



## **INTRODUCING OUR SEMINARIANS**

When Bishop Braxton is on his Parish Pastoral Visitations, he always urges the Christian faithful to pray and work for vocations to the priesthood, so urgently needed in our Diocese. Often people ask, “How many seminarians do you have?” The Bishop sometimes responds, “Not as many as we need!”

Currently, there are five men studying to be priests in the Diocese of Belleville. In these reflections they are introducing themselves to the Catholic people of southern Illinois in their own words. Bishop Braxton urges you to pray for them, write them letters of support and encouragement, and introduce yourselves to them if you see them around the Diocese. The Bishop also reminds all parishes to pray the Diocesan Prayer for Vocations to the Priesthood at all the masses at least one weekend a month and to pray the special petition for vocations at the masses every weekend.



Deacon Weber



Mr. Guilford



Mr. Judkins



Mr. Reed



Mr. Holloway

### **Deacon Ronald Joseph Weber**

Permanent Deacon, Archdiocese of Chicago  
Fourth Theology  
Sacred Heart School of Theology  
Blessed Sacrament Parish, Belleville

I was ordained as a Permanent Deacon for the Archdiocese and now I am studying in the hope of being ordained a priest to serve the Church in the Diocese of Belleville. I believe that my experiences as a husband, father, widower, and Permanent Deacon will be an asset to the Diocese. My vocation to the priesthood was mainly influenced by two priests – my uncle, Father Mary Ignatius (Weber), O.C.S.O, a member of the Trappist Order whose motherhouse, Our Lady of New Melleray, is near Dubuque, Iowa; and Father James Hoogterp, my pastor at Our Lady of

Fatima in Shelby, Michigan. Both of these priests exemplified for me what it means to dedicate your life to God. I was also deeply affected by The Seven Storey Mountain, the autobiography of Father Louis, O.C.S.O., the world-famous Trappist Monk and mystic of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, known to the world as Thomas Merton.

I am now in my fourth year of Theology at Sacred Heart School of Theology in Hales Corners, Wisconsin, a seminary for men who feel called to the priesthood as a second vocation, later in life. The faculty and administration at Sacred Heart are dedicated to providing an environment for academic, human, pastoral, and spiritual formation that nurtures our vocation and strengthens our commitment to become priests. I will conclude my seminary studies and training when I graduate in May of 2012. I have gradually learned more and more about the Diocese, especially during my three summers working at Blessed Sacrament Parish. I have found the people and the priests to be very welcoming and encouraging. Bishop Braxton, Father McEvelly, and Father Deeke have generously assisted me at every step of the way. They have also challenged me in areas in which I needed to grow. I am very grateful to them for giving an older man the opportunity to pursue his dream of following Christ as one of his priests.

**Mr. Max Christian Guilford**

St. Teresa Parish, Belleville

Junior, Cardinal Glennon College Seminary

People often ask me, “Why do you want to be a Catholic Priest?” My answer is simple. I want to be a priest first and foremost because I believe Jesus Christ is calling me to the sacred priesthood. I have always thought about becoming a priest, but I used to set it to the side. I wanted a job that would make lots of money so I could be happy. Well, as I can clearly see now, God may have had other plans for me. It wasn’t until I accepted the call in my heart that my life turned from searching for happiness and peace to being happy and at peace. I was no longer thirsting for wealth, a big house, and a nice car. Instead, I was trying to find something much deeper. What I found was a desire to help people. Not just physically or mentally, but spiritually. I have a desire to help people find the path to salvation. I want to help people living in this world to prepare for an infinitely greater world of Eternal Life.

If I am called to the priesthood by my Bishop, an important part of my life will be the celebration of the sacraments. I hope to baptize, absolve sins, anoint the sick, witness Christian marriages, and, most importantly, celebrate the Eucharist, to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. I also want to spread the Gospel. I would like to share the Good News of Jesus with people who do not know Him. Apostolic service is also important for me. I want to be a part of the Church’s ministry of feeding the poor, comforting the afflicted, and clothing the naked. Overall I want to be a pillar of support for the People of God and help them to know and love Christ, the bridge from this life to the life of the world to come.

My father has been the most influential person in my discernment since the day I was born. He named me Max Christian because he wanted my name to mean *great follower of Christ*. Ever since I was a young boy, my father has always urged me to consider the priesthood. I never took it seriously until two years ago when I started to give the idea of being a priest some

thought. Now that I am going into my second year of seminary, I am glad he kept encouraging me. Because of my father's love for his faith I am now studying to be a Catholic priest.

My mother has also been influential in my discernment to enter the seminary. Unlike my father, who encouraged me to think about the priesthood in a more direct way, my mother instilled in me the virtues and morals that are needed to be a good Christian and a priest. She taught me how to truly be a man of God. Because of her I understand the importance of prayer and the virtue of faith. Without her example, I would probably not be in the seminary today.

Another question people frequently ask me is, "What do you do in the seminary?" Seminary life is similar to a regular college schedule, but we have the benefit of formation. Each day I pray psalms with the whole Church in the Divine Office. I have the privilege of participating in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and I study philosophy, Latin, and Scripture. Most people seem to think that the seminary is like a monastery but it is more like a parish. I go out and get a pizza with my friends, go see movies, play sports, and do all sorts of activities that I would normally do in secular college. I enjoy every minute of it and I encourage anyone who thinks they might have a vocation to come and check it out.

**Mr. Brett Anthony Judkins**

St. Stephen Parish

Caseyville

Second Year, Pre-Theology

Kenrick School of Theology

My vocation to the priesthood began around age four or five. I would play priest at home and "say" my own masses. I was completely drawn to the priesthood and, though I was very young, I loved the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and knew that it was something profoundly special. In those early years I was inspired by the example of a priest who had a significant impact on me. My parents and my grandmother did so much to encourage my interest in the priesthood and I will forever be grateful to them for their prayers and sacrifices. As I grew older and I learned more about my Catholic faith, my love for the Sacred Liturgy also deepened and I thought that this might be God's way of telling me that I might still have a vocation, despite my interests in other things, like teaching or practicing law. As I finished college, I knew where God wanted me to be and I accepted His invitation to enter the seminary with a great sense of peace and joy.

As I begin my second year in the seminary, I feel more affirmed in my call to the priesthood each and every day. I have especially enjoyed my philosophical studies and have developed a great respect for Thomistic philosophy. Through the daily prayer of the seminary, namely the celebration of Holy Mass and praying the Divine Office, I know that Our Blessed Lord seeks to draw me closer to Himself and establish the intimate friendship with Him that is the very heart of the holy priesthood. At the same time, I am filled with tremendous gratitude for the prayers and support that I have received from many of the faithful of our diocese. I look forward to the day, God willing, when I may humbly serve the Diocese of Belleville as a priest. *Laudetur Iesus Christus!* Praise be Jesus Christ!

**Mr. Nicholas Gordon Reed**

St. Teresa Parish

Belleville

Sophomore, Cardinal Glennon College Seminary

My name is Nick Reed and I am a seminarian for the Diocese of Belleville. I grew up in St. Teresa Parish in Belleville and I also attended the grade school there. It is there, at St. Teresa, that I first had an attraction to the priesthood. I had several people who influenced me to consider trying the seminary, but it was Fr. Trevor Murry who really influenced me the most. He is the one who really “planted the seed” of the priesthood in me and showed me that any man who loved his faith could possibly be a priest. However, after he was assigned as pastor of another parish, I did not give much more thought to the priesthood and I put the idea in the back of my mind.

As the years passed, I had a few more people who felt I would make a good priest, especially Fr. Darin, Fr. Deeke, and Fr. Junker at St. Teresa. It, however, fell on deaf ears until I met two very influential people. Those people were Bishop Stanley R. Schlarman, Bishop Emeritus of Dodge City and Bishop Braxton’s Vicar for Priests and my youth minister, Mike Towle. It was through these men that I really began to see what everyone, including my parents, was talking about and why they encouraged me to go to seminary. The rest, they say, is history.

I have been at the seminary now for about five and a half weeks and I am enjoying it very much. It has been an adjustment for me, but I believe I am doing very well. I know that many people are praying for me and I believe that is really helping me to succeed. The prayer and work that I am asked to do can be overwhelming at times, but it is worth it to find out if the priesthood is my true calling.

**Mr. Haydn Francis Holloway**

Corpus Christi Parish, Shiloh

Freshman, Cardinal Glennon College Seminary

Greetings and blessings from Cardinal Glennon College Seminary! My name is Haydn Holloway and I am a first year collegian studying for the Diocesan Priesthood for the Diocese of Belleville. I wish to share with you some of my experiences here to give anyone who is considering entering the seminary an idea of what this place is like.

Now that I have been here a little more than a month I can safely say that this was the right decision for me, at this point in my life. I truly feel at peace here, maybe for the first time in my life. The atmosphere of prayer is wonderful and this is a place that is strong in God. Not to say that it is ever boring! The Seminary is full of wonderful men and after a long week of work and study the men of the Seminary know how to have a great deal of fun. I will not lie to you and say that it is all fun and games as both the schoolwork and formation can be challenging, but they are rewarding as well.

I am writing this out especially for those young men who are considering entering the Seminary but are unsure. Please do not be afraid! If you feel the call of God in your heart and think it may be to the Priesthood, talk to your family, your parish priest, or one of the vocation

directors. The Seminary itself has many programs that help young men like you and I discern the call to come here and I beg you to take advantage of them! This is a wonderful place and, God willing, I will be ordained a priest. But, even if it turns out that is not my vocation, I am confident that my experience here will make me a better, more honestly Catholic man. God be with you.

Many young men and their families have questions about entering the seminary. Here are the answers to some of the most frequently asked questions.

**1. When is the right time to think about becoming a priest?** *The idea of becoming a priest can enter your heart at any age:* in elementary school, high school, college, or many years after college. You do not need to live in southern Illinois to become a priest in the Belleville Diocese. You simply need the desire to serve God in a community that has a great need for priests. That desire might give you the missionary spirit needed to tend a portion of the Lord's flock that needs good shepherds.

**2. What should you do?** *The first thing you should do is pray.* If you have ever thought about being a priest, why not take some time to really think about what your life might be like serving Christ and the members of His Body, the Church, as a priest? Spend a few moments each day praying and asking God to guide you in your discernment about a possible vocation to the priesthood. One of the best places to pray about becoming a priest is at Mass. There you are actually in the presence of a priest celebrating the Eucharist, which is at the heart of the Priesthood. You can also pray for guidance in a quiet chapel in the presence of Christ in the tabernacle, or on a long walk, or in your room at night before you go to bed. Prayerful openness to the Holy Spirit will help you to understand better the reasons why you think you might want to be a priest.

**3. What should you do next?** *The next thing you should do is talk to a priest.* This could be the priest serving in your parish or some other good and faithful priest you know well. Share with him the reasons why you have been thinking about becoming a priest. Ask him questions. He will happily advise you and tell you some of the things you should do to discern your vocation. He might even take you to visit a seminary.

If he thinks there is a good chance that you might be called to serve as a priest, he will put you in touch with the Vocation Office of the Diocese of Belleville, or with a Vocation Director. The Vocation Director will be able to give you more information concerning the process of applying to the Diocese and studying for the priesthood in a Catholic seminary. If you do not know a priest to talk to, you can contact the Vocations Office or a Vocation Director personally at 618-235-9601, extension 1482.

**4. Then what?** *Get a spiritual director.* In the meantime, it would be good to ask a priest to serve as your spiritual director. He will help you grow in the life of prayer, which is essential in developing a deep, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the High Priest. A retreat or a day of recollection might also help you in your discernment. Begin to read the story of Jesus in the New Testament, especially the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the letters of St. Paul. Keep in mind the call to serve Christ as a priest is not always loud and clear. It is not necessarily like

Moses and the “burning bush” experience in which God called him to lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. Most of the time it is a gradual realization that a life of prayer, service, and helping Catholic people to learn, love, and live their faith is the life that appeals to you. Of course, if you pursue this vocation, you will find out that the life of a priest is full of interesting and rewarding experiences.

**5. Who should you tell?** *Be sure to let your parents know that you are thinking about becoming a priest. Ask your parents, family members, and close friends to pray for you. Do not be discouraged if some people are not enthusiastic about your thoughts of becoming a priest.*

**6. How do you apply?** *At a certain point, you should go through the actual application process for the seminary through the Diocese of Belleville. The Vocation Directors and the Vocation Office will help you with this. This process requires gathering some basic information about your life, getting copies of documents such as your Baptismal certificate, and responding to questions about why you think you wish to be a priest. Remember that entering the seminary is not the same as a commitment to the priesthood. Many men enter the seminary and eventually conclude that they are not called to the priesthood. So, even if you are not completely sure about your vocation (very few people actually are), you are still free to apply to the seminary.*

**7. How long does it take to become a priest?** *It usually takes about eight years after high school, four years of college and four years studying theology. Today, many men enter the seminary at the college level. A priest needs to have a good, solid Catholic education, with a special emphasis on philosophy and theology. However, you are not required to be a great scholar in order to be a good priest. After four years at a college seminary, there are four more years of study at a theological seminary. Because of the time spent in study, prayer, spiritual direction, and formation, most men who enter the seminary after high school are ordained a priest around the age of twenty-six. During this time it is very important that you give very serious consideration to what it means to live a life of obedience to the Church, a life of total service, freely forgoing the joy and companionship of a wife and children of your own.*

Of course, some men go to a regular college and enter the seminary after they graduate. Others come to the seminary later in life after they have worked as a teacher, an engineer, a social worker, or some other career. During the years in the seminary you should continue to pray and discern God's call in your life, faithfully following the guidance of the seminary rector and your vocation director. Ultimately, the Bishop of the Diocese will call you to the priesthood. It is not possible to become a Catholic priest unless you are called by the Bishop. If you ever see the Bishop (He visits parishes often.), introduce yourself to him.

**8. What if you are not a Catholic?** *Do not be surprised if you are not a member of the Catholic Church and yet you think you could possibly be called to the priesthood. You are not the first person to realize that you want to be a priest even though you must become a member of the Catholic Church first! The Vocation Directors would be happy to assist you in learning how to join the Church.*

**9. Is this a bad time to enter the seminary?** *No! This is a very good time to enter the seminary. Many people are searching. They are looking for meaning in their lives, searching for God,*

searching for Christ, and searching for the Church. There has never been a time when there was a greater need for priests. In recent years, the education and formation program at American seminaries has been significantly improved. The sad stories of priests sexually abusing minors may make you or your family hesitant about considering the priesthood. This hesitancy is very understandable. Some men who are already in the seminary share this hesitancy. They are receiving the assistance they need to address their concerns. It is a terrible thing if even one priest abuses a minor. It is a source of shame and embarrassment for the Church. In spite of the wide media coverage, these grave misdeeds have been the actions of only a small number of the hundreds of thousands of priests serving faithfully all over the world. Their sinful actions do not represent the Church as a whole. They certainly do not represent the majority of priests. Most of these offenses took place in the past. Today Bishops, seminaries, Vocations Directors and others are working very diligently to select only men of mental, emotional, spiritual, and sexual maturity, who are fully committed to celibacy, to serve the Church as priests. If you become a priest, we want you to be proud and happy that you have responded to this great call to follow Christ's apostles as "fishers of men." (More information is available on the Diocesan website: *diobelle.org*.)