



CALLINGS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT VOCATIONS

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This journey to the Jesuits goes through Notre Dame

By John Thiede, SJ

Having grown up in Minneapolis, the largest metro area in the U.S. without a Jesuit school, it surprises me sometimes that I'm a Jesuit. A product of public schools, I went on to the University of Notre Dame, which many people think is a Jesuit school, although it is actually run by the Congregation of the Holy Cross.

for joking once in high school about becoming a priest (if I couldn't get a date to the prom), the idea of a religious vocation never really came up until college.

Everything about my first year at Notre Dame was great, the Catholic environment, football weekends, inter-hall hockey and football competition, the dances – everything. All the guys in my dorm went to Sunday Mass together, which also felt good because, finally, it wasn't a parental mandate. Choosing to go at first because everyone else did, I continued because it was enjoyable. All the first-year pre-med courses made it pretty tough academically, so I would occasionally even go to daily mass. "Monk Hoops," basketball with University President Edward "Monk" Malloy who lived in my dorm, helped relieve some of the stress and was also a lot of fun. Some upperclassmen usually stopped at the grotto on the way home, so I got in the habit of stopping too. Being a long way from home, I also started to pray at night.

The priesthood may never have been a consideration, however, had Fr. Tom Gaughan, CSC not mentioned it one night. Fr. Tom lived on my floor and played goalie on our inter-hall hockey team. Some of us would often stop by his room on the way home from studies to chat and help ourselves to any candy he had lying around. One night, after most of the other guys had left, we continued talking about the stress of an upcoming exam.

That's when Fr. Tom asked me why I wanted to be a doctor. He listened to me talk about the family medical tradition; that my great-grandmother was the first registered nurse in Minnesota; that I had always wanted to be a doctor in order to help people and make a difference in people's lives.

"John, I don't know if you realize this," Fr. Tom said, "but those are some of the same qualities we look for in a good priest."

My jaw must have hit the floor! Somewhat flattered, I said thanks but no thanks. Life had other priorities that included dating – high above chastity on my list at the time. But despite my protests, a light bulb went on in my head, and the idea of a religious vocation persisted. →



PHOTO BY MARY KATE MACISAAC

JOHN THIEDE, SJ STANDS OUTSIDE OUR LADY OF GRACE CHURCH IN CHELSEA, MASSACHUSETTS, WHERE HE SERVES AS DEACON. JOHN IS COMPLETING HIS THEOLOGY STUDIES AND WILL BE ORDAINED IN JUNE ALONG WITH THREE OTHER WISCONSIN PROVINCE JESUITS. (SEE PAGE 2)

So why am I about to be ordained a Jesuit priest? My parents get some credit. All the kids in my family participated in CCD classes and the parish youth group. Sunday Mass was mandatory – even on family camping trips. We prayed regularly before dinner, and at bedtime – usually concluding with an *Our Father* or a *Hail Mary*. We were a good Catholic family.

In the fourth grade, I told my teacher of my intentions to play football, attend Notre Dame, and be a doctor. My mom and all her sisters are nurses and a number of her cousins are doctors. Except

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At the end of my freshman year I had looked into the option of a program for students interested in joining the Holy Cross seminary their senior year. But after consulting with my parents, I decided that a normal college life made more sense at the time. If a vocation still presented itself after graduation, it could be considered then – a great decision that left me free to consider other options and enjoy college life at Notre Dame. For me that included touring the world with the Notre Dame Glee Club, playing extra-curricular sports, dating, and going to hall dances.

By the summer before my senior year, however, the vocation question continued popping up, as it had whenever I took time to slow down, especially on retreats my sophomore and junior years. So I decided not to begin the med-school application process unless it felt 100 percent like the right thing to do and added a minor in business with the idea of maybe working for a couple of years after college while sorting things out.

Early in my senior year it was clear that while I loved Notre Dame and met some great guys in Holy Cross, the order wasn't a good fit; nor was being a diocesan priest, because I favored the model of teacher and priest. Clearly, in my mind, that eliminated becoming a priest.

Then a friend and confidant who had graduated from a Jesuit high school suggested I check out the Jesuits before giving up on a possible vocation.

Provisionally, the next day a Holy Cross seminarian said he was going to visit the Jesuit novitiate in St. Paul over fall break to make certain he was in the right place with Holy Cross. We made the trip together.

I spoke with Fr. Bob Hotz, SJ, the vocation director at the time, visited with a few novices, and accepted an invitation to stay for dinner. At Bob's suggestion I found a spiritual director at Notre Dame and by spring was in discernment with Fr. Michael Buckley, SJ, a professor there. I interviewed for jobs in the business world, got three offers, and accepted one in Minneapolis, which prompted a major question. Should I work for a couple of years, or apply to the Jesuits and enter after college?

After what others said was a "classical discernment process," it seemed clear that even were I to work for a couple of years, the



JOHN THIEDE, SJ WITH STUDENTS IN QUITO, ECUADOR FROM FE Y ALEGRIA, AN EDUCATION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT MOVEMENT DESIGNED TO EMPOWER THE MARGINALIZED. JOHN SPENT HIS LAST SUMMER OF REGENCY IN ECUADOR GIVING TALKS AT GRADE SCHOOLS AND HIGH SCHOOLS.

vocation question would still remain. I needed to take the leap and enter the novitiate. Having kept this decision-making process largely private, sharing it only with my parents and a few close friends, my joining the Jesuits in fall 1992 surprised a lot of people. Personally, however, it was the best decision I could have made.

While novitiate life presented some trying times and difficult "experiments," my transition to religious life was mostly smooth. We had a talented entering class. I had solid experiences in making the Spiritual Exercises, going on pilgrimage, doing ministry at a nursing home, helping out in campus ministry at a local high school, and spending the long experiment at Red Cloud Indian School on the Pine Ridge Reservation. At the end of the novitiate, there was no question that my life's desire was to be a priest in the Society of Jesus.

Predictably, during this time of crisis here in Boston, many people have questioned why I remain a Jesuit and still want to be a priest. I hearken back to when I just couldn't shake God's call. And now the call continues, forged by some incredible formation experiences.

After a year of Humanities Studies at Creighton University in Omaha, my provincial missioned me to Chile to study philosophy, learn a foreign language, and feel the influence of another province of the Society of Jesus. My weekends were blessed in the presence of parishioners of a poor urban church in Santiago. I worked with the youth groups at the Capilla Jesus Vida Nueva, sang with a small group at Sunday liturgy, and continued to feel the call to be a Jesuit. A part of my heart remains there.

see **THIEDE** on back page →

Four Jesuits to be ordained

John Thiede, SJ, whose vocation story is featured in this issue of *Callings*, is one of four Jesuit scholastics from the Wisconsin Province who will be ordained in St. Paul, Minnesota on June 6th. The other ordinands are Jim McDermott, SJ, Chris Manahan, SJ, and Greg Lynch, SJ.

FOR
DETAILS ON THE
ORDINATION
CELEBRATION,
SEE PAGE 4.

Everyone is invited to join in this joyful occasion and attend the Ordination Mass and reception that follows.

After ordination, Fr. Thiede, who taught as a Jesuit scholastic at Marquette High in Milwaukee, will head for Omaha, Nebraska, where he will teach theology at

Creighton University and work in pastoral ministry at St. John's Church on the university campus.

The other three men have also received their first priestly assignments. Fr. McDermott, who taught at Red Cloud High School in South Dakota, will work in pastoral ministry at Gesu Parish in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Fr. Manahan, who also taught at Red Cloud, will work in pastoral ministry at St. Francis Mission, St. Francis, South Dakota, primarily among the Lakota people on the Rosebud Reservation. Fr. Lynch will teach history at Creighton Prep in Omaha where he taught as a Jesuit scholastic.



JIM MCDERMOTT, SJ



CHRIS MANAHAN, SJ



GREG LYNCH, SJ

Vocations and personal relationships share a common ground

Fr. Warren Szama, SJ

DIRECTOR OF VOCATIONS – WISCONSIN PROVINCE



The more I think about it, the more striking similarities I see between a vocation and a personal relationship, albeit with some obvious differences. I've reached this view based on many discussions with people about their vocational discernment processes in which I often find myself comparing a vocation to a relationship. In fact, I think in many ways a vocation is a relationship – with God and a specific community rather than an individual. The community could be a religious congregation or, in the case of a diocesan priest, a diocese. In fact, viewing a vocation as a relationship can be helpful in examining one's vocational discernment process.

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Entering into a relationship involves an initial trial and error process as we get to know someone and spend an increasing amount of time together. Take a college freshman entering a new campus community for example. There are a lot of strange faces. Some people appear more interesting and attractive than others. As the freshman gets to know some of these people, they are drawn to spend time with some more than others. Over more time, some will become acquaintances. Others will become causal friends. And there will be some with whom stronger bonds are formed.

Similarly with a religious or priestly vocation, a person looks at the different communities, including the diocese, and feels more attracted to some than others. To decide

which community is right for them requires a deeper familiarity with each other, which requires time and energy. In essence, a relationship develops between the community and the person, and the person feels drawn to one specific community more than others.

Eventually, if there's a good fit between the person and the community, the person commits to the community and the community to the person – first on a non-binding basis – and eventually in a formal way.

In a religious or priestly vocation, the relationship is not only with the community but also very centrally with God. A religious vocation is, at root, a way to get closer to God and a way to live out one's relationship with God.

I often hear people in discernment talk about their relationship with God in a way that describes God as pursuing them or seeking them out, similar to how someone in love pursues and seeks out their beloved. And, sometimes the person in discernment avoids and even runs from God's pursuit (just as someone can be fearful of entering into a deep relationship and making a commitment with another human being).

I often hear discerners speak of how they felt God calling them from childhood forward and how hard they have tried to dismiss that call – “No, not me, Lord!” They then tell how sometimes, after many years, they finally surrender their anxieties and fears in the face of God's continuous beckoning. In this process of surrender, they paradoxically finally find joy, peace, and contentment.

FIDELITY AND CONTACT IMPORTANT

As in a relationship, fidelity is necessary. In a relationship one must be faithful to the unfolding process of the relationship. So too in a vocational discernment process, one must be faithful to the process and, after entering the community, faithful to the values, ways of proceeding, promises, and

vows of the community. Relationships simply don't work without fidelity. Neither do religious or priestly vocations.

Also, as in a relationship, there can be real passion in responding to God's call in a religious or priestly vocation. Our hearts can “burn within us,” as did the hearts of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. There can be a leap of the heart. For example, I can truly say that I deeply love God and I also love the community of my Jesuit brothers. I love being a member of the Jesuit Community, and most of my best friends are also my brother Jesuits. I am truly passionate about my ministry as a Jesuit.

Of course, just as relationships differ, so do the feelings involved in various people's vocational discernment processes. Some relationships involve strong feelings and likewise some people feel strongly about their experience of being called by God. On the other hand, the feelings in other relationships are more subtle, and similarly some people's attraction to a religious community or diocesan seminary is more like a quiet, still breeze than a raging tempest. Or, to use another familiar metaphor, sometimes a relationship or religious calling are like still waters that run deep.

Lastly, just as long distance relationships are very challenging and often do not work out over time, I have found that it is difficult for people to discern a possible vocation with a community without regular contact and, ideally, being in the same area.

HOW IT WORKS

How might looking at a vocation as a relationship be a helpful way to approach the vocational discernment process?

First, it is important for the discernor to spend time with a community about which they are discerning. You can't discern a religious or priestly vocation entirely in your head or even your heart. It just won't work.

see **SAZAMA** on back page →

During Regency at Marquette High in Milwaukee, I taught freshmen and junior theology classes, Biblical Literature and Church History, coached hockey, helped form a choir, and assisted with the weekly all-school liturgies. Working with students and a dedicated faculty was a privileged experience with many “teachable moments” both inside and outside of the classroom. Being invited into people’s lives in profound yet tangible ways confirmed my calling.

Three years here at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, MA, are rounding out my 10 years of formation. I love studying theology and hope to teach it someday. I have also enjoyed the pastoral experiences at St. Mary of the Angels

Parish, Boston College, and Our Lady of Grace Parish where I currently serve as a deacon.

Preparing homilies, talking with people about the Church in Boston, and baptizing babies are among the things that excite me about the years ahead. For example, on a day this past fall after a series of baptisms many of the families wanted to include me in their pictures, even though I had just met some of them. One mother simply handed me her baby for a photo in front of the baptismal font. As I looked down at the infant, she gazed back and smiled.

This simple act of holding a newly baptized child further confirmed for me my calling to priestly ministry and the rich, fulfilling life of being a part of the Society of Jesus. **G**

You have to share experiences with the community or diocese you’re considering and have regular contact with its members. It would be something like if, after one date with a person, a friend asked you if this is the person you want to marry. At best you would probably have to say something like, “I don’t know. We just met. We have to get to know each other a lot better before I know.”

The parallel is true for a religious vocation. You have to get to know the community before you can know whether it might be right for you to join it. I’ve observed that with discerners, it’s not so much who says they’re interested, but who shows up. In other words, people who consistently show up to our various discernment events are the people who end up entering our community. Also, as in a relationship, you might get cold feet before making the final commitment. I have witnessed a fair number of marriages and find that it’s not uncommon for a person to experience doubts and fears as the marriage date draws near. People in discernment sometimes have similar doubts and fears as they go through the application process.

This brings us back to fidelity and

commitment, qualities that are essential to both a serious relationship and an authentic vocational discernment process. A person in a genuine discernment process must be faithful to prayer, spiritual direction, regular Mass attendance, and regular contact with the community (often through various discernment events that the community offers). Discerners who are not faithful to these things inevitably drift away. They didn’t really give the discernment process a chance. On the other hand, those who do eventually enter a community or diocese are the ones who stay faithful and committed to the discernment process, even when they experience doubts and fears.

Fidelity, openness, generosity, courage, risk, passion – all are essential to forming healthy commitments; all are stepping stones on the journey of a life lived well. Experienced fully they can bring us to true, trusting, and lasting relationships and commitments whether with individuals or communities, regardless of the personal paths and directions each of us choose.

Enjoy the adventure! **G**

UP COMING EVENTS

APRIL 11-13

COME AND SEE WEEKEND at the Jesuit house of studies at Loyola U. in Chicago. This weekend is for all inquirers who are 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 6

JESUIT ORDINATIONS at 7:30 p.m. at St. Luke’s Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. There will be a simple meal beforehand and a reception after. The ordinands will be: Greg Lynch, SJ (who taught at Creighton Prep in Omaha), Chris Manahan, SJ and Jim McDermott, SJ (who both taught at Red Cloud Indian School in South Dakota), and John Thiede, 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 20 - AUG 3

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 21-23

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.

AUGUST 16

FIRST VOW 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. It will be held at 10 a.m. at St. Luke’s Church on Lexington and Summit Avenue. You are welcome to attend a cook-out in honor of the vow men on Friday evening, August 15th, 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 overnight lodging on Friday or Saturday nights.

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, S.J.

Ongoing Vocation Discernment Groups

We have two discernment groups for men considering the Jesuits.

Milwaukee group: contact Fr. Tim Lannon, SJ at Marquette University (414-288-5075, timothy.lannon@marquette.edu).

Omaha group: contact Fr. Dick Hauser, SJ at Creighton University (402-280-3010, hausersj@creighton.edu).



A NEWSLETTER ABOUT
VOCATIONS

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