

Promoting vocations and missionary discipleship

By Fr. Eric Augenstein

In addressing vocation directors from around the United States at a recent conference, Cardinal Edwin O'Brien, the Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher, shared what he believes to be the gift that Pope Francis is offering to vocations: the gift of missionary discipleship.



Fr. Eric Augenstein

A missionary goes to a place where he or she is not wanted, and speaks a message people don't want to hear. A disciple grows daily in relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer and service. These two realities come together in the vision that Pope Francis has set before the Church and the

world: a vision of missionary discipleship.

While all Christians share in this missionary discipleship, priests, deacons and consecrated religious are called in a particular way to go to the outskirts of our communities carrying the message of Jesus Christ. We are called to live the alternative to the self-centeredness of our times and to be generous in loving all those we encounter. We do so grounded in prayer, rooted in community, and

nourished by the sacraments.

This vision of missionary discipleship guides not only the lives of clergy and consecrated religious, but also the work we do in promoting these vocations in the Church. Cardinal O'Brien challenged vocation directors to broaden their engagement with culture in order to present a vision of ordained ministry and consecrated life beyond those who would naturally be drawn to these vocations.

Here in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, we are trying to take seriously both the call to missionary discipleship that comes from Pope Francis, and Cardinal O'Brien's challenge to broaden our engagement with culture and the young Church.

While we continue to offer regular discernment programs such as retreats, dinners with Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin and peer discernment groups, we also spend considerable time forming relationships and being a visible presence wherever the young Church gathers—at Theology on Tap programs sponsored by the archdiocesan Young Adult and College Campus Ministry, on college campuses and in our high schools, at the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C., and through various opportunities for evangelization and service.

Vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life grow and blossom in countless ways and at varied places—and we hope to be a presence and provide

resources to families, parishes, schools and individuals at any point along the journey.

But we also need your help. Those of us who minister full time in vocations cannot do this task alone. We cannot reach all the places where the seeds of a religious vocation are being planted. We must work together as an entire Church to be missionary disciples who walk with one another along the journey of faith in discovering God's call for each of us.

Parents, catechists, teachers, family members, parish leaders, youth ministers, priests, deacons and consecrated religious—both individually and as a community—can reach out to all corners of our culture to reflect the light of Christ and help to illumine the path to holiness. This shared missionary discipleship can hold up the variety of Christian vocations—marriage, priesthood, diaconate and consecrated religious life—as authentic paths to holiness.

Will you join me in being a missionary disciple? Will you join me in raising up the next generation of priests, deacons and consecrated religious for the Church and the world?

(Father Eric Augenstein is vocations director of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. For more information about the ministry of the archdiocesan vocations office, log on to www.HearGodsCall.com.) †

Heavenly desserts and unexpected ingredients add a sweet taste to Franciscan sister's faith journey

By John Shaughnessy

The natural temptation is to describe her chocolate-laced desserts as heavenly.

And that was the reaction Franciscan Sister Madeleine Schumacker received after she recently made a flourless chocolate cake with Chantilly cream and a mousse-textured dessert called chocolate espresso panna cotta for a group of lay leaders from the Franciscan Alliance health care system.



Sr. Madeleine Schumacker O.S.F.

"They enjoyed it so much that the leader of the group said that all the cardiologists in the system would be thanking me," says a laughing Sister Madeleine, a Batesville native who is a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration.

While the rave reviews were exactly what Sister Madeleine was hoping for her desserts, her recipes for becoming a religious sister and a chef-in-the-making have deliciously unexpected ingredients to them.

In fact, she may have set a record for the least amount of time it took her to go from being someone who had fallen away from her faith to being someone who seriously began

to consider a religious vocation.

It all took place on a weekend 10 years ago when she was 22 and a recent college graduate. Knowing she had a degree in broadcasting and a plan to work for a television station, the youth minister at St. Louis Parish in Batesville asked her if she would videotape a weekend youth retreat. Their friendship, not her faith, made her say yes.

"Prior to that, I had fallen away from the Church for about five years," she recalls. "I wasn't claiming and living my faith."

That reality began to change on the Friday night of the retreat. As she stood in "the back corner of the gym with an old VHS recorder," she videotaped the talk that Father Jonathan Meyer gave on Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

"I had a St. Paul moment," Sister Madeleine says. "Suddenly, it clicked that Christ was in the Eucharist, and he loved me. It hit me like a ton of bricks. I knew in

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Franciscan Sister Madeleine Schumacker prepares a dessert on Sept. 23 in the kitchen of the Mishawaka, Ind., motherhouse of her religious community, the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration. Previously a member of St. Louis Parish in Batesville, Sister Madeleine professed perpetual vows earlier this year.

(Submitted photo)



New Albany priest seeks to remind people of God's presence

By Sean Gallagher

Priests might learn about the meaning of their vocation through prayer or from the wise words of a spiritual director or seminary professor.

Father Daniel Atkins gained insight into his calling from a football player at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis.

Father Atkins, 66, served as chaplain at the school from 1989-94. One night while standing along the sidelines at a football game, he was confused by a stoppage in play and an ensuing conference between coaches and game officials.

A player tried to explain the situation to him. "I must have had a stupid look on my face," said Father Atkins. "He said, 'You don't understand, do you Father?' I said, 'No, I don't.' He said, 'It's OK. The last priest didn't either.'"

"When we were coming off the field, he came up to me and said, 'Father, you don't have to understand all the rules of football. That's why we have coaches and referees. You're just out there to remind us that God is with us.' I've never forgotten that."

Wherever Father Atkins has ministered—at Roncalli, in parishes and at Indiana University in Bloomington—he has sought to carry out that mission.

"If I go to a hospital and the doctor comes in and starts talking about medical terminology, I really don't get rattled," he said. "I am not there to be a translator for a doctor. I'm just there to help the people remember that God is with them."

Currently, Father Atkins serves as the pastor of Holy Family Parish in New Albany, not far from Floyds Knobs where he grew up.

During his childhood and teenage years, Father Atkins and his family were members of St. Mary-of-the-Knobs Parish in Floyd County. His sister, Jackie Vetter of Palmetto, Fla., said he liked serving at Mass there.

"He always wanted to be in church," said Vetter. "There were times when we had to walk down St. Mary's Road because he was determined that we were going to go to church."

Father Atkins' faith blossomed in a different way as a young adult when, during a difficult time in the life of his family, he brought Vetter to Kansas where he was a

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Father Daniel Atkins, pastor of Holy Family Parish in New Albany, poses on Sept. 18 with students at the parish's school during a walkathon it sponsored. (Submitted photo)

Seminarian sees childhood desires fulfilled in priestly formation

By Sean Gallagher

God willing, seminarian James Brockmeier will be ordained a transitional deacon for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis next spring.

He would then be expected to be ordained a priest a year later.

It's a vocation that he started thinking about when Brockmeier, 24, was in grade school. But the steps he has taken along the way were always measured, never going beyond where he felt God was calling him to be at that moment.

Those steps began in the Catholic home in which Brockmeier grew up in Covington, Ky.

"We always went to church on Sunday. That was a constant," he said. "I remember my parents gave me a lot of little pieces of religious art. I would hang them up in my room. There were little statues of Mary or of the Sacred Heart of Jesus around our house. It was a normal thing."

Brockmeier responded positively to this Catholic environment, intrigued at an early age by the faith.

"There was an importance and homeyness to going to church and being a member of the Church that always struck me," he said. "Everywhere I would go, there was the Church and I could appreciate that. I was receiving a lot from the Church when I was growing up. I wanted to be a part of handing it on."

The possibility that handing on the faith could involve the priesthood occurred to Brockmeier at a young age.

"I can remember being in the fourth- or fifth-grade religion classroom," he said. "I can see it [in my mind] today, the pages in the religion book where it talked about the priesthood and religious life. I just thought that it was so interesting that there were people who do this. ... There were people who dedicated their whole

lives to the faith. That really struck me."

Nonetheless, as Brockmeier continued to embrace his faith as a teenager and became involved in a helpful youth group, he didn't discern a particular call to the priesthood but more to ministry in the Church in general, possibly to teaching religion in a Catholic high school.

That's why he was attracted to Marian University in Indianapolis, whose San Damiano Scholars Program for Church Leadership trains lay young adults for ministry in the Church.

He was accepted into the program and enrolled at Marian in 2007.

"The fact that this campus had young people who wanted to study and work for the Church, as well as young people who were thinking about the priesthood really attracted me," Brockmeier said. "There seemed to be so much going on."

During his four years at Marian, he became involved in catechetical ministry at St. Mary and St. Mark the Evangelist parishes, both in Indianapolis.

Between these experiences and getting to know several seminarians, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis began to feel like home for him.

"There was a lot going on in the archdiocese," Brockmeier said. "I kind of sensed a lot of excitement all over the place about where the Church was going and what the Church was doing."

At the same time, he showed leadership among his fellow students at Marian, according to Mark Erdosy, director of Marian's San Damiano Scholars program.

"By the time that he was a senior, he had a great grasp of philosophy and theology," Erdosy said. "He was the one person students could always count on to be able to help them understand it, no matter what class they were taking, philosophy or



Seminarian James Brockmeier prepares the altar in the St. Thomas Aquinas Chapel at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad during a March 27 Mass. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

theology. James had a knack for taking complicated concepts and simplifying them so people could understand them."

Throughout much of his time at Marian, the priesthood remained in the back of Brockmeier's mind. That began to change during the fall semester of his senior year when he began to consider more seriously the possibility of becoming a seminarian.

Over Christmas break, he shared his thoughts with then-archdiocesan seminarian Benjamin Syberg, a friend of Brockmeier from Syberg's days at Marian and Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary in Indianapolis.

"In a moment of sheer joy, I hugged him," said Father Syberg, who was ordained a priest last spring. "We both were very excited. We had hoped he would. But to finally hear that he was going through with it was a big moment for us."

That affirmation helped Brockmeier along his path of discernment.

"Seeing him and his enthusiasm got me thinking about it more," he said.

He later sought out Erdosy's advice.

"Instead of talking to me about it, he picked up the phone and called the vocations office," Brockmeier said. "To this day, I thank him for that. [He said], 'You should absolutely have this conversation with the vocations director.' He really nudged me along the road."

He has now been an archdiocesan seminarian for more than three years and, in that time, has received priestly formation at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad, managed the seminary's pub and pizzeria, been involved in parish ministry and been trained as a hospital chaplain.

"I continue to live the daily life of the seminary, the life of prayer, of classes, the jobs I have here, the pastoral ministry," Brockmeier said. "And from day to day, in that prayer the Lord is calling me to this. This is where the Lord is calling me today."

Brockmeier has also found that God has deepened the thoughts and desires that first captured his imagination as a

grade school student.

"It's transformed over time from an attraction to it being a real part of my identity," he said. "I've been living this now for three and a half years, daily doing the work and the prayer, receiving the grace, thanks be to God. It's gone from something I'm hoping for to something that attracts me to something that the Lord is forming me into."

Brockmeier knows that the priestly identity that is being formed in him will be centered on bringing other people closer to Christ and the Church, something he has wanted to do since he was a child.

"I've learned here that the priestly call is that you daily bring people back to prayer, the prayer of the Mass," said Brockmeier. "I'm attracted to teaching and preaching and pastoral care. But these things are vehicles to draw people more closely to the Mass and the sacraments where God is waiting to give them grace."

(For more information about a vocation to the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, log on to www.HearGodsCall.com.) †

'Consistent path of discernment' leads Sister of Providence to vocation

By Jason Moon

Special to The Criterion

Since she was a young child, Providence Sister Regina Gallo had the sense there was more to life than just getting up, breathing in and moving forward.

As she got older, Sister Regina continued to have these feelings, even though she had started down a "normal" path. She had a well-paying job she enjoyed, had just been promoted and was dating.

But eight years after graduating from high school, she began to feel something she had not felt since she was young: A call to religious life.

"When the thought of entering religious life entered my mind, I did all I could to dismiss that and push it under the carpet," said Sister Regina, a member of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, whose motherhouse is in St. Mary-of-the-Woods.

"I was happily dating at the time, and my dream was always to get married and have children. I dismissed the thought for about six months, and after six continuous months of constant nagging, I finally decided to talk with someone about it.

"My feelings were part confusion: Why me? Why am I getting these feelings? This is not what I had planned for my life," she continued. "The thought of closing the door on all that I dreamt was not only frightening,

but painful.

"Things seemed to be going well ... and then one morning I woke up to the smell of my neighbor cutting his grass—and boom—the literal and clearest words came into my head: 'Regina, why don't you think of becoming a sister?' My response, literally, was, 'Why don't you just go away?' Well, I guess we know who won on that end."

Sister Regina admitted the feelings of a possible religious life scared her.

"What will my family think? Will I be supported and accepted? Will I be good enough? What would I or do I have to offer?" she said.

When Sister Regina was a young child, she felt a spiritual sense clinging to every fiber of her being, but she wasn't sure how to react to it.

"I always knew and was consciously aware at such a young age that there was something so much bigger than me," Sister Regina said.

Despite some reservations, Sister Regina met with Providence Sister Kay Manley, who helped her during four years of discernment.

Still, Sister Regina questioned the call and through the assistance of the Sisters of Providence's vocation director, entered into therapy to make sure she wasn't doing anything for the "wrong" reasons.

This counseling, along with the guidance given by Sister Kay and participation in vocations retreats, gave Sister Regina confidence that her motivations were good and helped her move down "a consistent path of discernment."

Sister Regina said she did look at other communities, but her relationship with the Sisters of Providence

ran deep. She attended Guérin College Preparatory High School in River Grove, Ill., where several Sisters of Providence taught.

"I looked into several different communities, or as I referred to it: I 'order shopped,'" Sister Regina said. "I looked at about eight different communities.

"I did not find within those other communities the connection that I felt with the Sisters of Providence," Sister Regina said. "They were all wonderful communities, but there was a lack of connection or something that pulled me away from them and pushed me toward the Sisters of Providence."

After finally confirming her belief to join the Sisters of Providence on Sept. 13, 2001, Sister Regina said she felt "relief."

"It was a long, tough four years of discerning," she said. "I also honestly felt a peace that I never felt before. I can't quite describe it, but it was really a cleansing feeling, as if something washed right over me. I do believe I had the nerves and 'butterflies' in the stomach, but that would be normal for any major life choice."

Sister Regina professed perpetual vows on June 26, 2011.

"I feel we all continue to discern," she said. "That never ends once we enter community. We, and I, are continuously listening to and sifting through how and where the spirit is calling us in life and our ministry."

(Jason Moon is the media relations manager for the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in St. Mary-of-the-Woods. For more information on the Sisters of Providence, log on to www.spsmw.org.) †



Sr. Regina Gallo, S.P.

Beech Grove Benedictine sisters help each other to seek God

By Katie Chrisman

Special to *The Criterion*

Religious life in a monastery is a potpourri of personalities. The young and elderly and those in between live, pray and work together.

They commit themselves to serving God and helping one another on the path of holiness. Although monastic life has changed over the centuries, one thing remains the same: God continues to call people to this way of life.

Two members of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove answered this call to monastic life decades apart. Benedictine Sister Mary Nicolette Etienne, 52, and Benedictine Sister Heather Jean Foltz, 31, have different backgrounds. Despite their differences, God called each one just the same.

Sister Nicolette, the fourth of six children raised in a “close-knit” family in Tell City, was always close to the Church. She considered the priests and religious sisters at her home parish role models and her heroes.

“I loved them. They helped form who I am today,” she said.

God and the St. Paul Parish in Tell City were always at the heart of her family’s life. Three of her brothers ended up being ordained priests, including Bishop Paul D. Etienne of Cheyenne, Wyo.

She admits she first had thoughts of religious life in the fifth grade, and later had a profound spiritual moment on her senior retreat in 1980, but it wasn’t until she completed her master’s degree in her early 20s that she began to seriously discern her vocation.

She was frequently around Benedictine sisters. Her aunt, Benedictine Sister Jeanne Voges, is a member of Our Lady of Grace.

Sister Nicolette knew she wanted to be a teacher—married or religious. “I really didn’t care which one; whatever God wanted.”

While teaching at St. Anthony School in Clarksville, she found herself around Benedictine sisters who invited her to share meals with them.

She entered Our Lady of Grace in July 1986 as a postulant, and 28 years later she remains. She professed temporary vows in 1988 and final vows in 1991.

“I’ve gone through phases. It took me awhile to adjust.”

Sister Nicolette recalls a profound period of time in her life, many years after entering the community. “For a long time, I felt like I was on the periphery, looking in at this community.”

It wasn’t until 1997 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer that her life in the monastery began to change. She had a double mastectomy and four rounds of chemotherapy.

“My sisters treated me like a queen. They were so supportive and loving,” she explained. “It was during those six months that I went from being on the periphery looking at my sisters to being in the heart of the community. It took 11 years.”

Now, 17 years later, she says that she is now at the most peaceful point of her monastic life.

Sister Heather answered her call more recently. The middle child of three girls, she grew up in Dyer, Ind.,

in the Gary Diocese as a United Methodist in a heavily Catholic area. She occasionally attended Mass with friends.

“I really felt drawn to the liturgy of the Catholic Church even from a young age,” she said. “It was so different than what I was growing up with.”

She attended the University of Indianapolis, and in her final two years lived in an intentional ecumenical Christian community. There, she lived, prayed, did service projects and spent social time with her roommates. “I really felt drawn to that way of life, but I wasn’t really sure how that would all play out.”

Sister Heather first encountered the Sisters of St. Benedict while in college. Benedictine Sister Jennifer Mechtild Horner was one of the chaplains on the campus. She invited her to prayer at Our Lady of Grace, and later to go with the sisters on a Lenten service project to a women’s prison.

In her first time in prayer with the sisters, she was drawn to the chanting of the psalms, and was struck by the sisters gathered in communal prayer.

“They brought their intentions to God from their specific ministries. It was just so beautiful to see that; that their life was centered in common prayer and the ministry kind of flowed out of that.”

Sister Heather entered the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults after graduating from college. Interestingly, it was Sister Nicolette who was the community’s vocation director at the time and, as Sister Heather describes, was the one who “journeyed with me when I started seriously discerning.”

In her decision to enter Our Lady of Grace, the important things were a life of prayer and living in community. Specifically, she said she felt called to live intergenerationally.

“There’s so much we can learn from people who have lived during a different time period, who have experienced different things in life,” she said.

Sister Heather entered Our Lady of Grace Monastery as a postulant in 2009 and professed temporary vows in 2012. She admits religious life can have surprises. Now serving as the director of social services at St. Paul Hermitage in Beech Grove, she said, “I had never even dreamed of working with the elderly, but it’s through those first few years of living here that other people saw that gift within me.”

Her ministry is strengthened by the sisters in the community. “Community life and prayer is a huge support,” she said. “I think I have an added benefit because there are other sisters [who] work in ministry with me, and so we support one another in our ministry.”

Sister Nicolette echoes those sentiments. An educator for 30 years, Sister Nicolette now teaches religion at Most Holy Name of Jesus School in Beech Grove.

“I feel like my ministry as a teacher is so much better because of the wisdom and influence of my sisters here,” she said.

Both women relish their time among their fellow sisters.

“We’re all here for the exact same reason, and that’s to seek God and to obtain the ultimate goal of heaven,” Sister Nicolette said. “We all approach it in our own



Benedictine sisters Mary Nicolette Etienne, left, and Heather Jean Foltz, right, pray with fellow members of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove in the community’s chapel. Both sisters seek God in the life that they share with other Benedictine sisters living in community. (Photo by Katie Chrisman)

personalities.”

Of the younger sisters in the community, she notes how committed they are to their vocation. “They’re serious about it, they’re joyful about it. I never hear them complain,” she said.

Likewise, Sister Heather points out how much she has to learn from those in the community who have decades more experience in the monastery, whom she calls “wisdom figures.”

“There’s always someone who’s been where you’ve been,” she said.

Whether the women answered the call half a century ago or more or in the 21st century, both sisters agree that the call to religious life is the same from their oldest sister—at age 102—to their newest sister. “God calls us in the way that we’re going to hear and listen to it,” Sister Heather said.

They say it may look different in today’s modern world, but “God has not stopped calling people,” Sister Nicolette said.

“I think the call is the same—that call to seek God with everything you are,” said Sister Heather.

(Katie Chrisman is a freelance writer for *The Criterion*. She lives in Greenwood. For more information about Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, log on to www.benedictine.com.) †

Franciscan sister travels to China and back to arrive at her calling

By Jennifer Lindberg

Special to *The Criterion*

Her desire to be a religious sister was almost an unrealized hope for Oldenburg Franciscan Sister Susan Pleiss.

She had left the Catholic faith of her family, moved to China, and then when she was getting closer to retirement age, she decided it was time to enter religious life.

The door was slammed firmly in her face. The reason: she was past 50 years of

age, and she had cancer.

There wasn’t a religious order that truly thought she had a vocation—especially, since most religious orders won’t take women past the age of 40.

At one point, Sister Susan might have agreed with them.

Growing up in Dayton, Ohio, in a strong Catholic family, Sister Susan left her Catholic faith for 16 years, after attending college at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind., where she graduated with a degree in civil engineering.

“Ohio is a more Catholic state, and this was the first time I was faced with questions about my faith which I couldn’t answer,” Sister Susan said. “It led me away from my faith to evangelical work, and it led me to China.”

In China, she taught English with a group of Christian teachers. She ended up being a supervisor and facing a heavy workload that was leading to burnout. It was also in this communist and atheistic country that God started getting her attention in a different way.

“God used China,” Sister Susan said. “I was a cradle Catholic, and the Chinese are very family oriented. I started to ask myself why I was doing this to my family, and why can’t I return to the faith of my family?” she said.

“In China, I could hear God asking me why I was not Catholic,” Sister Susan said. “It was distressing to my family, and I decided I can’t do this to them.”

Once she returned to America, she fell in love with the Catholic Church. She said she was raised in an era of confusion about the Church.

“My faith formation was not complete,”

Sister Susan said. “My early years were the *Baltimore Catechism*, and then we went through the hippy Jesus and ‘Jesus Christ Superstar.’ It was confusing.”

There was one thing she was certain about.

“I was going to reclaim my call” to the religious life, said Sister Susan.

The call had been there all along, she said, “and I answered it in various ways.”

She had felt it when she was an engineer living in Seymour. She felt it in China. But at those times, she was an evangelical Christian, and religious life does not exist in that faith tradition.

After leaving China, she did not want a job with a lot of responsibility and was not looking to return to engineering.

“Someone asked me what I wanted to do and I said, ‘manual labor,’” Sister Susan said.

And that’s what she did, various jobs in horticulture or anything in the outdoors.

She ended up moving to Richmond, Va., because an evangelical friend lived there. Curiously, her

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‘God used China. I was a cradle Catholic, and the Chinese are very family oriented. I started to ask myself why I was doing this to my family, and why can’t I return to the faith of my family?’

—Franciscan Sister Susan Pleiss

Monastic life offers distinctive gifts to the Church and the world

By Brother William Sprauer, O.S.B.

Special to *The Criterion*

A charism is a spiritual gift given by God and, if properly recognized and cultivated, is shared for the benefit of others, giving life to the Church. The ancient tradition of monastic life, as one of many forms of consecrated life, offers the Church its own unique charism.



Br. William Sprauer, O.S.B.

Distinctive vows

Religious orders follow Christ in a particular way by binding themselves to the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Monastic vows, while they indeed contain these three, are expressed in a slightly different manner. St. Benedict, directs new monks to "... come before the whole community in the oratory and promise stability, fidelity to the monastic life, and obedience." We certainly share the vow of obedience, yet stability and fidelity are particular to the monastic life.

Stability of place calls the monk to stay in one place for life, the enclosure of the monastery, so that a stability of heart can take root in which the monk is able to seek Christ above all else. By committing oneself to a particular community, the monk allows that community to form him. Vowing stability, the monk does not to expect others to change, but allows others to change him to become more Christ-like.

Contained within the vow of fidelity to the monastic way of life are several other directives. Celibate chastity, poverty and *conversatio* (conversion) are all implicit in this vow of fidelity. The key word in the vow, interestingly enough, is not "fidelity," but "monastic." We bind ourselves to be faithful to this particular way of life, not any other way.

Monastic poverty takes the form of "holding all things in common." While we are not expected to exhibit radical poverty, like that of St. Francis of Assisi, we are called to live a simple, unmaterialistic life, recognizing that ultimately we personally do not own anything.

Monks strive to live a life of continuing conversion, or *conversatio morum* (conversion of manners) as it is called in the *Rule* of St. Benedict. We strive each day, through prayer, work, community (and ultimately, self-discovery), to let go of those things that inhibit us from loving, from willing the good of another. The relentlessness of daily monastic life slowly wears on us, until our hard edges are smoothed and we more closely resemble Christ.

Distinctive place

Traditionally, monasteries are often found in a "deserted place," away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Monks choose to leave "the world," putting themselves on the fringe of society, while still connected to the Church at large, in order to seek Christ above all else.

This "flight" from the world is not because monks are



With guests looking on, monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad process into their Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln. For centuries, the monastic life has offered its own unique gifts to the service of the Church and the world.

(Photo courtesy of Saint Meinrad Archabbey)

running from something. Rather, they "step aside" to gain better perspective. Living apart in a cloister allows the monk to view the world from a distance, offering a fresh perspective while living a simple, quiet life of prayer and work within a close-knit community.

Distinctive prayer

Each monastery's daily schedule brings the monks together several times a day to sing the praises of God through the Liturgy of the Hours, or "Work of God" as St. Benedict called it. Gregorian chant is the preferred monastic method of praying the psalms, and its use makes the liturgy reverent and dignified.

This constant returning to public prayer strengthens our relationship with Christ so that we become more attentive to his voice speaking to us in our daily lives.

Our private prayer comes in many different forms, be it *lectio divina* (contemplative praying of the Scriptures), the rosary, centering prayer or the Jesus Prayer. Although the form itself may differ, the goal is the same, to simply "rest in God." Whatever devotion or prayer practice used to achieve this state of quiet contemplation is certainly up to the individual monk.

And so, our prayer does not cease, but follows us into our various tasks around the monastery. Our prayer bleeds into other areas of our lives, and begins to manifest

itself in charitable works in the community and the Church at large.

While the *Rule* of St. Benedict doesn't specify any particular type of work, monks tend to take on apostolates that allow for these regular intervals of liturgical and private prayer, so that prayer becomes the primary and persistent focus of a monk's life.

Work is secondary to prayer, but is still a necessary part of the daily life of a monk. As St. Benedict says, "Idleness is the enemy of the soul."

Monastic life offers a unique witness to the Church and to the world. Monks strive to cultivate Gospel values by living the Kingdom of Heaven this side of death, in a quiet and simple life. We believe that by living in continuing conversion through our contemplative prayer and work, we can change the world around us and make it a more loving place.

This is our charism. This is our received gift from God and, we in turn, continue to cultivate it, offering ourselves in prayer and witness for the Church and for the world, so that nothing will be preferred to the love of Christ.

(Benedictine Brother William Sprauer is a monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad. For more information about Saint Meinrad Archabbey, log on to www.saintmeinrad.org.) †

OLDENBURG

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evangelical friend had a lot of Catholic friends that led Sister Susan to a vibrant Catholic parish.

Sister Susan tried to discern with Benedictine communities. They all turned her down because of her age and a cancer diagnosis.

She almost gave up, and "decided to work out my call as a lay person," she said, but then she got a huge surprise that literally came through a road sign announcing that the Sisters of St. Francis of Oldenburg, Ind., were nearby.

On her way to a Benedictine Monastery in Wisconsin, for a retreat, Sister Susan stopped in Batesville, Ind., for the night. She was still living in Richmond and traveling down the highway when she saw the sign about the Franciscan community close by.

She curiously asked the front desk clerk about the sisters, but was told nothing. The desk clerk was new, and was not Catholic. So Sister Susan looked them up on her computer once she got back to her room. She saw they had a "Come and See" weekend for women interested in religious life taking place on the dates she was to return from Wisconsin.

Sister Susan at first dismissed it, stating that she planned to continue onto another retreat in Chicago. It ended up being cancelled, and Sister Susan found herself going to Oldenburg for the discernment retreat.

"I asked to be a sister in discernment," Sister Susan said. "But I was initially rejected because of my

cancer diagnosis."

It was another "no," a common answer to her prayers.

When then-vocation director Franciscan Sister Joan Miller called to give the bad news, Sister Susan said, "I pushed back."

She later learned that Sister Joan asked the community's council to reconsider.

Sister Joan, now the parish life coordinator of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Shelby County, remembers the conversation with-then laywoman Pleiss well.

"What she said to me is that I didn't know what it was like to feel a call and have everyone deny it," Sister Joan said. "I thought about that."

"I will fight for something I think should be, and I really felt she had a vocation. The circumstances that she found us—it was God really sending her to us for a reason. I felt the council had made a mistake."

Sister Joan went to the community's leader and asked for the council to meet again, and they reconsidered.

"She is a gift to us," said Sister Joan.

Sister Susan found out she was accepted on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 2009. She is also cancer free, stating she has few problems with it anymore. Sister Joan believes she was healed.

Now, Sister Susan ministers in Campton, Ky., to the poor in the Appalachian Mountains. She mainly helps with sacramental assistance and the administrative end of a food pantry the sisters operate there.

She finds that her main ministry, though, is being a witness to love and helping bring about reconciliation.

She ministers in a place where the people still have a "firm sense of place," she said, and where roadside family cemeteries are cared for by succeeding generations.

Still, drug abuse and extreme poverty run rampant though the beauty of the Kentucky hills that sit near the Red River Gorge and Natural Bridge. It's a place where pioneer history had come alive as Daniel Boone made his way through, and now the national forest there boasts his name.

It is here that people keep up family feuds and have a lot of Catholic prejudice about Mary and the saints, Sister Susan said. When the Oldenburg Franciscans first came to eastern Kentucky almost 25 years ago, no one would even rent to them because they were Catholic nuns, she said.

Yet, like Sister Susan, who found reconciliation with the Catholic Church and now has her vocation as a religious sister realized, she feels her main job is to help the people of Kentucky with their own kind of reconciliation.

"There are deep roots here," she said. "There is a ministry for reconciliation here to help people let go and move on."

"I think that there is power in the religious life. People here watch how you live, and you have a powerful witness."

(Jennifer Lindberg is a freelance writer for *The Criterion*. She lives in Shelby County. For more information about the Sisters of St. Francis in Oldenburg, log on to www.oldenburgfranciscans.org.) †

New deacon candidates come from varied backgrounds

By Sean Gallagher

On Sept. 27, 21 men from across central and southern Indiana were accepted by Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin as candidates for the diaconate during a Mass in SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral.

They have completed one year of formation. Over the next three years, they will continue participating in the four dimensions of deacon formation: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral.

During that time, they will meet as a group for classes or on retreat one weekend a month for 11 months each year. Additionally, they will participate in various ministries of charity in parishes to which they will be assigned as well as other places outside of parishes (e.g., jails, hospitals, etc.).

Deacon Kerry Blandford, archdiocesan director of deacon formation, is leading the candidates in their formation. Father Jeffery Godecker serves as the director of spiritual formation for the deacon program.

This third class of deacon candidates ranges in age from 41 to 67. They have been married as few as 15 years and as many as 46.

Most continue to work at careers in the secular world, although two are retired. Their occupations vary from professional musician to firefighter to video editor.

Eight of the 11 archdiocesan deaneries are represented in the new class of deacon candidates. This includes the Tell City Deanery, which has not had a candidate in the previous two classes. †

| | | |
|--|---|--|
|  <p>David Bartolowits Age: 57 Wife: Leslie Children: 2 Parish: St. John the Evangelist, Indianapolis Occupation: Professional musician</p> |  <p>Joseph Beauchamp Age: 53 Wife: Shelly Children: 3 Parish: St. Ann, Indianapolis Occupation: Mechanical Engineer</p> |  <p>Robert Beyke Age: 51 Wife: Beth Children: 2 Parish: St. Monica, Indianapolis Occupation: Environmental Affairs Manager</p> |
|  <p>Gary Blackwell Age: 54 Wife: Lynn Children: 4 Parish: Most Holy Name of Jesus, Beech Grove Occupation: Firefighter</p> |  <p>John Cord Age: 58 Wife: Gwen Children: 3 Parish: St. Ambrose, Seymour Occupation: Business Owner</p> |  <p>Wilfredo de la Rosa Age: 63 Wife: Melinda Children: 2 Parish: Holy Angels, Indianapolis Occupation: Self-employed</p> |
|  <p>Paul Fisherkeller Age: 66 Wife: Sandra Children: 4 Parish: St. Mark the Evangelist, Indianapolis Occupation: Retired</p> |  <p>Charles Giesting Age: 58 Wife: Mary Children: 4 Parish: St. Susanna, Plainfield Occupation: Global Ethics and Compliance Consultant</p> |  <p>John Hosier Age: 58 Wife: Ada Children: 3 Parish: Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Indianapolis Occupation: Quality Engineer</p> |
|  <p>Martin Ignacio Age: 50 Wife: Avigay Children: 2 Parish: St. Mary, New Albany Occupation: Occupational Safety and Health Manager</p> |  <p>Oliver Jackson Age: 66 Wife: Cora Children: 3 Parish: St. Rita, Indianapolis Occupation: Retired</p> |  <p>John Jacobi Age: 44 Wife: Carmen Children: 3 Parish: St. Michael, Bradford Occupation: Director of Religious Education</p> |
|  <p>Anthony Lewis Age: 46 Wife: Angie Children: 3 Parish: St. Thomas the Apostle, Fortville Occupation: Operations Supervisor</p> |  <p>Jerome Matthews Age: 65 Wife: Cathy Children: 3 Parish: St. Barnabas, Indianapolis Occupation: Teacher Assistant</p> |  <p>John McShea Age: 60 Wife: Regina Children: 3 Parish: St. Monica, Indianapolis Occupation: Telecommunications</p> |
|  <p>Reynaldo Nava Age: 47 Wife: Lorena Children: 4 Parish: Our Lady of the Greenwood, Greenwood Occupation: Warehouse/Hispanic Ministry Coordinator</p> |  <p>Juan Carlos Ramirez Age: 48 Wife: Gabriela Children: 3 Parish: St. Bartholomew, Columbus Occupation: Quality Control</p> |  <p>Matthew "Tom" Scarlett Age: 44 Wife: Kathy Children: 3 Parish: St. Vincent de Paul, Bedford Occupation: Program Manager</p> |
|  <p>Nathan Schallert Age: 62 Wife: Kathy Children: 2 Parish: SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis Occupation: Retired</p> |  <p>Kenneth Smith Age: 62 Wife: Carol Children: 3 Parish: St. Paul, Tell City Occupation: Director of Solid Waste Management</p> |  <p>Steven Tsuleff Age: 52 Wife: Kara Children: 2 Parish: St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Bright Occupation: Video Editor</p> |

PRIEST

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college student and took care of her.

"He was putting himself through college," said Vetter. "He took very good care of me. ... He put me through school. He always gave me encouragement."

Father Atkins gave encouragement to a broader audience after graduating from college in 1973, and began teaching English and religion at his alma mater, Our Lady of Providence Jr./Sr. High School in Clarksville.

Mark Lilly, a member of Holy Family Parish, had Father Atkins as his teacher for sophomore religion at Providence in 1979.

"He really caused me at that age to examine my faith in the Catholic Church," Lilly said. "It wasn't a textbook type of religious education. It was more heartfelt. It was a deeper kind of faith formation ..."

Father Atkins described his approach to teaching the faith to his students.

"I really enjoyed helping young people to take hold of their faith," he said. "It wasn't a matter of telling them what to think, but to help them to know how to think."

While teaching at Providence, Father Atkins was encouraged by the school's chaplain, Father Wilfred "Sonny" Day, to take summer school classes in theology at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad. He spent several summers there.

During this time, Father Day and Father Kenny Sweeny, then-pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany, encouraged Father Atkins to consider a possible call to the priesthood. That encouragement continued at Saint Meinrad.

"I was coming back from a class one day and Archbishop Daniel [M. Buechlein], who was then Father Daniel, the rector, stopped me in the hallway and said, 'When are you going to come down here and study for the priesthood?' recalled Father Atkins.

He eventually contacted the



Father Daniel Atkins

- **Age:** 66
- **Parents:** Carl and Margaret Atkins
- **Education:** Our Lady of Providence Jr./Sr. High School in Clarksville; Pittsburg State University in Pittsburg, Kan.; Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad
- **Favorite Scripture passage:** Phil 2:5-11
- **Favorite saint:** St. John XXIII
- **Favorite prayer or devotion:** Liturgy of the Hours
- **Favorite spiritual author:** Franciscan Father Richard Rohr ("When I can understand him," says Father Atkins with a laugh.)
- **Hobbies:** Playing the guitar

Father Daniel Atkins holds the Blessed Sacrament while processing out of Holy Family Church in New Albany on Holy Thursday on March 28, 2013.

(Submitted photo)

archdiocesan vocations office and become a seminarian in the fall of 1984.

Father Atkins received his priestly formation at Saint Meinrad. In the fall of his final year at the seminary before he was ordained a priest in 1987, he began to feel a confirmation in prayer that the priesthood truly was the calling that God had given him.

"I did a lot of walking at night, praying, just asking God, 'Do you really want me to do this?'" Father Atkins said. "I knew that I was very happy and energized about my studies. I loved my classes, especially Scripture."

After ministering at Roncalli, Father Atkins served at St. Paul Catholic Center in Bloomington for 11 years starting in 1994.

Ministering in the Indiana University community, especially among the faculty members, was intimidating at first.

"I learned a lot about how a priest can't just pick and choose where he's going to go simply based on where

he feels comfortable," Father Atkins said. "Sometimes a priest's presence is needed where he would normally not choose to go."

According to Mark Erdosy, however, Father Atkins was "personable, open and genuine" among the students and faculty at IU.

"He always looked for the good in other people," said Erdosy, who assisted Father Atkins in his ministry at St. Paul. "Even when he really disagreed with people, he would still try to find that one thing that he could hang on to and bring it forth."

What attracted students to Father Atkins, Erdosy said, was his availability and his warm desire to bring them close to Christ.

"He invested himself 100 percent in his ministry there," Erdosy said. "He loved the students, loved their questions. He wanted to help them grow in their faith. When they encountered difficulties in their life, he wanted to be Christ's healing presence for [them]."

That availability has continued in his parish ministry at Holy Family, says Father Day, who preceded his friend as pastor of the New Albany Deanery faith community.

"As soon as you call, if he can, he's there for you," said Father Day, who now serves as pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish in Starlight. "He'll respond as best he can with the gifts he has."

The selflessness he shows in caring for his parishioners when they are in need is related to the Eucharist for Father Atkins.

"Every celebration of the Eucharist, for me, reminds me that I'm not a priest for myself," he said. "I'm a priest for God's people. My being a priest for them reminds me that I belong, that I have a family. It's an experience of love and unity."

(For more information about a vocation to the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, log on to www.HearGodsCall.com.) †

SISTER

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that moment that something had to change, and it had to be me.

"After the talk, there was time for private prayer. I turned off the camera, and I knelt there on the floor. I thought of the sinful woman who bathed Christ's feet with her tears and wiped his feet with her hair. From there, I knew I had to change. It was the beginning of the decision to move forward and live my faith."

A day later, she went to confession for the first time in eight years. Yet the most astonishing moment for her came on Sunday when Father Meyer asked if anyone on the retreat had thought of a priestly or religious vocation during the weekend.

"I'm in the back corner again, and my hand is in the air, and I don't know why," she recalls. "I wanted to get married and have a huge family with a lot of kids. I kept



Franciscan Sister Madeleine Schumacker, right, places her hands in the hands of Franciscan Sister Angela Mellady, provincial superior of the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration, on Aug. 11 as Sister Madeleine professed perpetual vows. The liturgy took place in the community's motherhouse chapel in Mishawaka, Ind. (Submitted photo)

telling myself, 'Put your hand down.' But I didn't.

"Two of the sisters from my order now were there. One of them was a new sister. She was 20. She was happy, joyful. Both of them were."

When she returned to the home of her parents that Sunday afternoon, she told them about her experience. Joseph and Kathryn Schumacker couldn't believe the transformation in the youngest of their five daughters. Neither could she.

But she didn't resist. She started going to daily Mass and receiving the sacrament of reconciliation on a regular basis. She also put herself in God's presence every day for 20 minutes, asking, "What do you want me to do?"

In 2005, she accepted that God was calling her to religious life. To test that call, she made a visit to the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration in Mishawaka, Ind.

"It was like I was being welcomed home," she says. "I got out of the car, and all the sisters, novices and postulants came out of the house. And they were happy to see me. It was beautiful."

She entered the order in 2006. She professed perpetual vows in August this year. Her mother still remembers how the St. Louis Parish community joined in the celebration at the family's home. Kathryn Schumacker also remembers that life-changing weekend when her youngest daughter videotaped the youth retreat.

"She didn't want to go," Kathryn says. "Now, she's absolutely happy, and that's all a mother can ask for. We gave her the background and the basics she needed to come back. That germ of faith was still there."

Another twist to that 2004 retreat is that the youth minister who asked her to videotape the event eventually discerned a call to the priesthood: Father Jerry Byrd. He's the administrator of St. Mary Parish in North Vernon and St. Ann and St. Joseph parishes, both in Jennings County. He and Sister Madeleine are still friends.

"She's a great person—fun, kind, generous. I could go on and on," he says. "Most of all, she's authentic. She wants to be the woman God has called her to be, and

she's found that calling."

It still makes him smile that the videotape session helped her find her true path in life.

"It's awesome that God brings us around to where we need to be when we need to be there."

After professing temporary vows, Sister Madeleine served her order in the Franciscan Alliance health care system for four years, including working as a patient representative at Franciscan St. Francis Health in Indianapolis and Mooresville.

In January of 2013, she was called back to the motherhouse in Mishawaka, to help in different areas there. When the community's cook developed health problems that year, she began to work in the kitchen to help take up the slack.

"For the first six months, the sisters would look to see how many bandages I had on my fingers and my arms," she says with a laugh. "I could make a soup, fix a piece of meat. I could do the basics. Slowly, I'm growing in my skills. I haven't burned or cut myself in quite a while."

She is now enrolled in an associate degree program in culinary arts at Indiana Vocational Technical College in South Bend.

"I'm getting to live my two passions," she says about her love of cooking and her life as a religious sister serving God. "I like making meatloaf. I make a really good mac and cheese, if I say so myself. I'm starting to learn some more advanced dishes, too—osso buco, and chicken legs stuffed with prosciutto and mushrooms."

Add the chocolate-laced desserts and there's a sweet and satisfying taste to a story and a life that Sister Madeleine once would have never imagined for herself.

"It's been incredible. The love and support of the sisters has been beyond what I imagined. It's a great adventure. It's also a great story. It's living out what we will all be in heaven. We'll be totally Christ's. We will be totally his."

(For more information about the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration in Mishawaka, Ind., log on to www.sstpa.org.) †

To respond in love to God, who loved us first.

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing”

-Revelation 5:12



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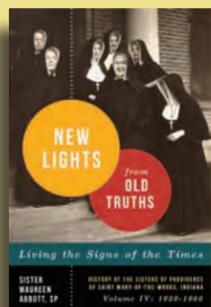
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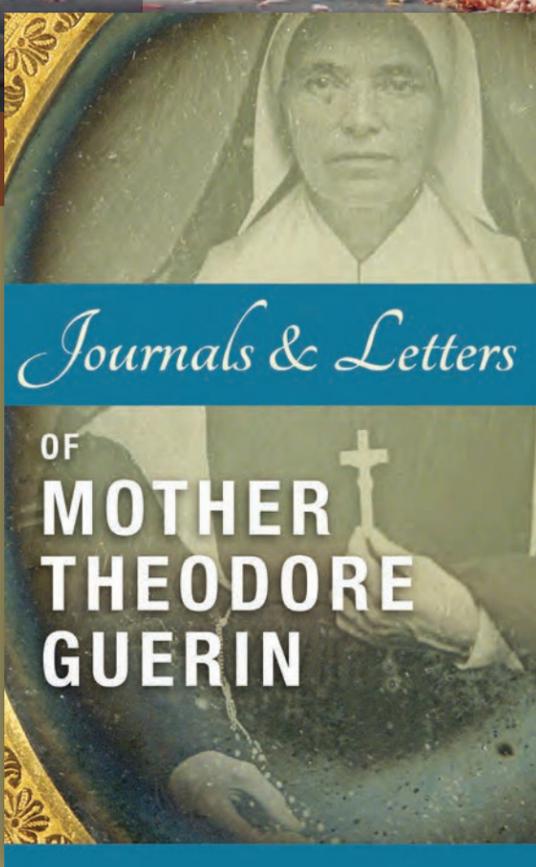
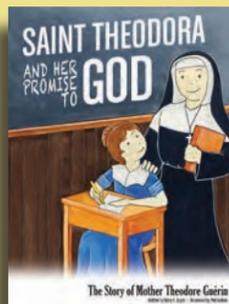


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