The Jubilee of Mercy and discernment

Fr. Eric M. Augenstein

In a few weeks, the Church throughout the world will open the Jubilee Year of Mercy. In his letter announcing the jubilee year, Pope Francis spoke of what mercy is about. “With our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful gaze, we experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity. The mission Jesus received from the Father was that of revealing the mystery of divine love in its fullness” (“Misericordiae Vultus,” #8).

It seems to me that this understanding of mercy also speaks to what we understand vocation to be—our vocation is God’s call to each of us to become his disciple, to experience his love, and then, filled with that love, to be sent out on mission in the world.

Whether as priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, or through the sacrament of marriage, our vocation is to love as best we can and to show God’s love to others. But we can only do that after we have first fixed our eyes on Jesus “and his merciful gaze” toward us.

In fact, we might even be able to articulate a plan for discernment based on the Holy Father’s understanding of mercy. To discern is to listen for God’s voice: it begins by growing in relationship with God and experiencing his love. We might think of discernment encompassing three components:

• Prayer—to keep “our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful gaze.”
• Sacraments—which through them we “experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity,” especially in the Eucharist and the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.
• Works of mercy—sharing in Christ’s mission of “revealing the mystery of divine love in its fullness” to all we encounter, especially those most in need.

To discover one’s vocation is to grow in receiving and showing mercy, and to grow in receiving and showing mercy is a sure path to discovering one’s vocation.

Ultimately, our vocation cannot be about us—I am not a priest because I wanted to be a priest, but rather because God called me to follow him and he wants to share himself with others through me. And so any path of discernment should not really start with us, but with God. To put God first in prayer—to receive God’s grace and become holy, to see all we encounter, especially those most in need.

In this year’s Vocations Supplement, you will read stories of people who have spent time with God, their search for vocation, and how they have grown through this discernment process. You will read about the Church and how it has grown through the流域 of people who have a possible vocation.

The seminary in Wisconsin wanted him to come that same day, which was the first day of classes.

It was suggested she attend a discernment weekend at their vocation director of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. For more information about the ministry of the archdiocesan vocations office, log on to www.HeartOfGod-IN.com

Benedictine Sisters find joy in community, ministry and prayer

By Natalie Hoefer

There is no barrier on joy—it is ageless and timeless. Just ask the Sisters of St. Benedict at Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove. In a recent interview with three sisters of different age groups, a common message that resonated was joy in their vocation, no matter the ministry. Here are the stories of these three Benedictine sisters, and the joy they find serving God and others in religious life.

“I find even more joy in my work.”

Benedictine Sister Susan Reuber, 35, had been teaching English at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis for eight years when she acknowledged that “something” was missing in her life.

“My job was too much of my life,” she said. “I realized there has to be something more.”

She visited the Benedictine Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Ind., in the Evansville Diocese, where her sister is a member of that religious community. But she “didn’t feel at home there.”

It was suggested she attend a discernment weekend at Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove.

“I put it off for a while,” Sister Susan admitted. “It was out of my comfort zone.”

But by the end of the weekend, she said, “I didn’t want to go home.”

Now a Benedictine sister for three years, Sister Susan is living a life of enhanced joy.

“I always found joy in teaching, in my work,” she said. “But now I find even more joy in my work because I have someone to share it with, and more to share with my students. It’s not just me being able to show my faith to them, and sharing my life as a sister with them when they ask questions about religious life.”

By John Shaughnessy

BEDFORD—The children on the school playground rush to Father Rick Eldred, giving him high fives, fist bumps and hugs.

And whenever he shouts, “One, two three!”, the boys and girls at St. Vincent de Paul School in Bedford respond with a roar. “We’re St. Vincent and proud of it!”

That’s the close bond that the 66-year-old pastor has with the children—a bond that has grown through his occasional movie-hosting sessions at the school, the ever popular “Popcorn with Padre.”

“The kids keep me young,” Father Eldred says, his voice dripping in joy. “Our school symbol is the shamrock, and on last St. Patrick’s Day, I brought in 230 6-inch cookies sprinkled in green in a shamrock shape for the kids and the staff. After the movie, all the kids had green lips, green tongues and sugar highs. They all bounced out of the school that day.”

The memory makes Father Eldred smile widely and laugh softly—the same reactions he shows when he shares his path to becoming a priest. After listening to the story of that journey, there’s a sense that not only Father Eldred has a good sense of joy and humor, so does God.

From the time he graduated from college to his early 40s, he worked in the family business in Terre Haute, running the company’s moving and storage operations. He enjoyed hanging out with the employees and had served on different parish councils, but he was still confused when he was stopped one day in the early 1990s by Msgr. Lawrence Moran, then the pastor of St. Patrick Parish in Terre Haute.

Parish in Mitchell, who has gained popularity with his outgoing personality and his “Popcorn with Padre” movie-hosting sessions at the school.

During recess at St. Vincent de Paul School in Bedford, children surround Father Rick Eldred, the pastor of that parish as well as St. Mary Parish in Mitchell, who has gained popularity with his outgoing personality and his “Popcorn with Padre” movie-hosting sessions at the school.

(Photos by John Shaughnessy)

“God’s joy and humor shine through in priest’s life”

By John Shaughnessy

“I asked him if I thought I’d ever be a priest,” recalls Father Eldred, who is also the pastor of St. Mary Parish in Mitchell. “I asked him, ‘What did I ever say to you to make you ask that question?’”

“I told him I wasn’t interested, but he kept inviting me over to his house to discuss it more. As a courtesy, I went with him to a dinner in Indianapolis with the archbishop [Archbishop Emeritus Daniel M. Buechlein].”

“I didn’t realize it was a dinner for people who had a possible vocation,” Father Eldred says. “I’ve told people I was on the menu, but I just didn’t know it.”

Still, he started praying about it. And he had a change of heart when he came across the Bible passage—Matthew 19:16—where a young man approaches Jesus and asks what he needs to do to gain eternal life.

“Jesus told him, and he went away sad,” Father Eldred says. “I didn’t want to be that way.”

Yet while he continued to move toward the vocation to the priesthood, he hadn’t let anyone in his family know about it.

“No one knew I was considering it,” he says. “I was sitting in my office when over the loudspeaker they said I had a call from Sacred Heart School of Theology and Seminary. Everyone looked at me. I said, ‘Hey, I’m the treasurer. They want a donation.’ I didn’t tell them I was the donation.”

The seminary in Wisconsin wanted him to come that same day, which was the first day of classes.

“I said, ‘I can’t do that. I have a business and houses. How about Wednesday?’” he said. “How about Tuesday?” I took it.”

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See BENEDICTINE, page 13
High schools work to help students be open to God’s call in their lives

By Sean Gallagher

Since Father Eric Augenstein became archdiocesan vocations director in 2013, he’s made a point to visit Catholic high schools across central and southern Indiana on a regular basis. It’s a key setting for him to help people discern God’s call in their lives because high school students are at an age when they often give serious thought to their future.

“It’s important to let young people in our Church know who they can talk to if they want to have more conversations about a vocation, that they know that there is a vocations office, that there is a vocations director,” Father Augenstein said.

And he has been in contact with a growing number of high school students interested in learning more about vocations.

Four new seminarians for the archdiocese this year are graduates of Bishop Chatard and Roncalli high schools, both in Indianapolis, and Our Lady of Providence Jr./Sr. High School in Clarksville.

On Oct. 28, he participated in a vocations day for freshman at Roncalli in which archdiocesan priests, seminarians and religious sisters spoke with the high school students about their vocations.

Although Long noted there wasn’t such a vocations day at Roncalli when he was a student there, he said that his experience at the high school—especially a class specifically on vocations during his senior year—was “a big part” of his vocational discernment.

“It made vocations, especially the priesthood, seem like so much more of an option,” Long said. “It just made it seem down to earth and not so out of reach.”

To further classroom exploration of vocations, the archdiocesan vocations office has made resources available to schools and parishes across central and southern Indiana that will help young people learn about the ways that God calls people to serve the Church and the world.

The vocations curriculum was developed by the Valdosta, Ga.-based Vianney Vocations. It is adaptable for kindergarten through 12th grade and usable both in schools and parish religious education programs.

Its resources—including lesson plans, activities, prayers, videos and art—can be accessed and used online. Many also can be printed.

“My hope was to make good information about vocations available to teachers and catechists, then to allow them to use that in however it would fit best with their school, their students and their curriculum,” Father Augenstein said. “There is good information available for them to pull from.”

The presence of priests and religious sisters in Catholic high schools across the archdiocese also helps young people consider God’s call in their lives.

Benedictine Sister Kathleen Yeakon, who teaches seniors in social justice and Scripture classes at Bishop Chatard, sees this happen on a daily basis.

“Use every topic as a springboard for a discernment. In social justice, each student chooses a cause to research and work on throughout the first quarter,” said Sister Kathleen, a member of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove. “I explain how God calls us through the interests we have. In sacred Scripture, many of the Old Testament stories [teach] the class on how discernment works.

“I am always on the lookout for young people who might be interested in a Church vocation. I create lots of projects in my class, and we do plenty of reflections so it gives them time to think about how God is calling them.”

Quenton Wellington, a senior at Bishop Chatard, appreciates the witness that Sister Kathleen gives to him and his classmates.

“She has a special connection with God,” he said. “She is energetic, passionate, caring and forgiving. Seeing her have a relationship with God is very helpful because it shows everyone that we need God in our life. Dedicating yourself to God can be hard, but he will be right there with you.”

As faith formation director at Father Michael Shawe Jr./Sr. High School in Madison, Chemaign Drumm helps sophomores, juniors and seniors learn about and be open to the vocation God has planned for them.

“If they are going to be truly great disciples, they need to figure out how to figure out what they are called to,” Drumm said. “It is important to educate them on all aspects of a vocation so they have a better understanding of what it is. We have to make it more approachable and a more tangible idea in order for them to even slow down to think about it.”

The class on vocations that Matthew Long took at Roncalli as a senior helped him slow down and listen to God’s call. He hopes the increasing effort at his alma mater will mean more young people discerning priestly or religious vocations in the future.

“It’s kind of cool to have vocations continually brought up more and more, especially at Roncalli,” he said. “It will be nice to see vocations grow here.”

(For more information about the vocations curriculum that the archdiocesan vocations office has made available to schools and parishes across central and southern Indiana, send Father Eric Augenstein an e-mail at eaugenstein@archindy.org or call him at 800-382-9836, ext. 1496 or 317-236-1496.)

Above, Father Eric Augenstein, archdiocesan vocations director, speaks about vocations on Oct. 28 to freshmen at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis. (Photos by Sean Gallagher)

Top photo, Father Timothy Wyciskalla, second from left, elevates a chalice during an Oct. 28 Mass at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis while members of a student choir stand at his left. The liturgy was part of a day dedicated to vocations for the freshmen at the high school. Kneeling third from left is seminarian Matthew Long. Father Eric Augenstein stands fourth from left. Kneeling at left is Dominican transitional Deacon Reginald Wolford.

Providence Sister Editha Ben, left, vocations director for the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, speaks on Oct. 28 with freshmen women at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis.

Hailey Stonecipher, left, and Elizabeth Bradley, both freshmen at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis, lead the singing of the responsorial psalm during an Oct. 28 Mass at Roncalli. The Mass was part of a day on vocations for the school’s freshman class.
Carmelite nuns’ community celebrates 500th anniversary of foundress’ birth

By Sean Gallagher

TERRE HAUTE—Western Indiana in 2015 might seem a world away from Spain in 1515. But a group of Discalced Carmelite nuns in Terre Haute recently celebrated the close connection that they have to St. Teresa of Avila, their order’s foundress who was born in Spain 500 years ago.

Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin, several priests, and scores of friends of the Carmelite Monastery of St. Joseph worshipped on Oct. 10 with the 14 contemplative nuns of the Terre Haute community during a Mass in honor of St. Teresa. In his homily during the Mass, Archbishop Tobin shared the connection that the nuns had with their foundress.

He said that they, and all people of faith today, can learn what holiness means by looking to St. Teresa.

“She taught that holiness begins with desire,” Archbishop Tobin said. “Holiness understood as communion with God who is love, and living in a loving relationship with the people that God sends into my life begins with wanting it.”

He also reflected on the way in which St. Teresa understood that God was working through the many instances of suffering in her life to bring about great good.

“For her, suffering was not simply a masochistic embrace of pain,” Archbishop Tobin said. “It was confidence that God was doing something with the suffering that came into her life. She often talked about being purified by what she suffered. Certainly, God made her suffering fertile.”

Ultimately, Archbishop Tobin said, St. Teresa remains relevant for the Church today because she “was so rooted in the Gospel.”

“Jesus is the only way that we can understand the gift that God’s love brings to us,” he said. “And it is only by our enduring friendship with him that we will make our way home.”

Although he reflected on St. Teresa during his homily, Archbishop Tobin said with a smile that he did so “in great fear and trembling knowing him that we will make our way home.”

The monastery’s chapel is arranged with the altar in the middle, with the cloistered nuns separated from the sanctuary and the congregation by a cast iron grillwork.

After the Mass, members of the contemplative community that supports itself through making icons, greeting cards and knitted gift items— in addition to the support of donors—spoke about the importance of St. Teresa to their vocation and community life.

Discalced Carmelite Mother Anne Brackman, the prioress of the Monastery of St. Joseph, has had much opportunity to reflect upon the example and teachings of St. Teresa since entering the community in Terre Haute in 1959, just 12 years after it was founded.

She noted the continuing significance of the conversion that occurred in Teresa’s life, where she went from wanting people to admire her, to her living for Christ alone.

“I believe that people today need to be encouraged that conversion is possible,” Mother Anne said. “Sometimes, it takes a long time.

She said that St. Teresa’s example can be an encouragement to Catholic parents “who are very distressed at the faith life of their children” who no longer practice it.

“We can’t lose hope,” Mother Anne said.

She was grateful to have the archbishop, several priests and so many friends of the cloistered monastic community gather to honor their foundress.

“It certainly was an affirmation of what we hope we are for the archdiocese,” Mother Anne said. “Even though we are primarily hidden and many people may not know about us, we believe that our life of prayer can be leaven in the dough.”

Discalced Carmelite Sister Clare Joseph Daniels reflected after the Mass on how the community has given special attention to the study of St. Teresa’s writings in the three years leading up to the 500th anniversary of her birth.

“It’s been like having her so present to us. We owe everything to her,” Sister Clare Joseph said. “She gave us the way to walk more closely with Christ.”

For Sister Clare Joseph, St. Teresa is timeless because she “was so rooted in the Gospel.”

“She was so rooted in following Christ,” Sister Clare Joseph said. “For me, Teresa totally shows the way of radical love, radical commitment and radical abandonment to following Christ.”

(For more information about the Discalced Carmelite Monastery of St. Joseph in Terre Haute, visit its website at www.heartsawake.org.)

The Criterion Friday, November 6, 2015 Vocations Supplement
Saints, Sisters of Providence help young adult’s discernment to religious life

By Jason Moon

“I love the idea of seeing people flourish, of seeing them develop their amazing talents, to use them for God,” Sister Monica Zore said. “They become aware of the God who sees them, who knows them, who loves them. And she gives them a window into how much their choices matter.”

By John Shaughnessy

When Franciscan Sister Monica Zore was asked where she wanted to have her photo taken at Marian University in Indianapolis, the longtime math instructor chose the school’s fountain, explaining, “It’s a reminder of God’s extravagant, overflowing love. It’s constantly pouring out, and it never runs out.” (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

“Sometimes, among the newer members, we joke about the fact that we really don’t have to worry until there are fewer than six of us left—since that’s how many were in Mother Theodore’s group when they first came to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana,” she said. “But look where we are now! At that time, Mother Theodore said, ‘all appearances are against it,’ and I’d imagine that’s how some people feel today when they look at the future of religious life.”

Sister Tracey graduated from the University of Dayton in 2010. Following that, she taught math at a middle school in Texas before coming to the White Violet Center for Early Justice, a ministry of the Sisters of Providence, to serve as an intern.

While at White Violet Center, Sister Tracey worked in its garden and tended to its alpacas.

Prior to coming back to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, the sisters served as an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer with Indy Hunger Network, where she developed fresh food access and nutrition projects.

But the path of consecrated life called her back to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, something she felt she needed to take steps toward in May 2013.

“At that time, I had just finished my yearlong internship at White Violet Center, and I felt like I needed some time away from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to understand what was moving in me,” Sister Tracey said. “I’d been discussing with another religious community throughout my internship year, and a visit with those sisters helped to clarify what I was feeling.”

Sister Tracey said the Sisters of Providence, as well as the writings of Mother Theodore, inspired her to choose her path.

“They were able to explain the spark, the energy and passion I had about the mission and charism of the Sisters of Providence. Their support and affirmation helped open my eyes to the call of Providence.”

Saint, Sisters of Providence help young adult’s discernment to religious life

BY JOHN MOON

Sister’s focus on doing ‘small things’ leads to closer bond with God

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Seminarian Jeffrey Dufresne

By Sean Gallagher

Seminarian Jeffrey Dufresne knew in his heart he was a priest long before he even considered entering formation for the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. He wasn’t delusional. He just had a sharp awareness of and a high value for the common priesthood which all Christians share by virtue of their baptism. The bishops at the Second Vatican Council more than 50 years ago noted in the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” (“Lumen Gentium”) that all the faithful offer spiritual sacrifices in the world to God in the way of life, which they have been called “They exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacramental leadership of the chaplain of their parish. You feel like that was an opportunity to have received this formation alongside other San Damiano scholars helped Dufresne become a pastoral leader among his peers in the broader Marian community. “We brought that common formation to the greater community,” he said. “I really felt like that was an opportunity to have instilled in us a mindset for lay pastoral ministry, to learn how to be in a community.”

Mark Erdosy, executive director of the San Damiano Scholars Program, witnessed the leadership that Dufresne exercised personally. “Jeff is very passionate about his faith,” said Erdosy. “He is equally passionate about ministering with people and helping connect them with Christ. Jeff is a very compassionate person who will make time for people because he wants to be Christ’s presence for others. That’s who he is called to be.”

As a student at Marian, Dufresne grew in his understanding of God’s particular call to him. He began to sense that God might be calling him to service, not in the sacramental priesthood. He first got an inkling of this call while praying before the Blessed Sacrament in adoration during his freshman year at Marian. “I realized it wasn’t until the spring of 2013—a year after he had graduated from Marian—that he really responded to that call and began the process to affiliate with the archdiocese as a seminarian. Part of what particularly led him to become a seminarian was seeing the sacramental leadership of the chaplain of Bishop Fenwick High School in Franklin, Ohio, who Dufresne was serving as the interim director of campus ministry. "As I reflect on that, fulfilling my role and ministry was for me, I realized that it wasn’t as fulfilling as it could be," he said. "I really started to see that, although I was doing my best in so many ways to live out the priestly life of the baptized, it was really the sacramental priesthood that I was being called to and that I really had a desire to live out by being able to bring God’s presence, his healing, his love and his grace to people in the sacraments.”

Although he grew up in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Dufresne chose to become a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis in part because of his experience of the life of faith at St. Monica Parish in Indianapolis. He valued it so much that he would drive two hours to attend Sunday Mass while serving at Fenwick High School. The worshipping community there was for him “full of life” and “very hospitable.” And he valued getting to know the “two joyful and passionate priests” who served there, Father Ted Goos artist, and Father Dustin Boehm, his associate pastor at the time. “His personality is a bridge,” said Father Boehm of Dufresne. “He’s a guy that, as soon as you meet him, you kind of ask the question, ‘Wow, what’s behind his joy?’ And he makes no bones about it. His personality clearly gains a lot of life from the Gospel and from Jesus Christ.” As he continues in his formation for ordained ministry and looks forward to possible life and ministry as a priest, Dufresne hopes to be able to help the faithful whom he would serve to embrace their common priesthood. “The mission of the sacramental priesthood is to empower the laity through the sacramental life to live their vocation to transform the world where they are,” he said. “That spiritual leadership that is rooted in the sacramental life is what drew me to the priesthood in the first place.”

Dufresne looks forward to helping lay Catholics to powerfully live out their faith and in so many areas of life—as spouses, parents, in the work world and in the broader community. “What I’ve realized over time is that there are many ways to live out the radical Christian life that I was looking for, and was passionate about finding when I was younger,” Dufresne said. “We’re all members of the one body of Christ in the Church by baptism.”

(For more information about a vocation to the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, log on to www.HearGodsCall.com.)
By Victoria Arthur
Special to The Criterion

Deacon Steven Gretencord was at least about to leave the hospital, thinking his work for the day was done. Then he received an urgent request. There was someone who needed a Catholic chaplain—immediately. Just 10 minutes before, this patient had learned he was dying of cancer. The man and his family were reeling from the news, and they were waiting.

There was no time to prepare. But at that moment, and in so many others in his ministry, Deacon Gretencord recalled the Gospel reading from that weekend’s Sunday Mass: St. Mark’s account of Jesus calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee.

“I told the man and his family that before Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples still experienced the terror of it,” Deacon Gretencord said. “I told them that all we have storms in our lives, and sometimes we may wonder if Jesus is asleep in the back of the boat. But he’s always there for us to call upon him, to trust him, and to find peace.”

A game changer
Deacon Gretencord was at Indiana State University’s Hulman Center in Terre Haute, watching his beloved Sycamores play basketball. On that day 15 or so years ago, he was seated next to Father Stephen Giannini, who at the time was Gretencord’s pastor at Sacred Heart Parish.

“I felt quite calm about it,” he says of that day past summer. “I spoke from my heart, but my preparation and formation definitely came into play.”

Deacon Gretencord was among the first group of men to be ordained as permanent deacons in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis in 2008. Permanent deacons are distinguished from transitional deacons, who are in the final stage of formation for his life and ministry as a permanent deacon.

“I felt the call about it,” he says of that day this past summer. “I spoke from my heart, but my preparation and formation definitely came into play.”

Deacon Gretencord credited years of formation for his life and ministry as a permanent deacon. “I felt the call about it,” he says of that day this past summer. “I spoke from my heart, but my preparation and formation definitely came into play.”

Deacon Gretencord said. After ordination, every deacon is assigned to one or more ministries of charity.

Deacon Gretencord has ministered to people in need—particularly youths—through Catholic Charities Terre Haute. Today, he considers this ministry a perfect fit for him.

“Always there!”
Now one of 40 permanent deacons ministering in central and southern Indiana, Deacon Gretencord describes the duties of the ministry as three-fold, encompassing word, sacrament and charity. Deacons proclaim the Gospel and preach homilies at Mass. They assist the priest in other ways during liturgies, and they can officiate at weddings and funeral services that do not involve the Eucharist. They can celebrate the sacrament of baptism and are ordinary ministers of holy Communion. And they dedicate themselves to service.

“During formation, you find out what calls you,” Deacon Gretencord said. After ordination, every deacon is assigned to one or more ministries of charity.

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“I cannot imagine my life without being a deacon,” he said. “It’s a wonderful, remarkable privilege.”

(Deacon Steven Gretencord is shown in the chapel at Union Hospital in Terre Haute preparing to take Communion to a patient. He serves as a volunteer chaplain there.)
my mom to lunch. On the way back, I told her, ‘I got a call from the seminary, and I’m going to leave in an hour.’ She had been praying on it. I went in my brother’s office and told him the same thing. He said, ‘I’m sure you’ll be good at it.’

Everything went according to plan in seminary until he became a transitional deacon—the last year before his priestly ordination in 1999—and he took a class centered on the Mass.

‘That was the first time I thought about having to stand up in front of people and giving homilies. If I had thought about it before becoming a deacon, I would have quit. I didn’t talk until I was 4. When I did start to talk, I had a horrible speech impediment. When I told them about it, they said, ‘Duly noted. Now get with it.’ It’s still there at times, but people say I do a good job of overcoming it.’

People also say he’s a terrific priest and pastor.

‘He’s compassionate and enthusiastic, and he’s a great teacher,’ says Teresa Underwood, the principal of St. Vincent de Paul School. ‘The kids love him. At Mass, he always makes a point of saying we’re coming closer to Jesus. It’s really important to him that Catholic education is available.’

As a member of St. Vincent Parish, Underwood also adipates the way Father Eldred has connected that parish with nearby St. Mary Parish in Mitchell.

‘We’re two separate parishes, but he saw the importance of bringing us together while allowing us to have our own identities,’ she says. ‘We’re the Catholic community of Lawrence County. He’s a unifier.’

He’s also an evangelizer, says Pastor Megel, a longtime friend who first met Father Eldred when he served as the pastor of St. Thomas More Parish in Mooresville from 2001 to 2005.

‘I believe he’s led by the Holy Spirit,’ Warthen says. ‘He’s very upbeat about his faith and evangelizing. And it’s contagious the way he feels about our Catholic faith. He makes you want to be like him in his faith.

Father Eldred’s journey to the priesthood has been filled with some amazing moments. On his 51st birthday, he and five other priests concelebrated Mass with then-Pope John Paul II at the pope’s summer residence in Italy. He also concelebrated Mass with Pope Benedict XVI at the canonization of St. Theodora Guérin in Rome.

‘I’ve experienced things that are just unbelievable,’ he says. ‘You take a little kid from Terre Haute, and he’s celebrating Masses with two popes? I say, ‘God, why me?’

Still, he regards the everyday moments of being a priest as equally special.

He beams when he talks about giving first Communion to children, working with seminarians and providing the sacrament of reconciliation.

‘I like to show people that God still loves them,’ he says. ‘I’ve been blessed to get there with three eucharistic adoration chapels started, too.

‘We also have a Christmas in July fund where we collect money for seminarians and retired priests. We send them gift cards. The retired priests are surprised to get a ‘thank you’ from a parish where they were never an active priest. And the seminarians are thankful, too.’

He has also helped to establish Becky’s Place, the Catholic Charities transitional housing site in Bedford for homeless women and children.

‘For Father Eldred, it’s all a matter of caring for people, especially in those moments where they face physical, emotional and mental problems.

‘You see someone with cancer or a 6-year-old with a brace on his leg. Or you’re with a widow and a son in the process of their husband and father dying. You try to be there for them. Sometimes, all you can do is pray and support them. But I’ve seen the power of prayer, too. The greatest gift mankind has is the power of prayer.’

He has seen that power in his life.

‘You have your challenges just like anyone else,’ he says. ‘But then you wake up knowing you are a priest.’ He says. “The peace and joy as a priest are off the charts. You have this wonderful feeling of being the presence of the Lord in your life.”

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