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.

A missionary goes to a place where the Lord is and speaks the 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 lives and to be a presence and provide a sweet taste to Franciscan sister’s faith journey.

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.

“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 my faith.”

That was the reaction Cardinal O’Brien had of a video he saw of the retreat. In the video, a young Franciscan sister has just joined the congregation and she is introduced by Father Daniel Atkins, her provincial and the pastor of Holy Family Parish in New Albany.

The priest said he was so impressed that he said he would like to see a video of the retreat. Sister Madeleine said she didn’t know how to do that, but that she would videotape it on a VHS tape.

“The priests were like, ‘Wow. This is amazing,’” said Father Atkins.

In fact, the retreat was titled “Holiness: A Dreamor a Reality?” and was the first retreat Sister Madeleine had ever given. The retreat was not only the beginning of her vocation, but it was also the beginning of her vocation as a religious sister.

While Sister Madeleine says she has set before the Church and the world a vision of missionary discipleship, it is one that 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—all individually and as a community—can reach out to all corners of our culture to reflect the light of Christ and help to illuminate 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.HeartGoGodsCall.org).

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. That 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.”

Whenever Father Atkins has ministered—at Roncalli, in parishes and at Indiana University 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 Floyd’s 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 always a lot of priests there.”

It was Brother Victor O’Brien, the Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher, who told Vetter that she had to see Father Atkins. Since then, he has been a part of her family, she said.

“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 priest. Vetter

(See PRIEST, page 14)

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(See PRIEST, page 14)
Consistent path of discernment’ leads Sister of Providence to vocation

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 become 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 what 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, especially in my room.”

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

“There was an importance and homesickness 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 going to seminary, going to church and going home. I just thought that it was so interesting that there were people who devoted 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’d discern a particular call to the priesthood but more to ministry in the Church in general, to teaching religion in a Catholic high school.

“That’s why I was attracted to Marian University in Indianapolis, where his 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 a catechetical ministry at St. Mary and St. Mark the Evangelist parishes 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 he was a senior, he had a great grasp of philosophy and theology,” Erdosy said. “He was a leader. People could always count on him to be able to help them understand the material, and he was very good at explaining them, philosophy or theology. James had a knack for taking complicated concepts and simplifying them so people could understand them.”

Throughout most 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 about the thinking about it more,” he said. “It’s transformed over time from 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 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 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.)

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

“I was truly aghast at 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 continuously 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? Is this not what I had planned for my life,” she continued. “The thought of closing the door on all that I dream of not being frightened, 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 through my 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 to help me?’”

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 do to have it?’ she said.

When Sister Regina was a young child, she felt a spiritual sense clanging 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 powerful that I could not move away from it,” said Sister Regina.

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 run deep. She attended Guerin 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 ordered 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.”

“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.”

(With the collaboration of Russell Boyce and Emily O’Connor)
Beech Grove Benedictine sisters help each other to seek God

By Katie Chrisman

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

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 thought about 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. She professed temporary vows in 1988 and final vows in 1991.

“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 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 play out.”

Sister Heather first encountered the Sisters of St. Benedict while in college. Benedictine Sister Jennifer Mocbld Horner was one of the chaplains on the campus.

She invited her to pray 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 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 Heather describes, was 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 living as the director of social services at St. Paul Heritage 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 Trinity 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 live out the ultimate goal of heaven,” Sister Nicolette said. “We all approach it in our own 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 learned from those in the community who have decades more experience in the monastery, whom she calls “wisdom figures.”

“They’re 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 today in 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.

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 her Catholic faith of her family, moved to China, and then when she was getting closer to retirement age, she ended 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 would 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.

“It’s 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 culture is very family oriented. I started to ask myself why China was doing this to my family, and why can’t I return to the faith of my family?”

—Franciscan Sister Susan Pleiss

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

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“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 h Hippie 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

See KLEINBAUER page 12
Monastic life offers distinctive gifts to the Church and the world

By Brother William Sprauer, O.S.B.

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.

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 individually 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 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 city life. 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 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, in turn, we 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.)

With guests looking out, 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)

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

Sister Susan decided to distance herself from the Benedictine community. 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 looking for a community 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 own after she made her way through, and now the national forest there boasts his name.

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 people of Kentucky with their own kind of reconciliation.

“Those 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. 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. †

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Bartolowits</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>St. John the Evangelist, Indianapolis</td>
<td>Professional musician</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary Blackwell</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Most Holy Name of Jesus, Beech Grove</td>
<td>Firefighter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul Fisherkeller</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>St. Mark the Evangelist, Indianapolis</td>
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<td>Martin Ignacio</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Avigay</td>
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<td>Anthony Lewis</td>
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<td>Angie</td>
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<td>Reynaldo Nava</td>
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<td>Nathan Schallert</td>
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<td>Kathy</td>
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<td>Shelly</td>
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<td>St. Ann, Indianapolis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary Blackwell</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Gwen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>St. Ambrose, Seymour</td>
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<td>St. Susanna, Plainfield</td>
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<td>Juan Carlos Ramirez</td>
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<td>Gabriela</td>
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<td>John Hosier</td>
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<td>Ada</td>
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<td>Carmen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>St. Michael, Bradford</td>
<td>Director of Religious Education</td>
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<tr>
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<td>60</td>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>St. Monica, Indianapolis</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew “Tom” Scarlett</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>St. Vincent de Paul, Bedford</td>
<td>Program Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steven Tsuleff</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Kara</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Bright</td>
<td>Video Editor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 Sweeney, 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 on lay and Archdiocesan [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 archdiocesan vocations office and become a seminarian in the fall of 1984.

Father Atkins received his priesthood formation at Saint Meinrad. In the fall of his final year at the seminary before he graduated 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, prayer, 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 University community, especially among the faculty members, was intimidating at first.

“I learned a lot about 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.

“Told me first to begin seeing why he was a priest,” said Erdosy. “My being a priest for them reminds me that I belong, that I have a family. It’s an experience of love and unity.”

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’s there, he’s there,” said Day, who now serves as pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish in Starlight. “He’ll respond as best he can to 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.HearGodCall.com)

Father Daniel Atkins

• Age: 66
• Parents: Carl and Margaret Atkins
• Education: Our Lady of Providence Jr./Sr. High School in Clarksville; Pittsburgh State University in Pittsburgh; University of St. 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: Francis of Assisi, 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)
“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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