



Pope Leo XIV elevates a monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament for Benediction at the end of a prayer vigil and recitation of the rosary for peace in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on Oct. 11. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

In hope, God sows seeds of vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life

As the Church in the U.S. celebrates National Vocation Awareness Week during this Jubilee Year of Hope, we turn our attention once again to the mystery of God's call to priesthood, consecrated life and diaconate.



Fr. Michael Keucher

This year's Vocations Awareness Supplement highlights the stories of men and women from our archdiocese who have responded with generosity to that call. Behind every face is hope for our Church in central and southern Indiana. Behind every story is the same grace at work—the word of God planted in the heart, nurtured by prayer and sacrament and brought to life in community and hope.

In his first general audience earlier this year, Pope Leo XIV reflected on the parable of the sower (cf. Mt 13:1-17), offering an image that beautifully illuminates the call to vocation. Our Holy Father noted that Jesus scatters the seed of his word freely—on the path, on the rocks, among the thorns and on fertile soil. “God is confident and hopes that sooner or later the seed will blossom. This is hope, founded on the rock of God's generosity and mercy.”

That vision of God as the patient sower is at the heart of every vocation. How often, as archdiocesan vocations director, I find folks whose hearts are not yet prepared to realize their vocation, yet the Lord never tires of calling! He continues to cast his word into his sons and daughters, trusting that it will take root when and where hearts are ready to receive it. Even when the soil seems unpromising, God is patient and he hopes; he knows that his word carries life within it.

You can never fully explain a vocation, especially a priestly or religious vocation; something happens inside you. That “something” is the coming to life of the seed of vocation in the human heart. The sower continues to sow, and his seed is alive. Some of those called to the priesthood or religious life recognize God's voice early, while others discover it later in life, often through struggle or surprise. Some find fertile soil in the prayer of their parishes; others wrestle through dry seasons of doubt or resistance. Yet God's word—once planted—will not stop growing. “The word of God makes fruitful and provokes every reality,” Pope Leo reminds us.

This is the essence of a vocation: it is not a human project, but a divine initiative. God calls, God sustains and God brings the harvest. Our task is simply to listen and to offer a generous, loving *fiat*. For that, we look to Our Lady as our model. Surrendering to the Divine Sower is the key.

For those discerning a call to priesthood, diaconate or religious life, this is a message of great encouragement. The Holy Father urges us not to lose heart, even when we feel unworthy or unsure: “If we realize we are not a fruitful soil, let us not be discouraged, but let us ask him to work on us more to make us become a better terrain.” God himself prepares the ground; he does not demand perfection, only openness.

During this Jubilee of Hope, we are reminded that the future of the Church depends not on human planning but on divine fidelity. The Lord continues to sow the seeds of priestly, diaconal and religious vocations across the world—and here, in our own archdiocese. Each man or woman who responds “yes” to God's call becomes a living sign of that hope. You will read about some of them here in this supplement.

May this week renew in all of us the desire to pray for and support those discerning a vocation to the priesthood, diaconate or consecrated life. May our parishes, families and hearts be rich soil where those seeds can grow. And may we never tire of trusting that the Lord of the harvest is still at work—sowing, nurturing and bringing to life new witnesses and agents of his mercy and love.

(Father Michael Keucher is director of vocations for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, dean of the Batesville Deanery and pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Shelbyville and St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Shelby County. Contact him at mkeucher@archindy.org.) †



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Happy, holy priests and seminarians encourage men discerning vocations

By Jennifer Lindberg

Special to *The Criterion*

Leading by example is the number-one way current seminarians say is most helpful in assisting men discerning the priesthood, along with being a joyful witness and living a life of prayer.

“It’s difficult for a young man to visualize himself as a priest,” said Father Liam Hosty, parochial vicar for St. Ann Parish in Indianapolis and St. Thomas More Parish in Mooresville. “I think that the joyful witness that seminarians offer is that they can help a discerner to mentally bridge that gap.”

Father Hosty, who was ordained in June, holds quite a distinction. His father is Deacon Thomas Hosty, and they are the first father and son in the history of the archdiocese in ordained ministry.

“While it might be difficult for a young man to see where God will take him 50 years from now, the witness of a seminarian can help a man see where God might be taking him as soon as next year,” Father Hosty said.

Seminarian Max Ecoff, who is in his first year of formation at Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary in Indianapolis, said other seminarians helped him with his vocation.

“Seeing some of my friends being open about the vocation and becoming seminarians was extremely helpful in my own discernment,” said Ecoff, a member of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish in Indianapolis.

He said it was also helpful that he was never over-encouraged to be a priest.

“Simply support them and pray for their vocation,” Ecoff said. “What helped me was seeing priests and seminarians who were joyful and excited about their vocation.”

Dominic Pavey, in his second year of formation at Bishop Bruté, echoed this sentiment.

“Young men will see the beauty of the priesthood if they see their pastors filled with joy as they dedicate their lives to saving souls,” said Pavey, also a Holy Rosary parishioner.

Pavey also said his strong parish youth group in his high school years helped him because it was more than “just games and snacks.” It also had adoration, spiritual reading discussion and talks from different priests about vocation and discernment.

“Those times of prayer and discussion and listening were all extremely helpful in my discernment,” he said.

All of the seminarians interviewed said attendance at Bishop Bruté Days—the archdiocese’s annual summer vocations camp for boys in junior high and high school held at Bishop Bruté Seminary—helped make seminary life less mysterious and more realistic as a choice in life.

Seminarian Randy Schnieder said the camp helped in his discernment.

“I was profoundly impacted by the seminarians’ joy and life of prayer,” said Schneider, who received formation at Bishop Bruté Seminary before attending Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad, where he is in his second year of formation.

“But most of all, I found that Bruté Days made seminary a ‘real’ choice for me—one that I could see myself pursuing,” said Schneider, a member of All Saints Parish in Dearborn County. “Seeing just normal guys doing something extraordinary allowed me to see myself doing the same thing.”



Seminarians Dominic Pavey, left, and Max Ecoff chat on Oct. 21 at Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary in Indianapolis where they are respectively in their second and first years of priestly formation. Both members of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish in Indianapolis, they noted that seeing happy and holy priests and seminarians helped them in their discernment of a possible vocation to the priesthood. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

These sentiments reflect a 2025 national survey of how men discern the priesthood conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., in collaboration with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. It found that at least 89% of men ordained to the priesthood said they were encouraged by someone in their life—most frequently by a parish priest (60%), friend (52%) or parishioner (42%).

The biggest question a seminarian is always asked is: “How do you know you want to be a priest?”



Lucas LaRosa

Lucas LaRosa, in his second year of formation at Saint Meinrad, said he always gives the same answer: “I only know God wants me to be in seminary right now. What happens from here is in God’s hands.”

Answering such questions is important, La Rosa said, because many men think they need to be 100% sure before entering seminary. “They may be worried once they make the decision to try seminary, they’re stuck with that decision,” said LaRosa, a member of St. Barnabas Parish in Indianapolis.

Yet, seminary doesn’t force a vocation onto someone. It is a process to see what God wants for you, La Rosa explained.

Pavey said if a man even thinks he may have a vocation, he should actively discern the possibility that God is calling him to the priesthood.

“The reality is that unless God gives a man a direct sign, he will never absolutely be certain of having a vocation to the priesthood until the bishop lays his hands on him and he is ordained,” Pavey said.

There’s also another important distinction for seminarians and priests to explain to men thinking about seminary, Father Hosty said.

He noted that many well-intentioned people encourage men to go to college

first, work a few years and then go to seminary.

“My question is this: What other profession do we give that same piece of advice to? If a young man told you he wants to be a medical doctor, would we say, ‘Are you sure? Maybe you should study engineering first, work a few years as an engineer. Then, if you feel like you still want to be a doctor, you can go to medical school?’

“And yet we do exactly that with the sublime gift of the priesthood. It is almost as if we are giving God the leftovers.”

While Father Hosty understands everyone’s discernment journey is different, he said he is glad he became a seminarian immediately after high school and received formation at Bishop Bruté.

“My time at Bruté were some of the best years of my life, and I have absolutely no regrets,” Father Hosty said.

“If you feel like Jesus might be calling you to share in his priesthood, I promise you that question is going to bother you until you talk to a priest about it,” Father Hosty added.

Those interviewed who are in priestly formation also noted it’s important for seminarians to witness by their prayer life and involvement at local parishes.

LaRosa said he still tries to serve at Mass as a witness to vocations or give

tours at Saint Meinrad where people can ask him questions.

Schneider said Bruté Days was an “incredible witness of seminary life to me as a high schooler” because it helped him realize at it that seminary was a real choice. Seeing other seminarians work, pray and relate to others allowed him to see himself doing the same thing.

The men also encouraged talking openly about obstacles to the priesthood by acknowledging there are real questions, such as sacrificing your entire life for others, sacrificing marriage, accepting celibacy, doubting one’s abilities as a singer or preacher, and other things a priest is asked to do in his life and ministry.

“It is true we will always be insufficient in our abilities ... but that is why we need the Lord to provide the necessary grace to take up our cross and fulfill our mission,” Pavey said.

LaRosa said many men question if they have the right personality to be a priest.

“God isn’t looking for a specific ‘cookie-cutter’ type of priest,” LaRosa said. “He’s looking for all kinds of people to help build his kingdom. ... A young man should never write himself off because of what he thinks God is looking for.”

Father Hosty said showing men that

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Vocations Awareness Supplement highlights the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life

This issue of *The Criterion* features our annual supplement that highlights vocations in the Church to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life.

It is ordinarily published in advance of or during the U.S. bishops’ annual Vocations Awareness Week, which this year is on Nov. 3-9.

From the beginning, the Church has recognized that marriage is also a vocation, a pathway to holiness, to

which God calls people. *The Criterion* publishes a marriage supplement annually in February.

In addition, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis has three offices which promote vocations. For information on the Office of Marriage and Family Life, visit archindy.org/marriageandfamily. For information on the diaconate, go to archindy.org/deacon. For information on the priesthood and consecrated life, visit archindy.org/vocations.†



Navilleton woman finds joy in religious vocation of ‘spiritual motherhood’

By Natalie Hoefer

Growing up in Navilleton, Catholicism was a life rhythm for Emily Naville, the third of Bob and Jenni Naville’s four children. “All of our family lived on the same road, and at the end of the road was St. Mary Church,” she recalled. “We went to Mass every Sunday, I went to Catholic grade school. Our parents taught us to pray, and we said prayers before bedtime. It was a great way to grow up!” But religious sisters were not part of her world. “Maybe some mission sisters spoke at Mass a few times,” she says. “But I never really talked with a sister until my freshman year” at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., in the fall of 2015. The religious woman was a novice with the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration, based in Mishawaka, Ind., in the Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese. And the conversation changed the college student’s life. With the name Sister Mary Amata, the Navilleton native professed perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience with the order on Aug. 2. With contagious joy, she shares her vocation and formation journeys, her advice for both women discerning a vocation and girls with no exposure to religious sisters, and about the two words that set her heart on fire: spiritual motherhood.

‘Something awakened in me’

With the foundation in faith set in childhood by her parents, Sister Mary Amata began to embrace the faith on her own in middle school through what was then called New Albany Deanery Catholic Youth Ministries (NADCYM), now known as Catalyst Catholic. “I was in a youth group. I went on [NADCYM] Faith in Action mission trips. I went on retreats and started serving in leadership in high school,” she says. “Faith was very much a part of my everyday life both in action and being formed in prayer.” Sister Mary Amata entered Ball State in the fall of 2015 to study music education. “I wanted to become a choir teacher like my older sister,” she says. “I couldn’t imagine life without music and singing.” She also got involved with the Catholic Newman Center on campus—where she met people “on fire for the faith” and made an impactful discovery. “It wasn’t until college that I realized I could have a personal relationship with Christ,” says Sister Mary Amata. “I was surprised by people who knew Jesus in that personal way.” Through eucharistic adoration and making a Marian consecration, she “fell in love with Jesus.” To give students the opportunity to explore vocations, the Newman Center hosted events with different religious orders. So it was that Sister Mary Amata sat down next to a novice with the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration at a spaghetti dinner late in the fall of her freshman year. “It was the first time I had a real conversation with a sister,” she says. “I thought sisters were older or really strict. But here was a sister who was young and joyful. “In talking with her, I realized she had real challenges and hardships. But she still had that joy because of her love of Jesus and his love for her, a joy that endured through any circumstance. I was so struck by that. “I couldn’t have said it at the time, but something awakened in me that said, ‘I want that, too.’ ”

‘It lit my heart on fire’

That December, the sisters held a discernment retreat at their motherhouse in Mishawaka. Sister Mary Amata participated—with no thoughts of discernment.

“I went because my friend was going and I just thought it sounded like fun, hanging out with the sisters,” she admits. The first thing she noticed was having “a sense of feeling at home, an ability to be myself.” As the retreat progressed, Sister Mary Amata “was struck by how the sisters loved one another. They had different personalities and ages and experiences, but there was genuine love there.” But the most impactful part of the retreat for her was a one-on-one meeting with a sister. “I asked her about the role of religious sisters in the Church,” says Sister Mary Amata. “I said, ‘Priests are shepherds, but sisters just pray and serve—anyone can do that.’ “And she said, ‘Spiritual motherhood. As brides of Christ, we’re called to love the Church and the world with a maternal heart and to nurture the life of Christ in every person that we meet.’ “I remember what she said word for word. It lit my heart on fire.” The next semester and through her sophomore year, Sister Mary Amata explored other religious orders and talked with vocation directors. And she continued to “grow in my relationship with Jesus, spending time with him in adoration, and falling more in love with him.” Sister Mary Amata began to notice “a restlessness” in her sophomore year. “I was doing things I enjoyed, I had friends, I was doing service, I loved my major,” she recalls. “But I had this sense of desiring more.” In January of 2017, she attended a SEEK conference sponsored by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students. The event is the college equivalent of the National Catholic Youth Conference. Among her group was a young woman who strongly desired to go to confession. But she hesitated, telling Sister Mary Amata through tears that she felt “so dirty and unloved.” While the woman went to confession, “I sat in the noisy hall and prayed,” says the religious sister. “I never felt more fulfilled. The Lord was showing me in a small moment of spiritual motherhood that, ‘This is how I made you to love.’ ” She could no longer deny her draw to the Franciscan Sisters in Mishawaka. “I began to think, ‘What if I didn’t finish college?’ And the Lord showed me how he led me to trust him in life. So, when this big question came, I knew he would be with me.” Sister Mary Amata told her parents her plans to leave college and pursue a vocation with the the order. “That was a surprise,” Bob admits. “We had it in our heads that she would finish college. That’s what makes most sense in the world.” He recalls her response: “If God is calling me now, how can I say ‘wait?’ ” “She had such confidence,” says Jenni. “That’s when we realized it’s not our timing, but God’s.” Sister Mary Amata entered the order as a postulant in September of 2017.

‘The sisters know how to have fun’

The order was founded “that love may be loved,” lived out by “ceaseless adoration, sisterly love and Franciscan joy,” explains Sister Mary Amata. “Since our founding in 1863, there has been at least one sister in adoration every minute.” The sisters take “the love and grace we receive in adoration” to those they serve in the order’s two apostolates—health care and education. Each sister’s day involves a flow, with times for adoration, prayer, Mass, apostolate service and personal time. There is even daily time for recreation—a time the Navilles witnessed while Sister Mary Amata was in formation.

“They’re riding bikes, playing Wiffle ball, basketball,” Bob says of the sisters, amused at the memory. “I don’t know how they do it in their habits!” “The sisters know how to have fun—they’re just so much fun!” Jenni adds with a laugh. After her postulancy and novitiate, Sister Mary Amata professed temporary vows of poverty, obedience and chastity in August 2020. Up to that point, the sisters are called by their baptismal name. Prior to their temporary vows, each postulant “prays about what name the Lord might want to give us,” she explains. “When I prayed about it, I was struck with the thought of us as beloved daughters of God. There is nothing we did to earn that, and we’re called to help others realize God’s love for them.” “*Amata*” is Latin for beloved. “And Mary was so important to my discernment, especially through my Marian consecration,” she adds. “I prayed about her understanding of her own belovedness, how rooted she was in God’s love for her, and that’s how she was able to give her *fiat*. I thought, ‘I want that, to be so rooted in God’s love for me that I’d do anything for him.’ ” The postulants submit a list of three names. Then, “with the help of the Holy Spirit,” their names are chosen for them. Sister Mary Amata received the first name on her list. After her temporary vows, she was sent to Franciscan University of Steubenville in Steubenville, Ohio, to earn bachelor’s degrees in business management and theology. Bob says he and Jenni could see Sister Mary Amata “growing comfortable in her own skin” throughout her eight years of formation. (The order has since added an additional year.) “The Church is very wise in requiring a certain amount of formation,” says Sister Mary Amata. “There’s a lot of growth and purification that happens. “There are times that are really challenging, where it’s hard to remember why you are doing this,” she admits. “But [those times] allow us to be free to love the Lord and our sisters and the spiritual children that he’s given us.”

‘It’s such a joy to live this life’

Sister Mary Amata professed her perpetual vows on Aug. 2. “I professed to live this life until death,” she says. “And in making that profession, I know the Lord has given me the grace to be faithful to those vows.” Her parents have no doubt about their daughter’s vocation. “She was never a sad person,” says Bob. “But when she made her final vows, she went from really happy to off-the-charts happy.” Jenni agrees. “She radiates joy,” she says. “We hear it from other people, we see it in pictures.”



Sister Mary Amata Naville radiates joy after professing final vows as a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration on Aug. 2 in the chapel at the order's motherhouse in Mishawaka, Ind., in the Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese. (Photo courtesy of Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration)

Sister Mary Amata now serves as her community’s assistant vocations director at the motherhouse in Mishawaka. “Now I help put on discernment retreats for young women just like the one I went on,” she says in a joyful voice. Along those lines, Sister Mary Amata offers this advice to women discerning a religious vocation. “First and foremost, your vocation is the way God has called you both to receive his love and give yourself in love,” she says. “In discernment, it’s not about solving a problem. It’s about falling in love with the Lord and following where he’s leading.” She reminds discerning women that God “might have a different timeline than yours,” and that taking a step “doesn’t mean your committing for life. ... You have nothing to lose when seeking the Lord and his will—and everything to gain.” Sister Mara Amata also has advice for girls like her, growing up with no exposure to religious sisters: “Seek them out.” She offers several ideas: visit a local convent; set up a call to talk with a sister about religious life; read about saints who were religious sisters; watch videos about religious life; ask your parish or youth minister to invite sisters to come give a talk. “The Church is missing spiritual mothers,” she stresses. “We need more sisters to witness so there can be more vocations.” As for Sister Mary Amata, she is still in awe of her own vocation. “To be a bride of Christ is a gift I’ll never fully comprehend,” she says. “Even though Jesus isn’t present as man here on Earth and is often hidden or quiet, the way he loves us as his brides is so real and intimate. It’s just such a joy to be so close to him and have my whole life centered on him.” She also finds “joy in living with my other sisters. They teach me. It’s a school of love, even when we may disagree. “It’s such a joy to live this life.”

(For more information on the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration, go to ssfpa.org.) †



Want to bring hope to the world, your life? Follow this Benedictine path

By John Shaughnessy

Benedictine Sister Anne Louise Frederick will never forget the time when she helped celebrate the birthday of Benedictine Sister Betty Jean Coveney.

On such a special day when a person usually receives presents, Sister Betty shared a gift from her heart with someone else.

“This spirit of celebration led both of us to a desire to take time to visit one of our sisters who was in a rehab facility a little distance from our monastery,” recalls Sister Anne Louise, formation director of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove.

“The time visiting with this sister was so beautiful as we laughed, prayed and sang. And I felt so grateful to share community with a sister who felt joy in taking this time on her birthday to visit another sister in need. It always stands out to me as a grace-filled experience.”

That story captures one of the six main ways—care for the sick and elderly—that the sisters show how Benedictine life is a sign of hope in the world today.

“Hope is a virtue that flows from God’s grace. It is not dependent on life’s circumstances,” Sister Anne Louise says. “The greatness of our hope shines forth in adverse situations where our faith in God’s goodness and God’s faithfulness gives us strength to endure. We minister hope when we recognize the dignity of each human being and trust that God can transform any suffering and use it for his purposes. Love will have the final word.”

Here are the five other ways that the Benedictine sisters strive to use their gifts to bless others and draw closer to God. They encourage people to reap the joys and benefits that come from embracing these goals in daily life, believing they can help bring hope to a divided world.

Seek the common good

“Benedict instructs in his *Rule* that we should seek not first our own good, but the good of the other. That is quite countercultural,” Sister Anne Louise says. “It involves sacrifice and an awareness to see beyond our needs and desires to the needs of others.

“Love is truly desiring the good of the other. Benedict trusts that in seeking the common good, we will find meaning in life and find the deep peace that comes from abiding in God.”

Sister Anne Louise has witnessed countless times how that approach and that belief have touched and transformed the sisters who live in community at Our Lady of Grace Monastery.

“There are so many ways to live this out in community. We give input to decisions that impact all, and support decisions that are made by leadership on behalf of all. Community life lived well is such a powerful witness to our world of the richness that is ours—if we strive for the communion we were created for.

“We offer hope as we live out our faith in a God who is for us, always desiring what is best for us.”

Make prayer an emphasis

Benedictine Sister Carol Falkner describes prayer as “the bedrock for the Benedictine vocation.” Individually and communally, the sisters make prayer for others and the world their focus.

“We celebrate our communal prayer three times each day,” says Sister Carol, subprioress (second in leadership) of the monastery. “Benedict refers to our daily prayer as the work of God. It strengthens us as a community. At these times, we ask God to sanctify our work, to bring peace to our world and to grant us the grace to share in spreading God’s word through our words and actions.

“I believe this constancy in prayer brings hope to a world in grave need of

healing. People appreciate being remembered in prayer. And anyone is welcome to join us for our communal prayer.”

That emphasis on prayer brings the sisters to a deeper connection with God.

“As a monastic, I promise to be faithful to prayer,” Sister Carol says. “In turn, I experience God’s faithfulness to me. As I stay open to God’s grace, I find myself with the desire to serve my sisters, guests and those who turn to us so they and their loved ones might also be held in prayer.”

The focus on prayer also helps her draw closer to the people she guides as a spiritual director.

“Prayer enables me to be attentive to the other person, to listen to that person, as Benedict says, with ‘the ear of my heart,’ ” Sister Carol says. “When I prayerfully tend to the other person, she or he is able to discern God’s will and act on it. One is filled with hope when one is assured of God’s love and care.”

Offer hospitality

Sister Carol says that she and her fellow sisters strive to embrace St. Benedict’s guidance “to treat each guest as Christ” and to care for the things we use “as vessels of the altar.”

“I find many opportunities to extend hospitality to those who visit our monastery,” Sister Carol says. “So many people in our world need a listening ear and someone to tend to them. Our guests are invited to pray with us, to join us for meals and to find periods of peace and quiet.

“Finding a place of welcome brings hope to a person and reminds that person of his or her importance. Experiencing this love enables a person to go out and extend love to others. As this love ripples out, hope is restored.”

That care for others involves another important approach—caring for the Earth.

“We care for others in caring for the Earth,” Sister Carol notes. “When we abuse the Earth, we bring darkness and hopelessness. When we consciously care for the Earth, we bring light and spread hope that the Earth will continue to sustain us.”

Seek peace

As Benedictine Sister Heather Jean Foltz searched for a sense of peace in her life, she found it in the Benedictine monastery.

“Peace is more than an environment or a feeling,” says Sister Heather, the vocations director for Our Lady of Grace Monastery. “The pursuit of peace in the Benedictine tradition goes beyond simply avoiding conflict. It involves actively working toward a just and harmonious world, both within oneself and in one’s relationships with others.”

The path to peace isn’t easy, she says. Instead, it requires effort, diligence and commitment.

“There is a healthy tension between pursuing a way of life that one believes will lead us to God, and our own



Benedictine Sisters Anne Louise Frederick, left, Carol Falkner and Heather Jean Foltz pose in Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove. In their years of life as members of the monastic community there, they have experienced how the Benedictine vocation is a source of hope for themselves, their fellow sisters and the broader community.

(Submitted photo)

responsibility for doing the work that brings about peace,” Sister Heather says. “The peace we seek is not something that comes from outside us. It starts within us.”

And when conflicts arise, the *Rule* of Benedict advises making peace “before the sun goes down.”

“My daily actions help to establish peace,” Sister Heather stresses. “It requires me to refrain from gossip, angry words, holding grudges, trying to control things that are outside of my control, letting others work on themselves without my help or input, and doing the work within me that drives me to act in ways that do not lay a foundation for peace.

“I can’t do any of these actions alone. The grace to live in peace comes from God. It is when I open myself up to do the things God is asking of me that I experience true peace. When God’s will and my will act together, I experience peace, even if the situation is difficult or challenging. This aspect of our Benedictine charism is a hope we share with a world that is so divided.”

Move from ‘I’ to ‘we’

In her 15 years of living at Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Sister Heather has come to embrace two essential aspects of

community life—stability of place and stability of heart.

“Stability of place is our physical presence to our community and to the greater Beech Grove community,” she says. “Stability of heart is about our love for our communities’ traditions, norms and to the individuals that God has called to this place.

“Through our vow of stability, our community calls me to surrender my own will and do what together we discern is best. Life moves from ‘I’ to ‘we.’ ”

In embracing that move, the roots of community grow stronger, leading toward a deeper relationship with God, too.

“On the good days and the hard days, we are called to stay at table with one another,” Sister Heather says. “We journey with others throughout the joys and the struggles of life. We celebrate new memberships, jubilees and professions that add joy to our life. Living inter-generationally together, we also witness the final surrender of each sister as they are called home to God.

“We remain on this journey together in all things. This draws each of us closer to God.”

(To learn more about Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, visit www.benedictine.com.) †



New Sisters of Providence delve deeper into faith during novitiate year

By Jason Moon

Special to *The Criterion*

ST. MARY-OF-THE-WOODS— During a ceremony on Aug. 24 at the motherhouse of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Ann Duong and Maité Rodriguez-Mora entered the novitiate and were welcomed into the religious community at St. Mary-of-the-Woods in western Indiana.

Both are now taking part in the religious community's yearlong Canonical Novitiate Program and have received the title of "Sister."

"I felt at peace as I entered the next phase of becoming a Sister of Providence," Sister Ann said. "In addition, I pray to Mary to protect my vocation and help me remain faithful to my call."

"The Canonical Novitiate is a once-in-a-lifetime gift when, in our formation, we will have time to learn the community and Church history, participate through the formation process in the Intercommunity Novitiate Program at Catholic Theological Union [in Chicago] and have more dedicated time to study Scripture, instruction, conferences, spiritual accompaniment and personal prayer," Sister Maité added.

During the ceremony, Providence Sister Dawn Tomaszewski, the religious community's general superior, offered a reflection prior to both sisters requesting entrance into the novitiate.

"This is the 'we' moment," Sister Dawn told the novices. "You are now part of who we are. Welcome to that adventure."

Both Sister Ann and Sister Maité entered the congregation as postulants on Sept. 14, 2024, while knocking on the entrance door of the motherhouse. They were welcomed by Sister Dawn and other members of the Sisters of Providence.

Sister Ann, 44, is a native of Vietnam. She was previously a member of the

Sisters of Mary, Queen in St. Louis for 21 years before entering the Sisters of Providence. She served for 16 years while in that community as a pre-school teacher.

Sister Maité, 49, is a native of Puerto Rico. Prior to entering the Sisters of Providence, she worked for Conception Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Conception, Mo.

According to the Sisters of Providence's constitutions, the purpose of the Canonical Novitiate Program is to "foster the internalization of Gospel values."

During the yearlong program, both sisters will have extended time for prayer and have spiritual direction monthly. They will also give service to the religious community and regularly receive instruction in religious life, Scripture, theology and the history and traditions of the Sisters of Providence.

They will be under the guidance of the community's novice director Sister Norene Wu.



Providence Sister Judith Birgin, left, embraces Providence Sister Maité Rodriguez-Mora on Aug. 24 in the Church of the Immaculate Conception on the grounds of their community's motherhouse after Sister Maité was received as a novice in the community that day. (Submitted photo)

"They will take classes relating to the community history of the Sisters of Providence, Old Testament, New Testament, music, art and spirituality and other important components of

novitiate formation," Sister Norene said. "Additionally, they will join the novices of other communities for weekly classes on different and very important topics for holistic formation through the Intercommunity Novitiate program in Chicago.

"We will join 27 novices and 15 novice directors from eight other communities for the classes."

Sister Norene said they will travel weekly to Chicago for the classes.

"The weekly gatherings for the novices are a good way to build relationships and

hopefully form a strong network serving God's people," Sister Norene said. "And as director of novices, my role is to be the novices' guide, coach, instructor and supervisor.

"I also try to be a 'midwife' for their holistic formation on the journey of becoming forever members of the Sisters of Providence."

During the coming year, both Sister Ann and Sister Maité will begin studying vows for the congregation.

"The goal of the year is to grow in our identity as a Sister of Providence and intimacy with our Creator God," Sister Maité said.

"This novitiate is a stage for me to go deep into the charism, history and legacy of the Sisters of Providence," Sister Ann added. "Furthermore, it is a year to pray and study to know more about God."

(Jason Moon is communications director for the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Women who are interested in religious life are invited to the Sisters of Providence's Come and See weekend retreats. Learn more at ComeandSee.SistersofProvidence.org or contact Vocations Director Providence Sister Joni Luna at 361-500-9505 or jluna@spsmw.org if you think you are being called.) †



Providence Sister Ann Duong, right, a novice of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, poses with Providence Sister Cynthia Lynge, left, Sister Judith Birgin and Sister Nancy Bartosavich on Aug. 24 in the Church of the Immaculate Conception on the grounds of their community's motherhouse. Sister Ann was received as a novice that day in a liturgy in the church. (Submitted photo)

SEMINARIANS

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priests are happy is important. Parents, he noted, sometimes think their sons may be lonely in the priesthood or even unhappy with such a sacrificial life.

"When someone loves something, they desire to share that with others," he said. "Priests are able to experience an intimacy with their friend that is beyond words. Who are we to stand in the way of that happiness of our sons?"

In the end, the seminarians and Father Hosty said praying for vocations and for the men discerning is important.

Father Hosty offered a prayer for vocations in the archdiocese that everyone can say each day:

Almighty Father, you have created us for some

definite purpose. Grant us the grace to know the path you have planned for us in this life and to respond with a generous 'Yes.' Make our archdiocese, parishes, homes and hearts fruitful ground for your gift of vocations. May our young people respond to your call with courage and zeal. Stir among our men a desire and the strength to be good and holy priests. Bless us with the consecrated religious, and those called to a chaste single life, permanent deacons and faithful husbands and wives, who are a sign of Christ's love for his Church. We commend our prayer for vocations to you, Father, with the intercession of Mary our Mother, in the Holy Spirit, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Jennifer Lindberg is a member of St. Mary Parish in North Vernon. For more information about a vocation to the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit HearGodsCall.com.) †



Transitional Deacon Liam Hosty walks in a procession on June 7 going into SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral for the Mass during which he was ordained a priest. He now serves as parochial vicar for St. Ann Parish in Indianapolis and St. Thomas More Parish in Mooresville. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



BOEHM

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was named pastor of St. Mary Parish in Rushville as well.

“That was a difficult transition and one of the toughest years of my life,” he said. “I had to learn to rely on others to get things done and make peace with the fact that I can’t be everywhere at once.”

A ‘delicate balance’

As a self-described control freak, Father Boehm says he spends approximately 25 hours each week organizing his calendar to make sure he is where he needs to be.

On a recent Tuesday, he spent the morning with the students at St. Gabriel School praying the rosary and blessing their new statue of Mary before heading over to Rushville to discuss funeral arrangements with a grieving family.

He stopped by St. Mary School at dismissal to check in with the kids, attended an assortment of meetings, caught up with correspondence and celebrated evening Mass before going home at the end of the day.

Thursdays are his “shift days” when he relocates to his other office and consults the Post-it notes he left for himself the last time he was there. He said it is a delicate balance with each parish having their own subtle nuances that he has to remember through the following Wednesday until it’s time to shift again.

“One thing that keeps me sane in all of this is the Lord’s commitment to me and my commitment to the Lord in prayer,” Father Boehm said.

The other bright points are the school children who offer a welcome reprieve during a long day as well as the parish and school staff who manage the day-to-day operations and get everything done. There are also the dedicated parishioners who readily step up whenever their assistance is required.

Sherry Owen at St. Mary is one such parishioner. She loves the way that Father Boehm encourages the congregation to get involved in existing ministries or to create a new one if they see a need. After conducting a parish survey to connect volunteers with various ministries, she found that there were a handful of ladies who liked to cook, but there was no outlet for their skillset.

“Without missing a beat, Father Dustin said, ‘Let’s start a Hospitality Committee,’ and today, we have 12 ladies who bring

meals to the OCIA [Order of Christian Initiation of Adults] breakfasts. They do the youth ministry gatherings, meet-and-greet events, as well as welcome and going away receptions,” she said. “He let us run with it, and it’s really been a great addition to the parish.”

‘He is one of us’

If any of Father Boehm’s parishioners feel neglected, you’d never know it. In fact, they feel that he is not only an engaged presence in their parishes, but available whenever they need him.

St. Bridget parishioner Amanda Hertel said Father Boehm is like a member of her family, and she appreciates the way he includes stories of his own faults, failures and struggles in his homilies. Not only does it help her relate to the readings during Mass, but it also shows that he is no better or worse than anyone else and that he understands what they may be going through.

“He really does a good job of making us feel like he is one of us,” she said. “Caring for three parishes can’t be easy on him, but he handles it all really well. You never see him without a smile on his face, and he is never too busy to greet you. He always takes the time to make you feel that you matter even when he has so many other people to take care of.”

St. Gabriel parishioner Matthew Biehl, a homeschooled high school sophomore, says Father Boehm has been a mentor to him as he discerns a possible vocation to the priesthood. It’s not only what he shares in their personal conversations, but also by being a good example of who a priest is.

Matthew says Father Boehm really expresses what it means for a priest to



Father Dustin Boehm preaches during a Mass at St. Gabriel Church in Connersville. The liturgy took place during a lock-in event for the parish’s youth group. Father Boehm is pastor of St. Bridget of Ireland Parish in Liberty, St. Gabriel Parish in Connersville and St. Mary Parish in Rushville. (Submitted photo)

give his life to the Church and, more specifically, to his parish.

“I learned from him that being a priest really means giving everything that you have to your parish, and through that giving of yourself, you will find a joy that you can’t find anywhere else.”

‘Just him and me’

Father Boehm agrees that the more he gives in his vocation, the more he gets in return. But he said it’s also important to take the time for self-care and to nurture the relationship at the center of it all—his relationship with God.

Like spouses who fail to connect due to the hustle and bustle of their daily lives, priests also have to work on their relationship with the one who called them to their vocation. And during the National

Eucharistic Congress held in Indianapolis in July 2024, Father Boehm rededicated himself to personal prayer and carving out some one-on-one time with God.

“That had been such a tough year, and I suddenly realized that I can’t do this without prayer,” he said. “My vocation does not happen without a relationship with God. It’s easy to lose sight of that when there are 25 things to do and only 24 hours in a day. So, I have reserved my early morning hours for just him and me, and I trust that he will give me the time to get everything else accomplished.”

(Julie Young is a member of St. Michael Parish in Greenfield. To learn more about a vocation to the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit HearGodsCall.com.) †



Father Dustin Boehm speaks with students of St. Gabriel School in Connersville on May 8 while they watch coverage of the conclave that elected Cardinal Robert F. Prevost as Pope Leo XIV. (Submitted photo)

Video discusses new statue of Mary on grounds of St. Gabriel School

The Oct. 24 issue of *The Criterion* featured photos of Oct. 7 events at St. Gabriel School in Connersville, including the blessing of a new statue of Mary on the school campus.

Scan the QR code or visit tinyurl.com/St-Gabriel-Mary-Statue to listen to St. Gabriel pastor Father Dustin Boehm and school principal Michelle Struewing discuss how the project came to fruition. †





Indy woman seeks to quench her ‘thirst for the living God’ in religious life

By Mary Dando

Special to *The Criterion*

“The idea of being a bride of Christ, the prayer life and the life of service were so powerfully beautiful to me.” These were some of the thoughts of Mercy Sister Maria Guadalupe Figueroa on her journey of discernment to religious life.

Toward the end of college, while finishing her degree in biology and taking prerequisites for an accelerated nursing program in Indianapolis, she began to experience “a restlessness in my heart.” She sensed that if she stayed in Indianapolis, surrounded by family and her faith community, she would never take the next steps to visit religious communities and seriously discern her vocation.

Instead of going on to nursing school, she made “the act of faith” and took a different course. She went to Washington, D.C., to serve the poor as a missionary.

It was there she met members of the Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Mich., and knew that she could live out her vocation to love among these sisters.

Sister Maria Guadalupe, 32, professed her final vows on Aug. 16. Her favorite Scripture passage is inscribed inside the ring she received at the Mass of Final Profession: “A thirst for the living God,” (Ps 42:3).

During her eight years of formation in the Religious Sisters of Mercy leading up to her final profession of vows, Sister Maria Guadalupe completed her nursing degree and is currently taking care of some of the elderly sisters in her religious community’s infirmary.

She is the youngest of five girls and grew up in the inner city of Indianapolis. Her parents, Francisco and Rosalba, moved from Zacatecas, Mexico, to the U.S. in the 1970’s in search of a better life.

“As a little girl, Gabriela was always the first to be ready for Mass. And she encouraged us all to be early for Mass,” remembered her father Francisco, referring to his daughter by her baptismal name. When she entered the Sisters of Mercy, she took on her religious name of Maria Guadalupe.

“At the time, I thought it was like everybody else,” he said. “She was always helping the poor and the homeless.”

Sister Maria Guadalupe grew up as a parishioner of St. Anthony Parish in Indianapolis, where her parents are still members. As a young adult, she often took part in the young adult community



Mercy Sister Maria Guadalupe Figueroa receives with joy the congratulations of a fellow member of the Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Mich., during an Aug. 16 Mass at the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption in Saginaw, Mich., in which Sister Maria Guadalupe professed final vows as a member of the Sisters of Mercy. She grew up as a member of St. Anthony Parish in Indianapolis. (Submitted photo)

at St. John the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis.

When he and his wife dropped her off at the convent in Michigan, Francisco was very sad. “She is my youngest, and I asked God, ‘Why are you taking her away from me?’ But now I am so glad,” he said.

When her parents were crossing the southern border, Rosalba was pregnant with Gabriela, and she prayed to the Blessed Virgin, as a mother, to bring them to safety. “Maybe that was a special blessing she received,” Francisco said.

It was in college that Sister Maria Guadalupe began to discern her vocation through taking steps to grow in her Catholic faith. “As a freshman I was invited to a Catholic Bible study. I had never attended a Bible study so I thought it would be a good idea.

“Through that invitation, I met a

community of young people who loved their faith and were serious about their call to holiness. That sparked an interest and desire to reprioritize my values in making my relationship with the Lord the most important thing in my life.”

Anne Marie Brummer remembers the student, who went by “Gaby,” as full of joy. Brummer was a missionary with the Fellowship of Catholic University Students at the former Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. She helped Catholic students by teaching them how to pray, make the sacraments a part of their life of faith and how to lead Bible study groups.

“Like many others, Gaby was just trying to figure out her life,” recalled Brummer. “She wasn’t particularly religious, but as she got more involved, she was all in in her Catholic faith. She

had such a good heart and gave herself up in the service of others.”

At college, Sister Maria Guadalupe began to think about the possibility of religious life. “As I grew in my relationship with the Lord, I felt that my response to his love needed to be a response of totality. Whenever I read about the lives of the saints who gave everything to the Lord, their example of total self-sacrifice and boundless love just made sense to me.

“I was still in college and didn’t feel the Lord was calling me right then, but I knew religious life was a possibility in the future. I trusted that if I continued being faithful, he would direct my steps.”

When she met some of the members of the Religious Sisters of Mercy in Washington, she felt that she knew them already and she looked them up when she returned home.

“I liked their habit,” she said. She recalled when she was in an airport, a stranger, seeing her in her habit, came up to her and asked for her prayers. “They see the light of Christ in us,” she said.

She visited the sisters in Washington at their convent there. Months later, she made the journey with her parents to enter the community as a postulant.

“The meaning of postulant is to question,” she said. “When you arrive, it’s like getting to know a new family. You grow in the family through the charism of mercy. I was warmly welcomed and knew I was home.

“At first, it’s challenging. But in moments of trial, you realize how much God loves us. You come to understand you have the freedom to choose what Christ chooses. Our Lord is our cornerstone, and through prayer you reflect on yourself and come to know him and accept his invitation to follow him unreservedly.

“I have a deep desire to know God’s love,” she continued, “a desire to serve, faithfully living my vocation, knowing there is spiritual fruitfulness of new life in Christ found through the gift of self.”

(Mary Dando is a member of St. Monica Parish in Indianapolis. To learn about the Religious Sisters of Alma, Mich., visit www.almamercy.org.) †

2025-2026 Seminarians & Religious in Formation Prayer Card

Please pray for the following individuals and intentions on the corresponding day of the month.

1. Pope Leo XIV
2. Archbishop Charles C. Thompson
3. Deacon Samuel Hansen
4. Deacon Timothy Khuishing
5. Deacon Khaing Thu
6. Kristofer Garlitch
7. Lancy Tony
8. Casey Deal
9. Randy Schneider
10. Seth Hickey
11. Robert McKay
12. Hayden Merkel
13. Lucas LaRosa / Sr. Emily Tekolste, SP
14. Luke Roesener / Sr. Jessica Vitente, SP
15. Todd Seiler / Sr. Leslie Dao, SP
16. John Fritch / Sr. Stephanie Marie Rivas, SP
17. Antonio Harbert / Sr. Ann Duong
18. Abraham Hudepohl / Sr. Maité Rodriguez-Mora
19. Nathan Huynh / Sr. Christine Sheehan
20. Josh Russell / Sr. Mary Paul Callahan, FSGM
21. Jack Fraley / Sr. Maria Gemma Barnett, SOLT
22. Dominic Pavey / Sr. Mary Francis Noll
23. Ethan Kawaguchi / Kristin Foresman
24. Dean Cheever / Emma Schuler
25. Max Ecoff / Br. Jude Angel Romero-Olivas, OSB
26. Simon Kempf / Br. Ambrose Brahm, OSB
27. Paul Weckenbrock / Br. George Meredith, OSB
28. Douglas Allison, OSB / Keegan Porter, OSB
29. Br. Benjamin Sasin, CSC / Ben Jansen, SJ
30. Taylor Fulkerson, SJ / Br. Thomas Goble
31. For Vocations to the Priesthood and Consecrated Life

For information on the Seminarians and Religious in Formation from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit www.HearGodsCall.com

PRAY FOR VOCATIONS





Monk finds his Benedictine vocation through prayer, community and art

By Sean Gallagher

ST. MEINRAD—Benedictine Brother Jean Fish was a teenager growing up in southern California in 2007 when his father Michael Fish woke him up early to drive him to Prince of Peace Abbey near San Diego so his son could experience and take part in the monks' Vigils and Lauds, two parts of the Liturgy of the Hours prayed at the start of the day.

His father had previously been on retreat at the monastery as a deacon candidate for the Diocese of San Diego and wanted his son to experience the quiet early morning prayer of the monastic community. He was ordained a deacon in 2010.

"The liturgy starts and immediately I kind of get this feeling of, 'Where's this been my whole life?'" recalled Brother Jean. "It was something special and my first experience of something like this spiritually. The second thought was, 'I wish I could do this all the time.'"

That desire turned into reality seven years later in 2014 when he entered Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad. He became a novice there the following year, professed temporary vows in 2016 and solemn vows in 2019.

'There was an immediate sense that this was home'

The groundwork for his openness to his Benedictine vocation was prepared in part during the two-year program he took part in as a teenager at his parish to be formed for the sacrament of confirmation. His parents were also helpful in supporting him in his discernment.



Deacon Michael Fish and his son, Benedictine Brother Jean Fish, pose on Sept. 25 in the Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln in St. Meinrad. Deacon Fish serves at St. Meinrad Parish in St. Meinrad and St. Boniface Parish in Fulda. Brother Jean is a member of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in Saint Meinrad. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

After being confirmed, Brother Jean was active in his parish's youth group and helped to lead it. This led to thoughts of a possible priestly or religious vocation.

"I knew that I wanted to dedicate my life to the Church in some way, possibly," Brother Jean remembered.

In an interview with *The Criterion*, the father and son recalled the moment when Brother Jean told his parents his thoughts.

"It was after dinner," said Brother Jean.

"We were sitting at the table and he says to us, 'I want to be a priest.' He was in tears," said Deacon Fish.

"I remember that," added Brother Jean, looking at his father.

His parents were supportive of his discernment but asked him to earn an undergraduate degree first, which Brother Jean did at Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park, Calif.

"If it was an authentic calling, it would still be there," said Deacon Fish. "And I said I would do everything I could in my power to help him achieve that."

"The openness of him supporting me in any way was completely the truth," Brother Jean said, recalling that his father helped him "not be afraid of who I am."

Brother Jean also saw things he desired in his own life when his father discerned his own calling as a permanent deacon when Brother Jean was a teenager. He also witnessed it in his father's participation in the San Diego Diocese's deacon formation program.

"Being a young adult, the main thing that you're seeking is purpose—purpose in the relationships that you have with other people," Brother Jean said, "but also kind of the trajectory of my life and what am I aiming toward."

He also appreciated the "sense of joy" and "sense of purpose" he saw in his father in his life and ministry as a deacon.

"The sense of joy had an energizing quality that came with that vocation," Brother Jean said. "It was very attractive to me as a young person trying to figure out where was I going."

He ended up going to lots of places, physically and virtually, in his discernment of a possible religious vocation, taking trips to monasteries in California. But viewing a video on Saint Meinrad Archabbey's website attracted him more than anything had prior. He noted that he was "impressed by how genuine everyone was in that video."



Benedictine Brother Jean Fish works on Oct. 10 on a piece of woven art on the grounds of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad. (Photo courtesy of Saint Meinrad Archabbey)

Brother Jean first visited Saint Meinrad in May 2014.

"There was an immediate sense that this was home," Brother Jean recalled.

'We were on our journey together'

After his first visit, Brother Jean soon started the application process to join the monastery. He moved in five months later in October.

And in the home he had discovered in May, he soon found a family. There were other men around his age in formation in the monastery. Although they did not know each other before coming to the monastery, they supported each other well in the months and years to come.

"We were on our journey together," Brother Jean said. "On Wednesday nights, we'd either just sit around and talk about how things were going or we would play board games. We were also hanging out on Saturday nights and Sunday nights. We really got along."

They also prayed together with the rest of the monastic community several times a day in the Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln in the kind of prayer that had been such a draw to Brother Jean as a teenager.

He described the Liturgy of the Hours that the monks pray together at different

points of the day, from morning to night, as "opportunities to breathe."

"It's a place of rest and peace," he said. "Despite everything else that is going on, it's a place that we come to together that has a sense of peace and rest. It really is kind of this refuge that we kind of return to."

Bring peace to daily life through art

In addition to the community life and prayer leading him closer to God in his Benedictine vocation, Brother Jean has also found art as a pathway to holiness.

In college, he took an interest in creating geometric patterns as a hobby. "I forced myself to draw straight lines freehand," Brother Jean said. "That meant that I had to control my breathing. The process of creating these patterns was greatly meditative. It brought a profound sense of peace when dealing with the business of full-time studies."

After professing solemn vows, he studied art at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, earning a bachelor's degree in fine arts, focusing in particular on sculpture. At Saint Meinrad, he creates woven basket sculptures and teaches others the craft.

"Art was one of the ways that I navigated my own monastic identity,"

See MONK on next page

Long journey of faith leads deacon from atheism to service in the Church

By Sean Gallagher

ST. MEINRAD—A quarter of a century ago, Deacon Michael Fish couldn't have imagined himself believing in God, let alone serving the Church as a deacon.

In the spring of 2000, he set out on a journey of faith, vocation and ministry that led him and his wife Joy from their home in southern California to southern Indiana.

Along the way, Deacon Fish turned away from a life devoid of God to embrace a life wholly shaped by trust in him. He later discerned that God was calling him to serve the Church as a permanent deacon, being ordained in the Diocese of San Diego in 2010—a decade after his journey of faith had begun.

The path that led him and Joy to southern Indiana was shaped by another journey of faith—that of their son, Benedictine Brother Jean Fish when he discerned his vocation as a monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad. (See article above.)

They moved to St. Meinrad in 2023, and Deacon Fish

has been serving in St. Boniface Parish in Fulda and St. Meinrad Parish in St. Meinrad for the past 18 months.

'I was blown away with who this Jesus was and what he said'

Deacon Fish grew up in southern California in a Jewish family. After taking part in his *bar mitzvah* when he was 13, he told his parents that he was no longer going to practice his Jewish faith, a decision which they accepted.

"For most of my adult life, I was, I would say, an atheist," said Deacon Fish, 67, in an interview with *The Criterion*. "I had no God in my life, no faith at all."

He and his wife Joy, born and raised a Catholic, married in 1980 in a civil ceremony. "I refused to get married in a church," he said.

Deacon Fish and Joy have two sons—Scott, born in 1987, and Benedictine Brother Jean, born in 1990.

While Deacon Fish continued to reject any form of faith in God for himself, he allowed Joy to raise their

sons as Catholics. In fact, he wanted the faith to be a part of their lives.

"I wanted my children to have what I lacked," he said.

But when Scott was 13—the same age at which Deacon Fish had rejected his own Jewish faith—he announced to his father one Sunday morning that he was no longer going to Mass.

"I don't know where this came from, but I looked at him and I said, 'Well, I'm going to go. And if I go, you go,'" Deacon Fish recalled of his response to Scott's announcement 25 years ago. "That's how important it was to me that he have faith in his life and have God in his life."

So, for the first time in his 20 years of being married to Joy, Deacon Fish attended Mass and continued to do so to provide a good example for Scott.

After about a month, Deacon Fish's attending Mass with his family started to have an effect on him.

"I left the church and I just felt wonderful," he said. "I felt incredible, actually."

See DEACON on next page



MONK

continued from previous page

Brother Jean said. “It created a space where I could be introspective. But it was also a way to share something with others as a sign of love and gratitude.

“Because art had been a great source of peace for me, there was that desire to share that peace with others. So, I began to see art as being something that could be a ministry, too. Similar to what initially impressed me about Benedictine liturgy, art was profoundly personal, but also communal.”

He shares his art not only with his fellow monks. It’s also available to the many visitors who come to Saint Meinrad.

“A common comment from guests is that Saint Meinrad’s quiet atmosphere and prayer can be a place to find peace and recharge,” Brother Jean said. “Art is something that guests can take back with them to continue that experience. One of the joys of teaching art has been showing others that peace can be accessible during their daily lives.”

Brother Jean seeks out that peace in his own daily life as a monk, including in his artistic work. For him, it’s a process

that takes a while to come to fruition and requires patience.

“When making art, there is a phase of imperfection, where the zeal of starting has passed and the beauty of a finished artwork seems distant,” he said. “There is the need to trust the process.”

The process, whether in creating a work of art, or cooperating with God’s grace in his ongoing creation of himself as a work of art of God in his life, requires faith and hope.

“The artist has a vision of the artwork in completion, but there has to be the faith and hope that such a vision is truly attainable,” Brother Jean said. “When speaking of beautiful art, its creation becomes a sign of both gratitude and love.

“If the goal of monastic life is to provide opportunities of conversion so as to prepare us for heaven, then artwork can draw our attention to that goal. To live a life of faith, hope and love is the way of Christ. Art provides an opportunity to ask how those values are being lived.”

(To learn more about a vocation as a Benedictine monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad, visit www.saintmeinrad.org.) †



This is a completed work of woven art created by Benedictine Brother Jean Fish, a member of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad. (Photo courtesy of Saint Meinrad Archabbey)

DEACON

continued from previous page

Deacon Fish had begun to believe in God. Yet he kept the beginnings of his belief to himself, not speaking of it even to Joy because he wasn’t sure if it would last.

But he soon ordered a Bible and had it delivered to the law firm where he worked as an attorney.

“It was a version where the words of Jesus were in red,” Deacon Fish explained. “And so I went right to the New Testament, which I’d never even heard of before, or read. I shut my door, and I spent the next eight hours reading everything in red. That’s all I did from Matthew to John, everything that Jesus said.”

The effect this had on him was clear.

“You could have picked me up off the floor,” Deacon Fish said. “I was blown away with who this Jesus was and what he said.”

He wasn’t the only person blown away by the entrance of God into his life.

“I was blown away,” said Joy, recalling when her husband told her that he had contacted her parish about taking part in what was then known as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). “He had been so adamant about having no religion before. Then, it was just like, boom, God hit him all of a sudden on his head.”



Joy Fish

‘I don’t know why you did this to me’

After first coming to believe in God, Deacon Fish dove in headfirst, learning as much as he could about the Catholic faith as quickly as he could.

Joy attended the RCIA sessions with him. It was an occasion for her to reinvigorate her own faith—and her relationship with her husband at

the same time.

“He had all these questions, and he was doing all this reading,” she said. “I thought that I had to catch up. He knew more than I did. It was kind of a renewal for us in our marriage. We had something that was exciting to talk about.”

On April 22, 2000, Deacon Fish was received into the Church through the sacraments of initiation in a social hall at St. Gabriel Parish in Poway, Calif. The parish had not built its own church yet, so he was baptized in what he recalled as “a Walmart wading pool.”

“But, for me, it could have been the Jordan River,” Deacon Fish said. “I would have crawled on my knees to the parish to be baptized, if that’s what it took.”

Deacon Fish and Joy had their marriage convalidated in the Church soon after he was received into the Church.

He enjoyed RCIA so much in preparation for his own reception into the Church that he again took part in its sessions the next year at his parish. Then he started teaching in it and leading the parish RCIA program.

“Then a year later, I’m sitting in the back of the church and [my pastor] comes up to me and he says, ‘I want you to be a deacon,’ ” Deacon Fish remembered. “I had no idea what he was talking about.”

But, just like when he first explored the faith, he began learning about the diaconate. He also soon learned from



Deacon Michael Fish preaches a homily on Sept. 28 at a Mass at St. Boniface Church in Fulda. (Submitted Photo)

the San Diego Diocese’s deacon office that he was too new in the faith to begin its deacon formation program.

“A couple of years later, the pastor came up to me and he says, ‘OK. It’s time. Call again,’ ” Deacon Fish said.

This time, in 2005, he was accepted into the diocese’s deacon formation program and was ordained five years later.

Joy accompanied Deacon Fish through all of his deacon formation classes. The experience strengthened their marriage just as her attending RCIA sessions had years earlier.

“We’d get out of class at 9 [o’clock] at night, we’d drive home, and we would talk all the way,” she said. “And then when we’d get home, we’d talk for hours about what we had learned. He had questions, and I had questions.”

As he approached his ordination, Deacon Fish experienced awe in the face of the journey that God had taken him on, but also determined to follow God’s call in his life.

“I said to the Lord, I said, ‘I don’t know why you did this to me. But ... I’m ready,’ ” Deacon Fish recalled. “That’s how I always viewed it. This was the journey that I was supposed to be on.”

‘You are what you do’

That journey was affected by his life leading up to the start of it. And a large part of Deacon Fish’s life has been practicing law. He sees his work as an attorney as having had a good influence on his life and ministry as a deacon—especially in teaching and preaching.

“The art of lawyering is to take difficult concepts, either in the facts of the case or the law, and simplify them so that non-lawyers [jurors] or judges not familiar with that aspect of the law can readily grasp the relevant principles,” he said. “In much the same way, the art of teaching and preaching is to take difficult concepts, such as the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and simplify them so that they are meaningful to the people.”

And after having had such a powerful experience of baptism in his own life, Deacon Fish values preparing people for that sacrament and celebrating it. He keeps a list of the nearly 400 people he’s baptized, most of them infants, since he was ordained.

“I can’t tell you how sacraments work, but I can tell you they do change a person, because I experienced that as an adult,” he said. “How does this water with this prayer and this intention—how does that work? I have no idea, but I can tell you it does, because I’ve experienced that. I really was a different person after I was baptized. I could feel that.”

And he knows that he became a different person after he was ordained a deacon in 2010.

“You’re drawn to it because you are what you do,” Deacon Fish said. “You are what you think. And the more you visit the sick or participate in liturgy or whatever you do as a deacon, that becomes more who you are.”

(For more information on a vocation to the diaconate in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, go to archindy.org/deacon.) †



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VOCATIONAL SYNTHESIS STAGE



Deacon Samuel Hansen '26
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Roch, Indianapolis



Deacon Timothy Khuishing '26
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Mark the Evangelist,
Indianapolis



Deacon Khaing Thu '26
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Mark the Evangelist,
Indianapolis



Kristofer Garlitch '27
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Mary, North Vernon



Lance Tony '27
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Simon the Apostle, Indianapolis
*Co-sponsored with the Diocese of
Palayamkottai



Casey Deal '28
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Charles Borromeo,
Bloomington

CONFIGURATION STAGE



Randy Schneider '28
Saint Meinrad Seminary
All Saints, Dearborn County



Seth Hickey '29
Saint Meinrad Seminary
Mary Queen of Peace, Danville



Robert McKay '29
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Ann, Indianapolis



Hayden Merkel '29
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Mary, Aurora



Lucas LaRosa '30
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Barnabas, Indianapolis



Luke Roesener '30
Saint Meinrad Seminary
Holy Family, Oldenburg

DISCIPLESHIP STAGE



Todd Seiler '30
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Mary, Aurora



John Fritch '31
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Martin of Tours,
Martinsville



Antonio Harbert '31
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
St. Joseph, Shelbyville



Abraham Hudepohl '31
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
St. Nicholas, Sunman



Nathan Huynh '31
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
Our Lady of Perpetual Help,
New Albany



Josh Russell '31
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
Holy Family, New Albany



Jack Fraley '32
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
St. Gabriel, Connersville



Dominic Pavey '32
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
Holy Rosary, Indianapolis

PROPAEDEUTIC STAGE



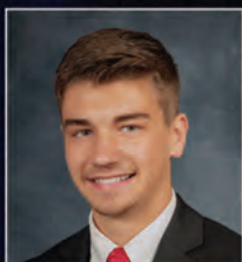
Ethan Kawaguchi '32
Saint Meinrad Seminary
St. Louis, Batesville



Dean Cheever '33
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
St. Therese of the Infant Jesus
(Little Flower), Indianapolis



Max Ecoff '33
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Holy Rosary, Indianapolis



Simon Kempf '33
Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary
Holy Rosary, Indianapolis



Paul Weckenbrock '33
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Pope Leo XIV
Elected May 8, 2025





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St. Anthony, Indianapolis
Temporary professed



Sr. Jessica Vitente, SP
Sisters of Providence,
St.-Mary-of-the-Woods
Temporary professed



Pope Leo XIV
Elected May 8, 2025



Sr. Leslie Dao, SP
Sisters of Providence,
St.-Mary-of-the-Woods
Temporary professed



**Sr. Stephanie
Marie Rivas, SP**
Sisters of Providence,
St.-Mary-of-the-Woods
Novice



Sr. Ann Duong
Sisters of Providence,
St.-Mary-of-the-Woods
Novice



Sr. Maité Rodriguez-Mora
Sisters of Providence,
St.-Mary-of-the-Woods
Novice



Sr. Christine Sheehan
Sisters of St. Francis of
Perpetual Adoration
Holy Rosary, Indianapolis
Postulant



**Sr. Mary Paul
Callahan, FSGM**
Sisters of St. Francis of the
Martyr St. George
St. Joseph University Parish,
Terre Haute
Temporary professed



**Sr. Maria Gemma
Barnett, SOLT**
Society of Our Lady of the
Most Holy Trinity
St. Charles Borromeo,
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Temporary professed



Sr. Mary Francis Noll
Nashville Dominican
Sisters of St. Cecilia
Our Lady of Perpetual Help,
New Albany
Novice



Kristin Foresman
Mercedarian Sisters of the
Blessed Sacrament
St. Mark, Indianapolis
Postulant



Emma Schuler
Dominican Sisters of Mary,
Mother of the Eucharist
St. Paul Catholic Church
Bloomington, Indiana
Postulant



**Br. Jude Angel
Romero-Olivas, OSB**
Saint Meinrad Archabbey
St. Meinrad, IN
Temporary professed



Br. Ambrose Brahm, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey
St. Meinrad, IN
Temporary professed



Br. George Meredith, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey
St. Meinrad, IN
Temporary professed



Douglas Allison, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey
St. Meinrad, IN
Novice



Keegan Porter, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey
St. Meinrad, IN
Novice



Br. Benjamin Sasin, CSC
Congregation of Holy Cross,
United States Province of
Priests and Brothers
St. John the Evangelist,
Indianapolis
Temporary professed



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Society of Jesus-
Midwest Jesuits
SS. Francis and Clare,
Greenwood
Philosophy studies



Taylor Fulkerson, SJ
Society of Jesus-
Midwest Jesuits
St. Mary, Lanesville
Theology



Br. Thomas Goble
Dominicans of the Province of
St. Albert the Great.
St. Bartholomew, Columbus
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Three transitional deacons ordained for the archdiocese on Oct. 25

Criterion staff report

Three archdiocesan seminarians were ordained as transitional deacons on Oct. 25 at the Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln in St. Meinrad.

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson ordained Deacon Samuel Hansen, a member of St. Roch Parish in Indianapolis, and Deacon Timothy Khuishing and Deacon

Khaing Thu, both members of St. Mark the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis.

The transitional deacons are expected to be ordained as priests for the archdiocese next June.

After their priestly formation at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad concludes in December, the three deacons will minister in archdiocesan parishes in the months

leading up to their priestly ordination.

(For more photos from the ordination, visit www.CriterionOnline.com or the archdiocesan social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn or X. For more information about a vocation to the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit www.HearGodsCall.com.) †



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, second from right, poses with three archdiocesan seminarians he ordained as transitional deacons on Oct. 25 at the Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln. The deacons are, from left, Deacon Timothy Khuishing, Deacon Samuel Hansen and Deacon Khaing Thu.

(Photos courtesy of Saint Meinrad Archabbey)



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson ritually lays hands on the head of archdiocesan seminarian Samuel Hansen during the Oct. 25 Mass in which Hansen was ordained a transitional deacon.



Transitional Deacon Khaing Thu gives Communion to his father, Victor Kolo, during the Oct. 25 Mass in which Thu was ordained a transitional deacon.

Right, transitional Deacon Timothy Khuishing ritually receives a Book of the Gospels from Archbishop Charles C. Thompson during the Oct. 25 Mass in which Khuishing was ordained a transitional deacon. Assisting at the liturgy is seminarian Lance Tony, center. He is co-sponsored by the archdiocese and the Diocese of Palayamkottai, India.

