



CALLINGS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT VOCATIONS

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Outdistancing doubts along the path to God

By Ben Bocher, SJ

How do you know being a Jesuit is the choice? How can you be sure?

Since entering the Society of Jesus two-plus years ago as a 21-year-old novice, I've heard these types of questions more times than I can count; and that's saying a lot given all the math I've studied en route to a civil engineering degree.

My answers have evolved and are varied. At times I've felt fear, shock, and doubt about whether I am worthy of belonging to the Society. I've often experienced an ambiguous sense that although I don't know for sure, that's OK. Other times I've searched the confines of my heart and asked: Do I believe that it is not only my will, but also God's will for me to be a Jesuit forever? Certainly! I've answered, only to feel the same searching uncertainty a brief time later.

In the criminal justice system, a jury must deal with the issue of reasonable doubt before it can convict or acquit. In the marketplace, the makers of Ivory soap insist their product be 99.9 percent pure! Pure what, I'm not sure, but whatever it is, it's a high standard.

When I was discerning a vocation to the priesthood, and later the Jesuits specifically, that's what I was looking for – at least 99.9 percent certainty. I never got it.

It is not too surprising then, given my ambivalence and questions about adequacy, that there was a period when I began referring to my possible vocation as my curse. On top of it all, I had a number of well-intended friends who reminded me of the priesthood scandal that regularly was making headlines.

Just in case I didn't have my necessary dosage of confusion and frustration, God placed a wonderful woman in my life. As that relationship matured, so did my thoughts about the priesthood.

Doubts galore and wonderful option – confusion sprinkled on top of uncertainty as if one were powdered sugar and the other a delicious brownie. So, as any confused chocolate lover would do, I paid a visit to Fr. Bob Leiweke, SJ, my spiritual director in



PHOTO BY LLOYD DEGRANE

AN AVID RUNNER, BEN BOCHER, SJ DISCOVERED THAT THE MORE HE RAN, THE CLEARER HE HEARD GOD'S CALL.

college, to discuss my curse. If I were Luke Skywalker, he would be my Jesuit Yoda – diminutive, wise, experienced, kind, caring, and exact.

He simply asked me, "Have you told God that's how you feel?" Of course not! What would I say? "Hey God, I think You're an idiot for giving me these thoughts. Everything points in the opposite direction! Oh yeah, I love You!" How crazy?! I couldn't tell God that something must be wrong up there – all these conflicting messages were falling down on me and I had nowhere to turn. Nonetheless, Fr. Leiweke continued to urge me to be completely open and honest with God – to trust!

Each day for cross country and track practice at Marquette University we would drive to city parks. While I was running →

INSIDE
THIS ISSUE

PAGE 2 **BE A JESUIT FOR 6 WEEKS**

PAGE 3 **ANSWERING THE CALL – CHRISTIANITY'S POWERFUL VISION OF REALITY**

PAGE 4 **UPCOMING EVENTS – SCHEDULE OF VOCATION-RELATED EVENTS**

on a wooded park trail one day, my mind, as it so often does when I run in the woods, began to wander. How could I, someone who has always pictured himself having a wife and children, someone who wants to be an engineer, someone who feels just as close to God on this trail as he does in church, possibly be a priest? How could that be a healthy life for me?

There was, however, something new this time. I began telling God my feelings. And on this day, as I dealt with my doubt, I began thinking about my hometown priest, Fr. Tom Marr, who appeared always joyful, always caring, always loving. What was it about him, about Fr. Leiweke?

My friends' questions, the personal doubt, all yielded to a new line of questioning and reflection about my sense of self. What gave me life? Why?

What did I enjoy? Why? After a while, for the first time, I began to view my thoughts about priesthood as not just my curse, but as a potential blessing.

Doubts about my worthiness to be a priest were now the seeds of awareness of not only my sinfulness, but my talents and gifts as well. Even my thoughts about a family, which in the past had merely been fuel for more doubt, were cast in a different light. Ultimately, all doubt led to new questions – the answers to which helped me grow closer to God. Doubt and uncertainty had become gifts that were revealing dreams and personal gifts I had never explored before!

I've been a Jesuit for a little over two years, far from the forever I vowed in August. Many days I see God continuing to reveal new dreams. I still have doubts, I just look at them and deal with them in a different way, helped by accepting God's love of me and my growing love of God.

As I sit up until 2 a.m. studying engineering math or trying to figure out whether a building I've designed would actually collapse or remain standing, I tell God, as Fr. Leiweke suggested, how I feel: I don't know how or if I am really doing Your will. Truth be told, sometimes I just want to give up. Maybe it's because school is just too challenging or I just don't seem to be relating

with a member of my community. Isn't there some other path without all these troubles? Couldn't my dreams of helping people as an engineer, of teaching people about You come true on another life path, one every bit as holy and rewarding as my current one in the Society of Jesus? So why am I here?

I can honestly write here that I struggle every day to live in a manner worthy of my calling as a Jesuit, and that's part of the reason why I know I am in the right place.

My life isn't perfect because no life is. Each of us, regardless of the path we choose, must face our share of doubt, temptations, and struggles. A Jesuit once told me that our life is a gift and a journey, and the journey is our personal quest. A vivid image of this for me is a picture I drew that hangs on my wall: Rocks and roots extend along rows of short, steep and gradual hills; red flowers

grow aside winding paths; a yellow mist seems to permeate the air around the purplish-brown dirt; three weaving trails, each with a unique beginning and separate routes converge on a sky blue circular center – the still point.

If we all are indeed on a quest, with the roots, rocks, and hills we call doubt, despair, and violence ever-present along the way, there is that joyful yellow glow guiding us. The King, clothed in royal purple, supports our feet, keeping us grounded. We often spot colorful moments of beauty. Hopefully now and again we stop and pick one of those flowers as we journey to our Lord, who lies at the center of all.

I struggle because I am fulfilling dreams, and that comes not without a cost. I also experience great joy in journeying toward those dreams. I struggle because discerning God's will isn't always easy, but it is extremely life-giving. I both struggle and rejoice – that's life no matter what comprises our quest.

But when it comes time to decide which path to take on my journey, my answer is now clear: the one that best leads me to love; the one that best leads me to God. And I know in my heart that I simply love being a Jesuit, and I absolutely love the way I am able to love as a Jesuit. **E**

“Doubt and uncertainty had become gifts that were revealing dreams and personal gifts I had never explored before!”

– Ben Bocher, SJ

'6-weeks' offers extended view of Jesuit life

The Wisconsin Province of the Society of Jesus will join forces with the Chicago Province again this summer to offer vocation candidates a close look at what Jesuit life is all about with the annual Six Weeks a Jesuit Program.

The program, which runs from June 17-July 31 this year in the Chicago and Milwaukee areas, is designed to give candidates a clearer understanding of Jesuit life by living in a Jesuit Community and working in a Jesuit-related ministry during the summer.

“This is the third year we have collaborated with Chicago to make this a valuable experience for participants,” says Fr. Warren Sazama, SJ, Wisconsin Province vocations director. “It has proved extremely helpful and meaningful for men who are seriously considering life as a Jesuit priest or Brother.”

Fr. David Godleski, Chicago Province vocations director, notes that the program has a long history of success. “It originated in the New York Province over a decade ago. We have adapted it in a way that works extremely well as joint venture between our two provinces.”

About half the candidates stay at the

Marquette University Jesuit Community in Milwaukee. They work at Marquette High's inner-city college prep program in the morning and a Jesuit Hispanic youth program in the afternoon. The other half stay at Loyola University Jesuit Community in Chicago and work at similar programs there.

Over the course of the six weeks the program also features three weekend retreats at the beginning, middle, and end and Saturday morning gatherings on the weekends when a retreat is not scheduled. These Saturday mornings include candidates from both areas. They attend Mass and a presentation on some aspect of Jesuit life. Afterwards they share lunch at either the Marquette Jesuit Community in Milwaukee or the Loyola Jesuit Community in Chicago.

“Candidates tell us over and over again how helpful this experience is in their vocational discernment process,” Fr. Sazama says. **E**

See *Calendar of Events* on page 4 for contact information.



CANDIDATES GATHER WITH SOME OF THE CHILDREN THEY WORKED WITH LAST SUMMER DURING THE 'SIX WEEKS A JESUIT PROGRAM.'

Christianity's Powerful Vision of Reality

Fr. Warren Sazama, SJ

DIRECTOR OF VOCATIONS – WISCONSIN PROVINCE



Like Timothy Johnson's *The Creed, What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (Doubleday, 2003) reminds us that as Christians we are called to live in a way that is radically different from the way suggested by the materialistic values and Darwinian views that dominate today's western culture. Johnson also highlighted for me how religious life is a powerful expression of our Christian values and beliefs, one that dramatically reflects the generous, loving nature of our triune God while exemplifying how we all, as disciples of Christ, are called to live our lives.

A scripture scholar, Emory University professor, and adult catechist, Johnson reflects on the meaning of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which we recite at Mass every Sunday. He discusses how it not only gives a clear, concise, and compelling summary of the Christian view of the world, but also serves as a guide for Christian belief and living.

What is the Christian view of the world? In the Creed we say that we believe that there is one, all-powerful God who is our Father and the Creator of all things visible and invisible. We believe that, besides creating us, God also amazingly became fully one of us by taking on our complete human nature in Jesus Christ, being born of Mary for us and our salvation. We believe that Jesus Christ was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered, died, rose from the dead, ascended to the right hand of the Father, and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. We believe that God's Kingdom will have no end. We believe in a triune God, whose very being is communal and consists in the sharing of

all things, and in the Holy Spirit, who spoke through the prophets and continues to speak through the church – the community of Christian disciples empowered by the Holy Spirit. We believe in the forgiveness of sins and look forward to the resurrection and eternal life.

Our Christian beliefs are a powerful vision of reality! Think about it. We humans are created in God's image. In taking on our human flesh and becoming one of us, God could not express more dramatically the incalculable, intrinsic value and dignity of every human being. We are of divine origin and our destiny is to be united with God and share in God's life, both now and for all eternity. Suffering has meaning. Our sins are forgiven as we are called to forgive others. Through the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ, God has been and continues to be actively involved in human history, transforming us into God's new creation.

Our faith calls us to become who we truly are – children of a loving, all-powerful God who calls us to be a community of faith, hope, love and service. Through us, the Holy Spirit transforms the world into a place where God can be ever more clearly recognized as the ruler of all, a place where love, justice, and the sharing of the world's goods give glory to God. We are free, responsible, and called to live the divine life within us in lives of community, love, sharing, and self-giving. What an ennobling, inspiring, hopeful view of reality!

Compare this to the dominant view that we are accidental products of a mechanistic, deterministic evolution with no purpose, intrinsic value, or meaning. In this view, the earth is a speck of dust flying aimlessly through the void and the only operative norms are economic laws of the survival of the fittest in which our only value is our economic productivity. When that is spent or not evident, we are worthless and expendable.

This view of the world – and it is the assumed if not explicit pervasive

view – strikes me as degrading. If this view of the world is true, then a self-absorbed life centered on pleasure, accumulating possessions, and treating all creatures – including other people and the earth itself – as things to be used for our own selfish purposes makes complete sense.

On the other hand, our Christian account of the world enlarges our vision of reality and enables us to live more humanely within the world. Johnson notes that our Christian view of the world is confirmed intellectually by its internal coherence and beauty, experientially by its capacity to transform and heal the human heart, and experimentally by the existence of actual communities throughout history to this very day living out the Christian view of the world.

While there are many such Christian communities that beautifully embody the Christian view of the world (including authentically Christian families and dynamic parishes), it strikes me that religious communities – such as the Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits – do so in a unique way.

This is so because religious life goes beyond taking seriously that we are created to be in union with God and share in and bear witness to God's life. Religious life is countercultural in that it literally makes no sense outside of the Christian view of reality, thereby shining a brighter light on it.

The vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience that religious profess, along with their ministry, prayer, worship, and community life, are a prophetic witness to the ultimate importance and centrality of God and "things invisible" – the spiritual dimension of existence. If the Christian view of reality is false, then those who live religious life are indeed fools. Yet, because religious life when lived authentically is so beautiful and life-giving (consider St. Francis of Assisi or Mother Teresa of Calcutta), it makes clear how God's power does indeed work through

see **SAZAMA** on back page →

those who live religious life with integrity and thereby bear witness to the truth of the Christian view of reality upon which it is based.

In attempting to imitate Christ's way of life, religious life points to the communal, radical sharing, self-giving nature of the triune God in whose image we are created. God's very nature is love. Christ came to serve rather than to be served. Christ's view of power was not to cling to his Godliness but to empty himself to become one of us and suffer and die for our salvation – a total, radical gift of himself to us and for us in love.

Religious life, however imperfectly, tries to reflect that radical self-giving of God in Christ. Together with the discipleship of all believers, religious dedicate their lives to the transformation of themselves, others, and the world to become ever more the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. **G**

'Come and See' a go for spring

The spring Come and See weekend at our Jesuit house of studies at Loyola University in Chicago (April 15-17) promises to again be a great opportunity for inquirers considering a vocation as a Jesuit priest or Brother.

There are approximately 30 Jesuits in training who are studying philosophy and theology at Loyola U. The weekend, sponsored by the Chicago and Wisconsin provinces, offers participants a chance to hear vocation stories from these young Jesuits, engage in a discussion of the vows, and ask a wide range of questions pertaining to their vocations and the discernment process.

Celebrating Mass, sharing meals, time to socialize, and morning and evening prayer services are also important parts of the weekend. The weekend has become a great introductory opportunity for participants to get a clearer sense of Jesuit training.

"If you are considering a Jesuit vocation and have not yet attended one of our discernment events, this weekend is a good next step," says Fr. Warren Sazama, SJ Wisconsin Province vocations director. "Participants consistently report that the Come and See Weekend is very helpful to them in their vocation discernment process." **G**

UP COMING EVENTS

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 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.

For more details, see story on page 2

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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