUIT MIDDLE SCHOOL OF OMAHA.

Jesuit, the Society as a body, and the Church as a whole to insist on better.

As I look back on pilgrimage, I am beginning to see more clearly that the Christ I encountered on long retreat, the Christ I followed through the villages, the Christ I watched preach, teach, and heal was inviting me to follow him and to do as he did. Jesus was inviting me to take that overwhelming love he had shared with me in retreat and to share it with others in very concrete ways.

Sharing that love through teaching, preaching, healing, or just being there is the only way to bring about the Kingdom of God, particularly in places where hope for the future is besieged by fear and hatred every day. •

NOTE: The names of the people and places in this article were changed at the request of the subjects. With the help of program staff, concerned members of the community, and Levon's parents, the real Levon successfully completed first grade and advanced to second grade for the next school year.



BESIDES TUTORING GRADE SCHOOL STUDENTS, BEN OSBORNE, SJ ALSO HELPED WITH A VARIETY OF MAINTENANCE AND REMODELING PROJECTS AT THE TINY MISSISSIPPI PARISH WHERE HE ARRIVED ON PILGRIMAGE.

ANSWERING THE CALL

Spiritual Direction Key for Discernment

Fr. Warren Sazama, SJ

DIRECTOR OF VOCATIONS – WISCONSIN PROVINCE



I could talk about my temptations, what's going well, what's not going so well, my moral life, how I've been living out my faith in practice through volunteer work, being helpful to friends, and so forth. If in vocational discernment, my spiritual direction would include telling my director how I feel moved regarding my vocation.

My spiritual director then gives me feedback regarding what I've shared. He might talk about what movements or patterns he hears, what seems to be coming from God and, conversely, what seems to stem from negative sources.

The director is like a spiritual guide. Experienced in the spiritual life, he ushers and mentors me down new and unfamiliar paths, enriching my ability to observe and absorb from what is going on around and within me. A spiritual director in the Jesuit or Ignatian tradition will use St. Ignatius's guidelines from the *Spiritual Exercises* to help interpret my experiences.

WHY IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IMPORTANT?

If I'm trying to discern ("figure out") God's call to me, I must pay attention to what God is saying to me. For that to happen, I must pray regularly – preferably daily – for an extended period (say, a half hour). I must pay attention to the patterns of what I hear in my prayer, the various spiritual movements within me. The guidance of a spiritual director makes me better equipped to do these things for several reasons.

- Regular meetings add accountability into the discernment process. When I know I will be making a report shortly to my spiritual director, I am challenged to look more carefully at my experiences so that I can articulate to my director what's been going on in my life.

- In articulating my experiences to my director, in a sense I "put my →

One of the first things I recommend to a man considering the Jesuits is that he get into spiritual direction with a good Jesuit spiritual director.

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

Spiritual direction is an ongoing process of nurturing one's spiritual life. Although it is not counseling or therapy, it may have the benefits of healing and spiritual and emotional growth. Perhaps the best way to explain it is to describe how it works. Imagine if you will that I am the one seeking spiritual direction.

First of all, I must find and ask someone to be my spiritual director. I might ask for a referral from the Jesuit vocation director, a priest, or another person whose judgment I trust. (For someone considering becoming a Jesuit, a Jesuit spiritual director is preferred because he would be familiar with our approach to the spiritual life.)

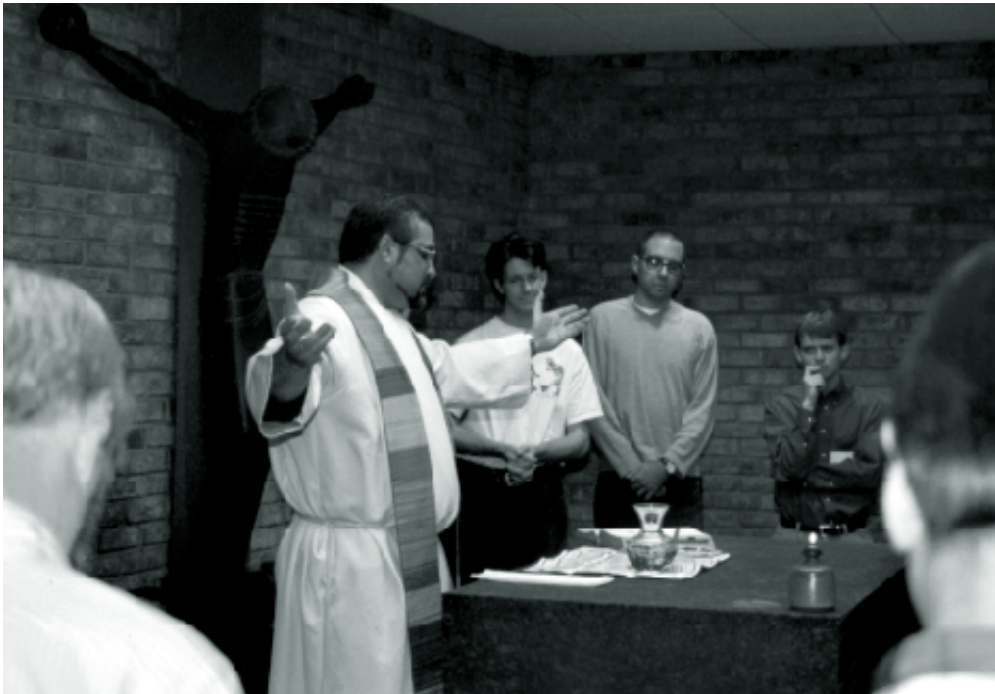
Once I have found a director, we meet regularly (perhaps monthly) for about hour each time. I tell my director what has been going on in my spiritual life. This includes talking about my prayer: how I've been praying, what's been going on in my prayer, whether I've felt drawn by the Lord in any particular way. I might also talk about how I've been finding God (or perhaps not finding God) in my daily experiences, such as in my relationships, work, studies, leisure, and other areas of my life.

→ FROM PAGE 3 experiences out there" to be looked at together. This helps me more clearly explore my inner experiences, detecting patterns, themes, and "movements."

- My director serves as a companion in my spiritual life and offers support. This is very important, because in our secular culture, trying to lead a life of prayer and faith and hear God's call can be difficult.
- Spiritual direction can also greatly reduce the possibility of self-deception. It is said St. Theresa of Avila noted: "The person who has himself as a spiritual director has a fool for director!" In going it alone, it becomes too

easy to misinterpret our inner experiences. Unconscious biases can lure us away from listening to God's voice. Instead we can end up paying more attention to voices other than God's such as the values of our secular culture, family, or friends. Not that family and friends can't be helpful. It's just that we cannot assume that their will is always the same as God's.

Finally, a willingness to enter spiritual direction can be a kind of vocation litmus test. Committing myself to these initial basic practices shows that I am serious about determining God's will for me and whether or not I have a religious vocation. •



COME AND SEE

FR. LEN ALTILIA, SJ CELEBRATES A MASS AT THE NOVITIATE IN ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA FOR A GROUP OF MEN EXPRESSING INTEREST IN BECOMING JESUITS. CALLED A "COME AND SEE WEEKEND," THE PROGRAM IS DESIGNED TO MORE FULLY INFORM PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES TO THE PRIESTHOOD AND BROTHERHOOD ABOUT LIFE AS A JESUIT. INQUIRIES ABOUT VOCATIONS AS A JESUIT PRIEST OR BROTHER CAN BE DIRECTED TO FR. WARREN SAZAMA, SJ, VOCATION DIRECTOR, AT 800-537-3736. HIS E-MAIL ADDRESS IS WARREN.SAZAMA@MARQUETTE.EDU — OR WRITE TO HIM AT 3400 W. WISCONSIN AVENUE, MILWAUKEE, WI 53208.

Ongoing Vocation Discernment Groups

TO JOIN ONE OF OUR ONGOING VOCATION DISCERNMENT GROUPS AT **MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY** IN MILWAUKEE, PLEASE CONTACT FR. TIM LANNON, SJ AT (414) 288-6386 OR TIMOTHY.LANNON@MARQUETTE.EDU.

TO JOIN THE GROUP AT **CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY** IN OMAHA CONTACT EITHER FR. MIKE LEE, SJ AT (402) 280-3913 OR MLEESJ@CREIGHTON.EDU OR RICK RALPHSON, SJ AT (402) 280-3921 OR RICKRSJ@CREIGHTON.EDU.

FEB. 18 - 21

VOCATION DISCERNMENT RETREAT AT THE JESUIT RETREAT HOUSE NEAR DENVER, CO (opportunity to grow in prayer, relationship with Christ, and pray about how God might be calling you)

APRIL 7 - 9

COME AND SEE WEEKEND AT THE JESUIT CAMPION HOUSE OF STUDIES AT CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY IN OMAHA, NE (experience what life is like for young Jesuits in studies)

JUNE 27 - 29

VOCATIONS RETREAT AT LOYOLA VILLA, ON THE CHAIN OF LAKES NEAR WAUPACA, WI, FOR CANDIDATES IN HIGH SCHOOL OR FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE (includes information about Jesuit life, the vocation decision-making process, and recreation on the lakes)

JUNE 9

JESUIT ORDINATIONS, OMAHA, NE (the ordination Mass for Jesuits completing their training)

JUNE 15 - JULY 31

SIX WEEKS A JESUIT PROGRAM IN NEW YORK, NY (experience Jesuit community and ministry for part of a summer)

AUG. 12

JESUIT FIRST VOW MASS, ST. PAUL, MN (the vow Mass for young Jesuits after their two-year novitiate)

OCT. 6 - 8

WEEKEND AT THE NOVITIATE, ST. PAUL MN (for candidates seriously considering applying to the Jesuits)



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