

Called by God

A special section to honor priests and religious and to promote vocations

The Diocese of Knoxville

May 2007

2007 ordinands are older, well educated

Those to become priests this year have varied backgrounds and an average age of 35.

WASHINGTON—The average age of U.S. men ordained in the United States to the Catholic priesthood in 2007 is 35, and one in three is foreign born. In addition, most entered the seminary with a college diploma and some have advanced degrees in law, medicine, or education.

The information was compiled by the Georgetown University-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) for "The Class of 2007: Survey of Ordinands to the Priesthood." CARA conducts the survey annually for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Vocations and Priestly Formation.

Researchers gathered information from 282 seminarians, estimated to be approximately 60 percent of the 475 potential ordinands. Among the 282 men are 221 ordinands to the diocesan priesthood and 60 to the religious priesthood.

Major findings were that

- The average age of ordinands for the class of 2007 is 35, approximately the same as in 1998, the first year for which data are available.
- On average, diocesan ordinands lived in the diocese for which they will be ordained for 17 years before entering the seminary. Religious ordinands knew the

(31 percent) is nearly the same as in 2006 (30 percent), but it has increased from the 24 percent reported in 1998. On average, responding ordinands who were born outside the United States have lived here 10 years.

- Nearly all ordinands have been Catholic since infancy, although 6 percent became Catholic later in life.

- More than six in 10 ordinands completed college, and one in five earned a graduate degree before entering the seminary.

- Half of responding ordinands attended a Catholic elementary school, as have almost half of U.S. Catholic adults. Ordinands are somewhat more likely than other U.S. Catholic adults to have attended a Catholic high school. They are much more likely than other U.S. Catholics to have attended a Catholic college.

- About two-thirds of ordinands report having full-time work experience before entering the seminary, most often in education. Slightly less than one in 10 has served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

- On average, the responding ordinands report that they were about 17 and a half when they first considered priesthood as a vocation.

The complete report can be found at www.usccb.org/vocations.



The men in this year's ordination class have a vast range of experiences and interests. Their hobbies and past professions include bungee jumping, professional golf, marathoning, computer programming, architecture, and whitewater rafting, to name a few.

The men behind the collars

Several dozen of the men to be ordained priests this summer were recently asked to complete the sentence "People would be surprised to know that I . . ." Here are some of the ordinands' answers:

used to play heavy metal guitar in a band

love to watch the Food Network

was a practicing physician (radiologist) before entering the seminary

enjoy riding roller coasters and visiting theme parks

was terrified of public speaking during my high school days

taught history dressed up as Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and James Madison for my job as a historical interpreter at the American Village in Montevallo, Ala.

have completed nine marathons in the last six years. I love to play golf and follow the Boston Red Sox. While in the seminary I have continued to play (men's leagues) and coach hockey (high school).

am a graduate of the Juilliard School and performed with many symphony orchestras in the New York area. I played the double bass for the Long Island Philharmonic for 13 years before entering the seminary.

enjoy extreme skating and once installed and maintained a supercomputer at a large university

was named a vice president at an advertising agency just as I finally realized that my true vocation was to the priesthood

graduated from a cooking school

have thought about the priesthood since my first Communion

Surprised continued on page 7



Pictured a few hours after his ordination Oct. 28, new Deacon Randy Stice (right) talks with Father George Schmidt, pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Chattanooga. Deacon Stice was ordained at Mundelein Seminary in Illinois.

members of their religious institute an average of six years before they entered the seminary.

- Seven in 10 responding ordinands report their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian, European American, or white. Compared with the U.S. adult Catholic population in general, ordinands are more likely to be Asian but less likely to be Hispanic/Latino. Religious ordinands are less likely than diocesan ordinands or the U.S. adult Catholic population to report their race or ethnicity as Caucasian/European American/white.

- One in three ordinands was born outside the United States, with the largest numbers coming from Vietnam, Mexico, Poland, and the Philippines. Religious are more likely than diocesan ordinands to be foreign-born. The percentage that is foreign-born

Half of the ordinands are age 32 or older. Thirty-six percent of men ordained for dioceses were between the ages of 25 and 29. Three percent were 60 or older.

Ordinands to the diocesan priesthood approximately reflect the race and ethnic diversity of the U.S. adult Catholic population. Ordinands to the religious priesthood are more likely than the U.S. adult Catholic population to be Asian/Pacific Islander or Hispanic/Latino.

Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian ordinands are over-represented among survey respondents, relative to their proportion of the U.S. adult Catholic population, whereas Hispanic/Latinos are under-represented. Asians/Pacific Islanders constitute 3 percent of U.S. Catholics overall but 11 percent of responding ordinands. By contrast,



A few minutes before his ordination as a deacon, Patrick Resen promises obedience to Bishop Joseph E. Kurtz. The Mass was held Nov. 18 at St. Patrick Church in Morristown. Deacon Resen and the other men whose photographs appear on this page will be ordained to the priesthood June 2.

Hispanics/Latinos constitute approximately 36 percent of U.S. adult Catholics (CARA Catholic Poll, 2005) but only 11 percent of responding ordinands identified themselves as African/African-American or black, the same percentage of African-Americans as among U.S. Catholics.

Among ordinands who became Catholic later in life, the average age of conversion was 26. Those who converted from another faith or Christian community are about evenly divided between those who came from a mainline Protestant tradition (Episcopalian, Methodist, Anglican) and those who came from an evangelical or conservative Protestant tradition (Evangelical, Pentecostal, Nazarene, Southern Baptist). One ordinand converted from Buddhism.

Half of responding ordinands attended a Catholic elementary school. More than a third attended a Catholic high school, and two in five attended a Catholic college.

Ordinands are not significantly more likely than other U.S. Catholics to have attended a Catholic elementary school. In a 2007 national telephone poll conducted by CARA, 49 percent of U.S. adult Catholics report having attended a Catholic elementary school, compared with 50 percent of ordinands who have done so. By contrast, ordinands are somewhat more likely than other Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (36 percent of ordinands, compared with 23 percent of U.S. adult Catholics) and much more likely to have attended a Catholic college (42 percent of ordinands, compared with just 8 percent of U.S. adult Catholics). Compared with diocesan ordinands, religious ordinands are more likely to have attended a Catholic high school but less likely to have attended a Catholic college.

Only 2 percent of ordinands (four diocesan and two religious ordinands) report having been home-schooled at some time.

Ordinands continued on page 6



New Deacon Bill McNeeley is vested Aug. 19 by Father Joe Ciccone, CSP, the pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Knoxville, the site of the ordination and of Deacon McNeeley's entrance into the Catholic Church in 2001.

A message from Bishop Joseph E. Kurtz

My dear faithful people: "We love our priests, deacons, and religious!" These words echo in virtually every visit I make to a parish as I move throughout our diocese. People love those who serve now and in the future.

I welcome you to this third annual vocations supplement, in which we hold up in gratitude the life and service of those who live in your midst as men and women of the consecrated life, deacons, and priests. As we honor those celebrating anniversaries this year, we thank God for their zeal and holiness, so evident in their years of faithful service. Join with me in honoring those priests and women and men of the consecrated life who celebrate significant anniversaries in 2007.

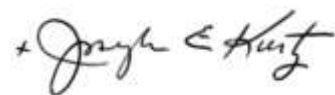
We also hope that, as we pause to say thank-you for religious vocations, we might continue to be blessed by the Lord with a generous "yes" from those men and women he is calling. This year of our Lord 2007 will witness the ordination of three priests, three deacons on the path to the priesthood, and 29 deacons who will serve as such for the rest of their lives. Each day I hear of men and women attracted to the consecrated life, and interest in the seminary is building. Pray for continued openness to a generous "yes," surely the work of the Holy Spirit, from those being called to holy orders and the consecrated life.

I have asked Father Michael Cummins to explore expanding our diocesan program of discernment as well as the possible establishment of a house of discernment to assist young men contemplating a vocation to the priesthood but not yet prepared to apply to the seminary. Please pray for these efforts.

As I did last year, I ask that you, the faithful reader of *The East Tennessee Catholic*, look through these pages carefully. Consider those whom you know and who have served you. As you pray in thanksgiving for them, I invite you to send a note of thanksgiving to them. Your prayers and words of gratitude will be greatly appreciated.

In closing, allow me to extend a word of sincere congratulations and prayer to those who are honored this year and to their families and loved ones. Thank you for saying "yes" to the Lord in embracing your vocation in the church. Thank you for saying "yes" each day! ■

Sincerely yours in our Lord,



The Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D.
Bishop of Knoxville



'Open your heart to the call of love'

Priests celebrating significant anniversaries reflect on the gift of their vocation.

Eleven priests in the Diocese of Knoxville are celebrating a significant anniversary of ordination in 2007, ranging from golden jubilarian Father Evan Eckhoff, OFM, to Father Mark Scholz, whose fifth anniversary is this year.

Each of the priests recently answered several questions for us about his vocation and anniversary, and below are excerpts. We wish each man a happy anniversary and many blessings.

Father Evan Eckhoff, OFM, chaplain, St. Mary's Health System; ordained June 24, 1957, at St. Francis of Assisi Church, Teutopolis, Ill.

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: The gift of perseverance in my vocation is a wonderful sign of God's providential presence in my life. . . . The Fran-

ciscans of the Sacred Heart Province deserve multiple thanks for accepting me as well as for fraternal support. My parents, Marie and Joseph, deserve a lot of credit for the many ways that they shaped my life.

Q: What is your greatest challenge?

A: To stay focused on the Lord Jesus and his mission. This challenge arises from the temptation to put prayer on the back burner and just get too busy.

Q: How will you celebrate your anniversary?

A: A celebration is planned for 7 p.m. Monday, June 25, at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Q: Who inspired you to become a priest?

A: The priesthood was very much present in my consciousness since my father's two brothers were diocesan priests. The elder of the two baptized me and became my godfather. In addition, there was an assistant at the family parish who instructed altar servers. It was he who paired me with another boy, and we became the acolytes who led the first Communion classes to church, and he trained us for solemn Masses. Bishop Fulton Sheen was also a great inspiration for me in the '40s.

Q: What advice would you offer a young man discerning a call to the priesthood?

A: Discernment is a process. Sometimes it takes more time than expected. In this process, prayer for enlightenment is necessary. . . . The desire to be a priest is a real gift from God, a "pearl of great price."

Father Greg Neuzil, retired and living outside the diocese; ordained May 25, 1967, at St. John the Baptist Church, Silver Spring, Md.

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: The people I have been privileged to serve and especially for those most fragile and vulnerable. Certainly I am grateful to my bishops and fellow priests and deacons.

Q: What is your greatest challenge?

A: To continue to stretch and grow in my ministry, to be open to continual spiritual guidance and mentoring from those so gifted, and to be generous, to serve these areas, so that I can stay on track in responding to God's continuous call within my vocation to the priesthood.

Q: Who inspired you to become a priest?

A: My pastor, Father Anthony B. Orlemanski, of Corpus Christi Church, Cleveland, Ohio, was a tremendous model and inspiration for me to the priesthood. My own parents and my aunt, Sister Mildred Neuzil, who was a dedicated Sister of the Most Precious Blood, were also great inspirations for me in the spiritual life.

Q: What advice would you offer a young

man discerning a call to the priesthood?

A: Respond to that call, realizing that God knew you through and through even when you were still in the womb. God loves you so much and calls you to become a light in the darkness for others. . . . If the priesthood is your calling and you respond, a happiness and a joy will be yours in this life and in the life to come.

Bishop Joseph E. Kurtz, ordained to the priesthood March 18, 1972, at the Cathedral of St. Catharine of Siena, Allentown, Pa.; elevated to monsignor in 1986; ordained bishop of Knoxville on Dec. 8, 1999, at the Knoxville Convention Center

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: My family gave me a picture of God, who is loving, and inspired me to serve him and his people. My life and service as a priest have been so full and enriching for me. Christ has placed in my life friends as well as those who have enriched me from a distance. My seven years as bishop have been rich in the Lord's gift of friends in the Lord.

Q: What is your greatest challenge?

A: In the midst of the great cultural adversity, not to forget that God is in charge and that he is to be my source of strength and hope. When I trust in the Lord, I see him alive in so many people today and am filled with an even deeper hope for the church and for the world.

Q: How did you celebrate your anniversary?

A: [For] the actual anniversary, by celebrating Mass at the cathedral and enjoying a brunch with Dave and [bishop's executive secretary] Nancy Feist and their family.

Q: Who inspired you to become a priest?

A: The influence of our parish priest [Father Stephen Valosak] was profound. Though he was not what I would call a friend of the family who dined with us, he was a steady influence, and we had great respect for him.

Younger priests at the parish near my home were also a great influence, as I saw them as real people and people to respect.

Q: What advice would you offer a young man discerning a call to the priesthood?

A: I would tell the young man, "Give it a try!" My seminary days had a tremendous effect on me and helped me discern God's plan and prepare for it well. I would not hesitate in telling a young man to follow that inner voice and allow others, such as seminary faculty and formation teams, to help sharpen that voice, for often that inner voice calling one to Christ is the voice of Christ himself.

Father Al Humbrecht, pastor, Sacred Heart Cathedral, and dean of the Smoky Mountain Deanery; ordained May 6, 1972, at St. Henry Church, Nashville

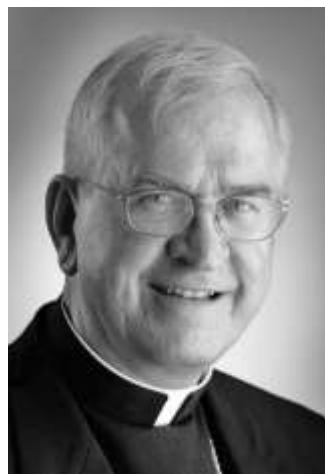
Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: The people who encouraged my vocation through the growing-up years and during seminary, and I'm grateful for the people who have supported that vocation over these 35 years of priesthood.

Q: What is your greatest challenge?

A: One is when you're comfortable in one place and then it's time to move on to another place—the readjustment, new people. People everywhere have been so good that they make the adjustment easier, but it's still an uprooting.

Q: How did you celebrate your anniversary?



Bishop Joseph E. Kurtz

A: The parish had a celebration in the pavilion [May 6]. It was coordinated between our Hispanic and our Anglo communities. It was really a wonderful blending of the two communities as well as our Asian community.

Q: Who inspired you to become a priest?

A: Monsignor Joe Siener, who was pastor while I was growing up in Holy Name Parish in Nashville, was a tremendous inspiration. Also the Dominican Sisters I had in grade school and in particular Sister Mary Philip, who was my eighth-grade teacher. She told me I was going to become a priest, and I told her I was not, but she prayed.

Q: What advice would you offer to a young man discerning a call to the priesthood today?

A: Truly be open to the many ways God may be issuing that call, and don't expect handwriting on the wall. That call more than likely will be coming to you through other people who recognize the talents and gifts God has given you and offering you an opportunity to give those gifts back to the Lord in service to the church.

Father Joe Brando, pastor, St. Jude Parish, Chattanooga; ordained June 3, 1972, at Sts. Peter and Paul Church, Chattanooga

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: Everything. The people who have been put in my life have made a great deal of difference to me. The priests in this diocese were very welcoming people to me. The Marriage Encounter community in Tennessee has been a life-giving force in my life and also the Cursillo community.

Q: What is your greatest challenge?

A: Trying to guide people in the right direction, which is still somewhat difficult for me.

Q: How will you celebrate your anniversary?

A: Something's going on at the church Sunday afternoon, June 3, but it's secret, I think.

Q: Who inspired you to become a priest?

A: Two groups of people. One is the nuns who taught me, the Sisters of Charity of Halifax, Nova Scotia, in Brooklyn, N.Y. And the priests in my parish, Our Lady of Angels in Brooklyn. [They inspired] just by being great people, being servers. These folks were people I admired. They were really human people as well as the kind of person a kid could admire.

Q: What advice would you offer to a young man discerning a call to the priesthood?

A: Basically to follow it, pursue it, pray over it, talk to people about it, don't keep it to yourself.

Father Bill McKenzie, pastor, St. Mary Parish, Oak Ridge; ordained Feb. 19, 1982, at Christ the King Church, Nashville

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: God's infinite love and patience, which have allowed me to grow in response to my vocation. A vocation, in all forms—

priesthood, consecrated life, or marriage—is an ever-growing part of faith that must be nourished and cared for to survive and flourish. Outside of God's gifts it remains only an action in word, but with God it is a road to salvation.

Q: What is your greatest challenge?

A: Always being open to God's grace. In the constant barrage of opinions, practices, faith struggles, pains, and losses, it is only God's grace that makes sense.

Q: How did you celebrate your anniversary?

Priest anniversaries continued on page 4



Father Joe Brando



Father Bill McKenzie

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Bishop Joseph E. Kurtz, publisher; Mary C. Weaver, editor; Dan McWilliams, assistant editor; Margaret Hunt, administrative assistant

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MARY C. WEINER

A number of religious brothers and sisters of the diocese recently gathered at the home of Bishop Joseph E. Kurtz for prayer, fellowship, and a meal. On the bishop's deck are (from left) Brother Edward Yochim, CFA; Brother John Howard, CFA; Sister Adamarie Kost, RSM; Sister Maria Sarradet, OP; Sister Anna Wray, OP; Sister Marie Celine Osbourn, SCN; Sister Anne Catherine Burleigh, OP; Sister Yvette Gillen, RSM; Bishop Kurtz; Sister Mary Zita Henkel, SCN; Sister Janice Brink, RSM; Sister Judy Raley, SCN; Sister John Catherine Kennedy, OP; Sister Mary Johanna Melody, OP; Brother Anthony Ragucci, CFA; Sister Albertine Paulus, RSM; and Brother Richard Remetch, CFA.

‘Such a joy-filled life’

Six sisters and a brother serving in the diocese share their stories and offer advice to those considering religious life.

The Diocese of Knoxville is currently home to 28 sisters and 13 brothers. Below you'll find brief question-and-answer interviews with seven who are celebrating milestone anniversaries this year.

Sister Mary Zita Henkel, SCN, chaplain, Hospice of Chattanooga, first profession March 25, 1952, at the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth motherhouse, Nazareth, Ky.

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: I am filled with gratitude that the Lord has directed me in all the stages of my life. I think the seed of my vocation was planted by Sister Mary Zita McManus. Sisters of Charity of Nazareth came to our little one-room schoolhouse . . . and [they] got three vocations from my family. I have two older sisters who entered earlier than I. I received the vocation call in grade two, through the invitation Sister Mary Zita gave me. She loved us very much, and so she became my model, and her invitation stayed with me.

Q: What has been your greatest challenge as a sister?

A: Moving with all the changes in the church has been a real challenge. When Vatican II came along, it shook up the whole church, and it shook up religious life. Those changes over the years take a lot of energy, a lot of courage. I've taken them more as a challenge than anything else.

Q: What do you enjoy most about being a sister?

A: Working with the dying, doing healing-touch therapy. It's not massage, but it's working with the energy system of the patient. It's very relaxing and brings a feeling of peace when the person is open to receive it.

Q: What advice would you offer a young woman today discerning a call to religious life?

A: It's important to have a director, someone she can confide in to talk it over. Search out various religious communities, look at the lifestyles of different religious communities.

Sister Celia Sanchez, MAG, serving in Hispanic ministry for the Chattanooga Deanery, Chattanooga, first profession July 31, 1977, Basilica of Our Lady of Charity, Huamantla, Tlaxcala, Mexico

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: I am infinitely grateful to God for the gift of my consecrated life. He has accompanied me on every moment of my journey. In moments of difficulty he has [reached out] with his love, and because of this I have been able to continue. I am also thankful to my parents, for their lives and for their spiritual support in every moment. I am profoundly grateful to the dear mother founder of our congrega-



Sister Mary Zita Henkel



Sister Celia Sanchez

tion, who helped me listen to the call of God. I am thankful to the congregation, for welcoming me and sharing their charisma, mission, and spirituality with me, and finally, I thank my current mother superiors, from whom I have always received great support to accomplish my goals.

Q: What has been your greatest challenge as a sister?

A: Not to have fear of facing new things and new responsibilities that have been asked of me, to keep my calling every day, and make my life fruitful and lived to the fullest, especially after the death of our most beloved founding mother.

Q: What do you enjoy most about being a sister?

A: Being with the congregation and knowing that despite my weaknesses and deficiencies the Lord accepts me like his spouse and has filled my life and my heart with his love. I enjoy the congregation's charisma because it gives me the opportunity to always be in contact with the people who make me live, grow, and increase my faith and to recognize Christ in all levels of life.

Q: Who inspired you to become a sister?

A: The most reverend founding mother of our congregation, Evangelina de la Cruz Quevedo Garcia, who was always a model of faith and hope. She lived her life to the fullest and left an incredible legacy of love in my life.

Q: What advice would you offer a young woman today discerning a call to religious life?

A: I would advise her to be brave and not to have fear about saying yes to God. I would advise her to attend vocational retreats or talks, to pray a lot, to turn her eyes to Mary our Mother, to learn about various congregations and their charisms in order to do a better discernment. Finally, I would advise her to contact someone who can help her.

Sister Esperanza Rivera-Gomez, MAG, serving in Hispanic ministry for the Five Rivers Deanery, Jonesborough, first profession Dec. 12, 1982, Basilica of Our Lady of Charity, Huamantla, Tlaxcala, Mexico

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: I'm thankful for having been chosen by the Lord despite my deficiencies. I'm happy and satisfied with this vocation.

Q: What has been your greatest challenge as a sister?

A: I have experienced a few challenges as a religious sister: giving your will to God, the obedience, giving up maternity and the life of a married woman, and unconditional poverty. However, I have overcome these challenges by giving myself to the Lord and loving him with everything I am. Regarding pastoral work, my greatest challenge was to have to drive a car.

Q: What do you enjoy most about being a sister?

A: The evangelization, helping people with their problems, knowing how to listen and give spiritual advice to people. I enjoy the fact that God sends you the people for you to evangelize. I only ask God to give me more life to continue building the kingdom of God everywhere in the world.



Sister Esperanza Rivera-Gomez

Q: Who inspired you to become a sister?

A: The others sisters in my community inspired me. They did it when they invited me to belong to the youth group. Later they continued inspiring me when they asked me to go on a spiritual retreat, where I discovered the call from God to consecrate my life to him.

Q: What advice would you offer a young woman today discerning a call to religious life?

A: I would advise her not to be fearful. If the Lord is calling her, he will give her the grace and strength. He is reaching out with his hand for her to take it and go forward on this vocation that is so beautiful and sublime.

Sister Maria del Carmen Silvia Medel Mendoza, MAG, serving in Hispanic ministry for the Chattanooga Deanery, Chattanooga, first profession June 26, 1992, Basilica of Our Lady of Charity, Huamantla, Tlaxcala, Mexico

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: I am grateful to God for giving me the gift of my vocation to be a fisher of souls for the kingdom and also to have been born in a Catholic home.

Q: What has been your greatest challenge as a sister?

A: My greatest challenge has been learning to live with people from another culture, to listen to and to learn another language that is more difficult to pronounce. I am thankful to my congregation for giving me this opportunity because I have learned a lot of things and value my life as a religious sister.

Q: What do you enjoy most about being a sister?

A: I take joy in having a lot of spiritual sisters who pray for me. Also to have been an instrument for people to know God through the study of the sacred Scriptures, the catechism, and all that our mother church teaches us—and for the ones who already know him, that they love him, strengthen their faith, and become good Catholics.

Q: Who inspired you to become a sister?

A: When I was young my maternal grandparents sowed in me a seed to be a woman religious, and my parents as well supported me in the decision that I took. Over time, seeing other religious sisters coming to my town to evangelize, I believed more and more in my desire. One day God sent other religious sisters to a pastoral visit to the parish that I belonged to, and I decided to join the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Ad Gentes. Now I am one of the many members of this great missionary family.

Q: What advice would you offer a young woman today discerning a call to religious life?

A: To go for it. I would advise her not to be afraid of saying yes to the Lord. I would advise her to attend vocational retreats, to learn about different religious communities, and to look for a religious counselor, either a priest or a sister.



Sister Maria del Carmen Silvia Medel Mendoza

Religious continued on page 6

We honor priests and religious serving outside the diocese

Although the priests and religious profiled in this issue serve in the Diocese of Knoxville, we also want to acknowledge those who serve outside the diocese. Below we list the names of priests, sisters, and brothers submitted to us by their family members in East Tennessee:

Sister Laurentilla Back, SSND, St. John's Medical Center, Tulsa, Okla.

Father Charles Smith, Our Lady of the Angels Church, Woodbridge, Va.

Sister Marie Morgan, MM, San Salvador, El Salvador

Father Jeff Johnson, SJ, Jesuit High School, Tampa

Father Michael O'Keefe, OCarm, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Darien, Ill.

Father Richard Cortese, Immaculate Conception Church, Union City

Sister Jeannine Marie, OCD, Sacred Heart Retreat House, Alhambra, Calif.

Sister Joanne Blihar, OP, Newburgh, N.Y.

Father Kenneth P. Paulli, OFM, Ed.D., Siena College Friary, Loudonville, N.Y.

Sister Mary Jerome Hanfifin, OP, St. Cecilia Convent, Nashville

Sister Diane Bickley, OP, St. Cecilia Convent, Nashville

Sister Teresa Silva, RSM, Taunton, Mass.

Father Robert Williams, St. Mary Church, Anderson, Ind.

Father John Shramko, Pius X Catholic High School, Atlanta

Sister Marie Therese Purnell, OP, Casco, Maine. ■

Vocations on the web

The web offers a world of information about vocations. Take a look at these sites, including those of communities serving in East Tennessee:

Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia Congregation: nashvilledominican.org

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas: www.sistersofmercy.org

Sisters of Charity of Nazareth: www.scnfamily.org

Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary: www.presentation-sisters.org

Sisters of the Divine Compassion: www.divinecompassion.org

Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis: www.ssj-tosf.org

The Congregation of Holy Cross: www.holycrosscongregation.org/english/index2.htm

The Congregation of Alexian Brothers: www.alexianbrothers.org/home.html

Apostles of Jesus: apostlesofjesus.org

Paulist Fathers: www.paulist.org

Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity: www.mssst.org

Order of Friars Minor: www.ofm.org

The Glenmary Home Missioners: www.glenmary.org

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Priest anniversaries continued from page 2

A: With a Mass of thanksgiving on Feb. 1 in the presence of the faith community of St. Mary in Oak Ridge, my family and friends—many of whose lives I have shared in ministry—29 of my brother priests, and our bishop.

Q: Who inspired you to become a priest?

A: The greatest [inspiration] was my family, many of whom have passed, but their faith and selfless spirituality made me aware of God's presence and call in my life. The church was truly the "source and summit" of our family life.

Q: What advice would you offer a young man discerning a call to the priesthood?

A: In the words of Scripture and John Paul II, "Be not afraid"; open your heart and soul to the call of love.

Father Mike Creson

pastor, Holy Spirit Parish, Soddy-Daisy; ordained Jan. 16, 1987, at Good Shepherd Church, Decherd

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: My priest friends in the presbyterate and the opportunity to minister to so many wonderful people in East Tennessee.

Q: What is your greatest challenge?

A: Trying to respond to a whole variety of needs from the people who are sick or from the growing Hispanic community, the need to maintain a good prayer life, the need to stay in shape physically and emotionally, trying to make time for all the things you need to do.

Q: How did you celebrate your anniversary?

A: We had a really nice celebration here at Holy Spirit on Jan. 16.

Q: Who inspired you to become a priest?

A: I met a young priest down in Huntsville, Ala.—he's deceased now—Father Tim Burns. And Father Phil O'Kennedy. I had come back to the church after being gone several years. Both of them made me start asking questions. They were very instrumental in getting me on track to begin to look at this. There was an Episcopal priest in my mother's family whom I never knew, but you can tell that she and all her friends had such a wonderful affection for him and the work he had done.

Q: What advice would you offer to a young man discerning a call to the priesthood?

A: The challenges are immense, but the life offers a lot of satisfaction, and the ability to be part of a really good presbyterate is one of the great things. We have so many fine priests in East Tennessee. You need to realize that it's going to be a life of some sacrifice and take your time to pray and discern about it, but there are many rewards also.

Father Mike Nolan, pastor, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, Chattanooga, and dean of the Chattanooga Deanery; ordained Nov. 27, 1987, at Sts. Peter and Paul Church, Chattanooga

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: The people of God who nourished my vo-

cation by lighting the path through their lives of lived faith, who patiently allowed and encouraged me to discern God's call, and who inspire me today through their humble, fervent, holy lives.

Q: What is your greatest challenge?

A: It's nothing new or unique to the priesthood—to day in and day out integrate a consistent, active, and growing prayer life amidst the demands of a busy parish.

Q: Who inspired you to become a priest?

A: Certainly my mom and dad [the late Frank and Josephine Nolan], who lived lives and created a home where religion was not just a Sunday obligation but interwoven throughout our community and daily lives. Retired Bishop of Nashville James D. Niederges, who as my boyhood pastor exemplified service as a loving, compassionate, pastoral shepherd. My uncle, [the late] Father Emil Masich, who served with wisdom, humor, holiness, and heart and like Bishop Niederges remained down to earth, approachable, and accessible.

Q: What advice would you offer a young man discerning a call to the priesthood?

A: Do not be afraid. Embrace it. Trust that God will guide you. Pray, pray, pray.

Father Antonio Giraldo

associate pastor, St. Thérèse of Lisieux Parish, Cleveland; ordained Nov. 22, 1997, at Our Lady of the Poor Church, Pereira, Colombia

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: Being able to accomplish what I always wanted to do: to help others, especially the poor and the most needy, to bring the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus, and to uplift the lowly.

Q: What is your greatest challenge?

A: To be a good preacher in a different language (English, in my case).

Q: What advice would you offer a young man discerning a call to the priesthood?

A: Not to be afraid. If you are looking for real happiness in life, it cannot be [found in] a better place than the priesthood. If you want to work in a huge and gigantic project of life, follow Jesus and be his disciple.

Q: What did your parents think when you first broached the subject of the priesthood?

A: Right after my parents died, I went back to the seminary to finish my studies. My parents always respected and supported my decisions. I know they were very excited about this idea but never said a word to me. One thing I know is that they prayed a lot for my vocation.



Father Mike Nolan



Father Mike Creson



Father Antonio Giraldo



Father Augustine Idra



Father Mark Scholz

I hope that in heaven they still pray to God to help me be an excellent priest.

Father Augustine Idra, AJ

associate pastor, All Saints Parish, Knoxville; ordained Dec. 6, 1997, at Pakele Catholic Parish, Adjumani, Uganda

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: I am most thankful to God for letting me make the decision to into the priesthood. Second, I do cherish greatly all the support from my family, religious order, and friends.

Q: What is your greatest challenge?

A: Cultural adjustment and being far from home.

Q: Who inspired you to become a priest?

A: I was inspired greatly by the faith of my mom, who took me to church every Sunday when I was growing up.

Q: What advice would you offer a young man discerning a call to the priesthood?

A: Just be open to the Holy Spirit and be able to say yes to God's call. Secondly, follow always the advice of his parents, especially that of his mother.

Father Mark Scholz

pastor, Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, South Pittsburg, and Shepherd of the Valley Parish, Dunlap; ordained July 20, 2002, at Holy Ghost Church, Knoxville

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: Meeting so many of the people throughout the diocese and really being inspired by them in the way they live out the Christian life.

Q: What is your greatest challenge?

A: One of them might be Hispanic ministry and trying to learn to communicate in another language. I'm still working at that.

Q: Who inspired you to become a priest?

A: A lot of the priests in Knoxville at the different parishes . . . just by the way they lived out their priesthood. They were very dedicated.

Q: What advice would you offer to a young man discerning a call to the priesthood?

A: If he believes God's really calling him to the priesthood, he should give it a try. I know it's difficult for a lot of people and families to make that commitment. It's a great life, and I think it's needed in our time. We need more priests.

Q: What did your parents think when you first broached the subject of the priesthood?

A: They've always been very supportive of me to become a priest. They have been active Catholics since I was born. They thought it was a good idea. ■

Spending the capital

The vocation of holiness demands that we cast out fear and take risks.

By FATHER MICHAEL CUMMINS



One of my favorite authors is Georges Bernanos. I find in his writing a subtle understanding of sin, grace, and the truth of sanctity. Recently (through the wonder of the Internet) I was able to acquire a book entitled *The Last Essays of Georges Bernanos* (Henry Regnery Company, 1955). What attracted me to the book was the essay "Our Friends the Saints," and the writing did not disappoint!

I would like to share a little of Bernanos's essay as a way of entering into a reflection on vocation and discernment:

To engage all of oneself . . .

Most people, as you know, engage only the feeblest part of themselves in life, a ridiculously tiny part of their being, like those wealthy misers who will

spend only the interest their income earns. A saint doesn't live on the interest of his income, or even on his income; he lives on his capital, he gives all of his soul . . . To engage one's soul! No, that is not merely a literary image . . . Anyone who makes use of his soul, however clumsily, participates in the life of the universe, becomes a part of its great rhythm, and at the same time enters on a level with the saints that communion of the saints which is the communion of all men of good will to whom Peace was promised, that Holy Invisible Church . . .

There is, as our Catholic faith instructs us, the possibility of holiness in every life vocation.

Whether that vocation be the witness of Christian marriage and family life, the life of the vowed religious, the service of the permanent diaconate, the ministry of the ordained priesthood, or the testament of the Christian single person in the world, the goal of each life vocation is nothing short of

holiness. This holiness, I would say, is not a denial of life but indeed its fulfillment.

"To engage one's soul" is to, as Bernanos instructs, "participate in the life of the universe."

To be open to discernment is to engage one's soul. It means not being content to live solely on the interest of life but to be willing to risk the capital. And the risk pays off—30-, 60-, a hundredfold!

Yes, discerning is a fearful thing (for the one discerning and even sometimes for others in that person's life), and sometimes we let that fear control us and hold us back, but we shouldn't. "Perfect love," we are assured, "cast out all fear" (1 John 4:18). Through our baptism each one of us has been given perfect love in and through Christ our Lord, and we are given this love for a purpose. The saints, our elder brothers and sisters in faith, learned this lesson well and relied on it. In fact, they bet the whole house on it!

You might ask, "What is it that this great cloud of witnesses shouts out to us who find ourselves on the field of the arena of life?"

I think that in the roar of this crowd we might hear such cheers as: "Engage your soul! Participate in the life of the universe! Become a part of its great rhythm! Dis-

cern! Take the risk! Spend the capital! Trust God's love for you and live life accordingly!"

Yes, to begin discerning, to begin making use of one's soul might be clumsy at first. It can be darned awkward saying to one's spouse, "I think our marriage needs to be more Christ-centered" or admitting to someone that the idea of priesthood keeps popping up in your thoughts or even just contemplating the renunciation and simplicity of the religious life in a society that equates worth with having possessions. But clumsy or not, one is making use of one's soul and that is a good thing. It is worth the effort and the risk!

"Don't be a miser . . . engage your soul": Good words of advice from Georges Bernanos and a whole host of others.

Oh and by the way (as the saints show us), after beginning to make use of our souls, we start to catch the rhythm of the race and begin to lose a little of the clumsiness. ■

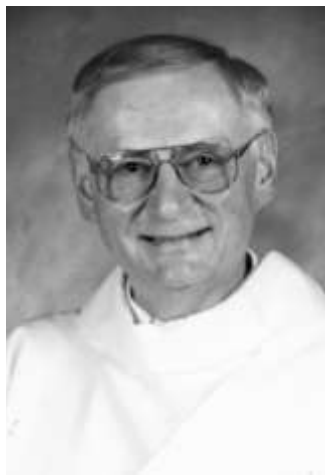
To discuss the idea of a vocation to priesthood or religious life, contact Father Cummins at 423-745-4277 or MemmetC@comcast.net. Father Cummins is Vocation Promotion coordinator and the pastor of St. Mary Parish in Athens.

Reflecting on years of service

Three veteran deacons observe milestone anniversaries in 2007.

The number of deacons serving in the Diocese of Knoxville is about to more than double, with the impending ordination of 29 men in May and June. Three men who have served as deacons for 30, 25, and 10 years, respectively, recently spoke to *The East Tennessee Catholic* about their vocation.

Deacon Ron Volek, Holy Family Parish and Holy Resurrection Byzantine Mission, Seymour; ordained June 19, 1977



Deacon Ron Volek

Q: What are you most grateful for?

A: There are so many things, but surely that God has given me these years to be of service. And then, of course, I'm grateful for family support, because without their dedication and support a deacon cannot possibly function and minister with the time constraints and all that is expected.

Q: What has been most satisfying about your service as a deacon?

A: One unique thing that has come to me—not only am I a Roman Rite deacon, but two years ago I received biritual faculty to serve the Byzantine, or Eastern Rite, church as well. To have that biritual faculty from our archbishop in Pittsburgh to function along with our priest [Father Thomas O'Connell], who is also biritual, has added something to my own life.

Deacon Jim Lawson, Sacred Heart Cathedral; ordained May 1, 1982.

Q: What are you most grateful for?

A: That I'm able to start on the next 25 years—key words *start on*.

Q: What has been most satisfying about your service as a deacon?

A: What I'm doing right now: being "obedient to the bishop" and by extension my pastor in the parish work that I do; teaching seventh-graders at Sacred Heart Cathedral School about the sacraments, the liturgy, our creed, our religion in general; being obedient to the . . . director of deacons, Father Charlie Burton, in the formation and education of diaconal candidates. All of these give me everything I want/need to do with ministry for the rest of my life. And I am grateful for the presence, support, and love of my wife of (almost) 40 years, Louiane.



Deacon Jim Lawson

Deacon Mick Spencer, St. Mary Parish, Athens; ordained Nov. 30, 1997

Q: What are you most grateful for?

A: That I am still healthy enough to discharge my diaconal duties and in the best parish in which I have ever served to boot.

Q: What has been most satisfying about your service as a deacon?

A: The most satisfying experience in my diaconate service was my being able to do weekly Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest in rural Utah. ■



Deacon Mick Spencer

Meet our seminarians

The Diocese of Knoxville has 10 men studying for the priesthood, three of whom—Deacons Patrick Resen, Randy Stice, and Bill McNeeley—will be ordained priests at 11 a.m. Saturday, June 2, at Sacred Heart Cathedral. Another seminarian, Christopher Riehl, was to be ordained to the transitional diaconate May 18. Below is an introduction to the seminarians who still have course work to complete:

Jorge Andres Cano-Ramirez, born in Marsella, Colombia; son of Nestor de Jesus and Maria Lucelida Cano, Dosquebradas, Colombia; home parish St. Augustine, Signal Mountain; theology III student at Mundelein Seminary, Mundelein, Ill.

Q: What is your greatest challenge in seminary?

A: The classes because I have had to [put forth] much effort to study in a new language. But I have been succeeding in my studies anyway.

Q: Who has inspired you as a seminarian?

A: My family has been a great inspiration in my vocation, for they, especially my parents, have kept the Catholic faith and tried faithfully to live Gospel values. When I was in a seminary in Colombia, I met a priest who influenced powerfully my vocation history.

Q: How does your home parish in the Diocese of Knoxville support you?

A: My home parish prays for my vocation.

Q: Along with God's calling, what planted the seed of your religious vocation?

A: The prayer life in my family. The testimony of pastoral zeal from some priest friends.

Dustin A. Collins, born in Johnson City; son of Danny and Susan Collins of Greeneville; home parish Notre Dame, Greeneville; senior at Conception Seminary College, Conception, Mo.

Q: Who has inspired you as a seminarian?

A: My family and home parish. It is always great to return to my home parish after being gone for the school year because I can once again serve the people who helped me to see my vocation.

Q: How do priests in the Diocese of Knoxville support you?

A: The priests of the diocese are always willing to support me in any way needed and often keep in touch with me to make sure everything is going well.

Q: Along with God's calling, what planted the seed of your religious vocation?

A: I believe the call was with me from an early age, but I did not see it until I was in high school. While in high school I began to get more involved with helping others and serving at Mass. Eventually Father Jim [Harvey] asked me to think about the possibility of becoming a priest one day, and this invitation brought me to where I am.

Alejandro Cornejo, born in La Calera, Yuriria municipality, Guanajuato state, Mexico; son of Salvador Cornejo and Rosa Regalado; home parish St. Thomas the Apostle, Lenoir City; senior at Conception Seminary College, Conception, Mo.

Q: What is your greatest challenge in seminary?

A: Keeping aware of the true will of God.

Q: Who has inspired you as a seminarian?

A: St. Alberto Hurtado. He was recently canonized, in 2005. I saw this movie that they made of him, and it's extremely inspiring.

Q: How does your home parish in the Diocese of Knoxville support you?

A: With joyful greetings and excitement, every time they see me. The excitement they show toward a seminarian, at least to me, means a lot.

Q: Along with God's calling, what planted the seed of your religious vocation?

A: A priest asked me [to consider priesthood] while I was an altar server, that and the movie about St. Alberto.

Douglas R. Owens, born in London, Ky.; son of Nadene Owens of London and the late Harse Owens; home parish Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Chattanooga; theology III student at Conception Seminary College, Conception, Mo.

Q: What is your greatest challenge in seminary?

A: Adjusting to the age difference [Mr. Owens is 41].

Q: Who has inspired you as a seminarian?

A: My spiritual director, Father Xavier Knacke.

Q: How does your home parish in the Diocese of Knoxville support you?

A: Cards, letters, e-mails, coffee!

Q: How do priests in the Diocese of Knoxville support you?

A: Father Mike Nolan, Father Jim Vick, and Father Mike Creson call regularly to check on me, are always available for counseling and venting, and always offer hospitality and a place to stay.

Q: Along with God's calling, what planted the seed of your religious vocation?

A: A trip to the Trappist Monastery at Gethsemani in Kentucky.

Christopher M. Riehl, born in Gowen, Mich.; son of John and Shirley Riehl of Jefferson City; home parish Holy Trinity, Jefferson City; theology IV student at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Wynnewood, Pa.

Q: What is your greatest challenge in seminary?

A: Being away from East Tennessee. My family lives there, as well as many of my friends.

Q: Who has inspired you as a seminarian?

A: My parents and my siblings have been very supportive and inspiring. They have responded to the call of the Lord in their vocations. Also the community of seminarians at St. Charles in Philly. We are all trying to be good and holy men now so that we may be good and holy priests in the future.

Seminarians continued on page 6

Survey: More candidates preparing for religious life

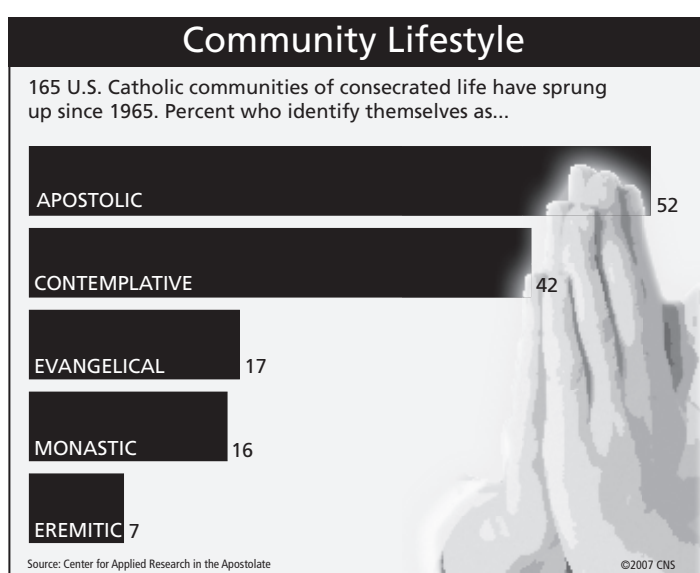
A new study suggests young people are showing heightened interest in vocations.

CHICAGO—Reversing a decades-long decline, Catholic religious communities have enjoyed a 19 percent jump in the number of candidates preparing for religious life in the past three years, according to the Vocationmatch.com Report on Trends in Religious Life, sponsored by *Vision Vocation Guide*.

That upward trend promises to continue, with 71 percent of communities polled reporting an increase in the number of people inquiring about entering religious life. In addition, the guide reports a 125 percent increase in the past year in the number of readers creating online profiles at vocationmatch.com and requesting information from specific religious communities.

This increased interest in vowed religious life is found primarily among younger Catholics, with more than 50 percent of those considering a religious vocation under age 30. Catholic vocation directors polled expressed delight at the number of inquiries they are receiving from people between 25 and 29 years. But a growing number of Catholics over 50—nearly 18 percent of vocationmatch.com's survey respondents—are also seeking formal affiliation with religious communities, a trend that vocation directors admit surprises and challenges them.

Those considering religious life (discerners) identify strongly with the teachings of the Catholic Church, with 66 percent of all respondents saying they are most drawn to religious life by a "desire to live a life of faithfulness to the church and its teachings."



Since 1965 more than 150 U.S. communities of consecrated life have sprung up, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. Those discerning a religious vocation have plenty to choose from.

Current discerners also express a preference for wearing distinctively religious clothing. Fifty percent of respondents say dressing in a habit is "very important" or "essential" to their vocation. At the same time, 85 percent of those potential habit-wearing priests, brothers, and sisters want to be involved in active ministry in such fields as education, social service, campus ministry, parish work, preaching, health care, and prison ministry.

Those considering religious life are aware of the challenges such a commitment poses. Forty-five percent rate restrictions on personal freedom and the discipline of prayer as challenging or the most challenging aspects of religious life, 43 percent rate simple living among the most significant challenges, and 41 percent rate celibacy as a significant struggle. Discerners also express concern that with so many communities and vocation options available, it is hard to find which community

is the "right fit for me."

Some vocation directors note that inquirers seem to have limited knowledge of the Catholic faith and have had "less exposure to people in religious life than they did in the past."

"Inability to make a commitment" is another area of concern for vocation directors. Indeed, 31 percent of discerners say they have been considering religious life for six years or more. Today's religious-vocation discerners are generally well-educated, however—the majority have college degrees, and 10 percent have advanced degrees—and they have diverse work experience, with backgrounds in business, education, health care, social service, and other fields.

Vocation discerners report "devotional prayer" and "praying with members of a community" as two of the qualities that most draw them to religious life. Forty-two percent believe living in community to be "essential" to their vocation. But in what surely will be favorable news for voca-

tion directors of aging communities, 53 percent of discerners say they do not consider it important that they live with people their own age.

Discerners express surprise at "how normal" and "how happy" those in religious life are and express admiration for the "profound sense of joy" they observe in sisters, priests, and brothers as well as "their heroic generosity." Discerners are struck by the fact that so many "young people (like me) are interested in religious life" and how "difficult it is to discern." Other comments from discerners include "Communities and their ministries are very diverse" and "Priests and sisters are cool."

Patrice Tuohy, executive editor of *Vision Vocation Guide* and vocationmatch.com, finds it encouraging that religious communities and young adults are finding it easier and quicker to make connections through the internet and e-mail. "Discerners have so much more information at their fingertips than they did in the past . . . [and can] sift through the information with online services and religious community websites."

For Brother Paul Bednarczyk, CSC, executive director of the National Religious Vocation Conference, the sponsor of *Vision Vocation Guide*, the most promising trend is that positive information about religious life is reaching the media. "The joy and wholesomeness of religious life has not been a story much covered in recent years. Religious life is not for everyone, but for those who choose it, it is most often a satisfying, grace-filled path." ■

Sister John Catherine Kennedy, OP, teacher, Knoxville Catholic High School, first profession Aug. 10, 2002, at the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia motherhouse, Nashville

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: I'm very thankful for the way my parents raised me and their generosity. I'm from a family of 12, and my parents made tremendous sacrifices to ensure we were raised in the faith and by their example more than anything else instilled that faith in us. Secondly, I am very grateful to my religious community for the formation I received from them, but also for their fidelity to the religious life.

Q: What has been your greatest challenge as a sister?

A: The most difficult thing is to love as Christ loves, to really love, to will the good of each person. On a more human level, the distance from my family [in upstate New York]. I go home once a year to see them, but especially at first it was difficult. I've been able to love the kids that I teach and my sisters in community, even though it's been only five years. It is worth leaving everything to follow Christ.

Q: What do you enjoy most about being a sister?

A: I love the life. I love being a visible sign of the kingdom of God. I love teaching. I love working with these kids and I hope in some way, bringing them to God.

Q: Who inspired you to become a sister?

A: When I was a little kid, I loved to read the lives of the saints, so probably they were my first inspiration. I loved the virgin martyrs, I loved Catherine of Siena, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the missionaries, St. Francis Xavier, and St. Dominic, of course. I would have to say the saints of my own lifetime who haven't yet been canonized but I'm sure will be: John Paul II and Mother Teresa.

Q: What advice would you offer a young woman today discerning a call to religious life?

A: A religious vocation is an invitation. It's ultimately a relationship with Jesus Christ, so cultivate a relationship

Religious continued on page 8



Sister John Catherine Kennedy

'Intimate communion with God'

Here is Pope Benedict XVI's message for the 2007 World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

April 29, 2007

Venerable brethren in the episcopate, dearest brothers and sisters:

The annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations is an appropriate occasion for highlighting the importance of vocations in the life and mission of the church as well as for intensifying our prayer that they may increase in number and quality.

For the coming celebration I would like to draw the attention of the whole people of God to the following theme, which is more topical than ever: the vocation to the service of the church as communion.

Last year in the Wednesday general audiences I began a new series of catechesis dedicated to the relationship between Christ and the church. I pointed out that the first Christian community was built, in its original core, when some fishermen of Galilee, having met Jesus, let themselves be conquered by his gaze and his voice and accepted his pressing invitation: "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men!" (Mark 1:17; cf. Matthew 4:19).

In fact, God has always chosen some individuals to work with him in a more direct way in order to accomplish his plan of salvation. In the Old Testament, in the beginning, he called Abraham to form a "great nation" (Genesis 12:2); afterward he called Moses to free Israel from the slavery of Egypt (cf. Exodus 3:10). Subsequently he designated other persons, especially the prophets, to defend and keep alive the covenant with his people. In the New Testament, Jesus, the promised Messiah, invited each of the Apostles to be with him (cf. Mark 3:14) and to



Newly ordained priests embrace after being ordained by Pope Benedict XVI in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican April 29. The pope pleaded for vocations worldwide as he marked the annual celebration of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

share his mission. At the Last Supper, while entrusting them with the duty of perpetuating the memorial of his death and resurrection until his glorious return at the end of time, he offered for them to his Father this heartfelt prayer: "I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them" (John 17:26). The mission of the church, therefore, is founded on an intimate and faithful communion with God.

The Second Vatican Council's Constitution *Lumen Gentium* describes the church as "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (No. 4), in which is reflected the very mystery of God. This means that the love of the Trinity is reflected in her. Moreover, thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, all the members of the church form "one body and one spirit" in Christ. This people, organically structured under

the guidance of its pastors, lives the mystery of communion with God and with the brethren, especially when it gathers for the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is the source of that ecclesial unity for which Jesus prayed on the eve of his passion: "Father . . . that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). This intense communion favors the growth of generous vocations at the service of the church: the heart of the believer, filled with divine love, is moved to dedicate itself wholly to the cause of the kingdom. In order to foster vocations, therefore, it is important that pastoral activity be attentive to the mystery of the church as communion because whoever lives in an ecclesial community that is harmonious, co-responsible, and conscientious certainly learns more easily to discern the call of the Lord.

The care of vocations, therefore, demands a constant "education" for lis-

tening to the voice of God. This is what Eli did when he helped the young Samuel to understand what God was asking of him and to put it immediately into action (cf. 1 Samuel 3:9). Now, docile and faithful listening can take place only in a climate of intimate communion with God, which is realized principally in prayer. According to the explicit command of the Lord, we must implore the gift of vocations, in the first place by praying untiringly and together to the Lord of the harvest.

The invitation is in the plural: "Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:38). This invitation of the Lord corresponds well with the style of the Our Father (Matthew 6:9), the prayer that he taught us and that constitutes a "synthesis of the whole Gospel," according to the well-known expression of Tertullian (cf. *De Oratione*, 1,6: CCL I, 258). In this perspective, yet another expression of

Message continued on page 7

Seminarians continued from page 5

Q: Along with God's calling, what planted the seed of your religious vocation?

A: Serving at Mass in elementary school was a source of my vocation. Of course, this presupposes that my parents took me to Mass and were faithful in their own practice of the faith. I learned much about the importance of faith in God from my parents, and without this foundation I think my call would have been hard to hear.

Miguel A. Velez, born in Pereira, Colombia; son of Cielo Cardona of Pereira and the late Miguel A. Velez; home parish St. Augustine, Signal Mountain; theology IV student at Mundelein Seminary, Mundelein, Ill.

Q: What is your greatest challenge in seminary?

A: The enculturation to a new culture and system and learning the language.

Q: Who or what has inspired you as a seminarian?

A: My vocation has been influenced by a lot of people, moments, and words, but the experience of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land has been the best. From the moment of arriving in the Holy Land, I felt that my vocation became more vibrant, real, and understandable. The word of God has another sense in your life when you are aware of the land in which Jesus walked, lived, and gave his life for us.

Q: Along with God's calling, what planted the seed of your religious vocation?

A: My wish to serve others with my own life and the witness of the lives of some priests who made me see the priestly life and fraternity as a way to achieve my wish. ■

The ETC was unable to contact seminarian *Moises Moreno-Urzuá*, a theology IV student at Assumption Seminary in San Antonio.

Web continued from page 4

Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales: fransalians.com
Religious Ministries Online Guide: www.religiousministries.com

Vision Vocation Network: vocation-network.org
National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors: www.ncdvd.org

Vocations Online: www.vocations.com
Ministry Potential Discerner: www.mpdinc.org
Prayers for vocations in English and Spanish: usccb.org/vocations/prayereng.shtml and usccb.org/vocations/prayersp.shtml ■

Ordinands continued from page 1

Among those who were, the average length of time in home school was nine and a half years.

Ordinands who mentioned prior work experience were most likely to report that they had been educators. Among religious ordinands the most common category of prior full-time work experience was in the areas of skilled labor, farming, and fishing.

Almost one in 10 ordinands reports having served in the U.S. Armed Forces (9 percent of responding diocesan ordinands and only one religious ordinand). Among those who have served, more than a third served in the Air Force. ■

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A sense of belonging

Choose a community that is compatible with your own abilities and gifts.

By SISTER YVETTE GILLEN, RSM



Three essential components of religious life—besides the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience—are prayer, ministry, and community. In previous issues of this special edition I have written about

the importance of prayer and ministry; today I will speak of community.

Webster's dictionary defines *community* as a group of people with a common characteristic or interest. Everyone belongs to some type of community—for example, a neighborhood community, a church community, or a school or work community. Everyone needs to be a member of some kind of community for support and a sense of belonging.

A religious community is a group of women or men who have come together to dedicate their lives to God, through their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and their commitment to serving others. The Diocese of Knoxville is home to two religious communities of men and seven religious communities of women. Throughout the world there are hundreds of religious communi-

ties of men and women. A few of the better known are Sisters of Charity, Dominicans, Sisters of Mercy, Poor Clares, Carmelites, Holy Cross Sisters and Brothers, Franciscan Brothers and Sisters, and Alexian Brothers. Each community differs in its ministries, its lifestyle, and in the way it lives out the charism of its founder or foundress.

I am a Sister of Mercy, and I have chosen to reflect on the life and charism of our foundress, Catherine McAuley. Catherine was born in Dublin, Ireland, in the late 1700s. Catherine's father died when she was 5 years old. She was quite fond of her father and remembered him for his strong Catholic faith, his love of God, and his love for the poor. Catherine followed his example.

Because of her mother's illness and early death Catherine went to live with relatives who were not Catholic, and she was not able to practice her faith. When she was in her early twenties, Catherine was adopted by a wealthy couple. Although they were not Catholic, they allowed Catherine to practice her faith outside of their home and to reach out to the poor. After their death Catherine received a large inheritance.

In 1827, with this inheritance, Catherine founded the House of

Mercy on Baggot Street in Dublin to provide shelter for homeless servant girls and women, education for poor children, and visitations to the sick in their homes and in hospitals. The name "House of Mercy" was not Catherine's idea, but her ministry to people in need—whether taking care of poor children, nursing sick people, or sheltering women—was certainly performing spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Having experienced God's mercy, Catherine transformed that into acts of mercy performed for others. She called mercy the principal path given to us by Jesus Christ and given to those who wish to follow him. In 1831 Catherine McAuley founded the Sisters of Mercy and called herself, her sisters, and her associates to follow the path of mercy in the footsteps of Jesus.

Catherine lived only 10 short years after founding the Sisters of Mercy, but today there are thousands of Sisters of Mercy throughout the world.

Catherine McAuley is only one of the many founders and foundresses of religious communities who lived an extraordinary life and had inspiring charisms. I believe that in responding to a call to religious life, it is important to choose a community whose charism and ministries are compatible with one's own abilities and gifts. ■

Sister Yvette is the diocesan coordinator of Vocation Promotion for Religious. She serves as the pastoral associate at St. Therese Parish in Clinton.

Men of communion

New vocations flourish when priests live their 'bonds of brotherhood.'

BY FATHER PETER IORIO



I've heard Monsignor Philip Thoni reminisce, "In those days we all went to St. Ambrose [seminary college]. We used to go by train. Seven of my class went to seminary, and all the priests

on faculty at Father Ryan [high school] saw us off on the train. I saw that they enjoyed the priesthood." I was struck by the brotherly joy that this scene evokes when I interviewed Monsignor Thoni along with 20 more of our priests for the "Fishers of Men Priestly Life and Vocations Summit." Several of the nuggets of wisdom and experience shared by those priests highlighted the communitarian nature of our vocation.

Every diocesan priest is a "man of communion." This can be taken in the sacramental sense in that a priest confects the Eucharist and distributes Communion to the faithful at every Mass. A special focus in the formation of priests, however, is given to the relational dimension of communion as it springs from Christ's command to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

In the fifth edition of the *Program for Priestly Formation* that the U.S. bishops promulgated in August 2006 a particular section is devoted to "community," which compliments the four main areas of priestly formation outlined by Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* ("I Will Give You Shepherds"). Those areas are human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation.

In light of criticisms about our culture being individualistic and promoting self-interest, this emphasis of formation on community is particularly important, given that young men grow up in our culture. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* says, "The ordained ministry has a radical communitarian form and can only be carried out as 'a collective work.' This 'communitarian form' also means that priests ought to develop and foster bonds of fraternity and cooperation among themselves so that the reality of the presbyterate may take hold of their lives" (No. 17).

When I was taking a particular class in seminary, I had to consult one of our priests about information on our diocese and its policies. I always remember that he said, "Priests should not be 'lone rangers.'" Perhaps it was that image of the cowboy from an old television show that made it stick with me, but I understand much better now what he

meant. We must work together. We are configured to Christ and sent on mission together, never alone, to labor in the vineyard of the Lord.

Relationships take effort and often call on the most difficult of Christ's teachings. My experience in the sacrament of reconciliation as a confessor bears witness that loving those who are closest to you is a challenge. It is no less a challenge for us priests when we are to live these bonds of brotherhood in the priesthood. We may hurt one another with our jealousy or our criticism or our self-righteousness. Holding up priestly community as a high value emphasizes our commitment to Jesus' new commandment in the Gospel of John: to love one another as he has loved us.

This kind of mutual love in the priesthood which is called "community" shows forth its various colors in forgiveness, charity, humility, dialogue, joy, collaboration, and self-denial. Role-modeling speaks more loudly than any homily. Jesus also said, "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

This kind of mutual love was evident when young Phil Thoni went off to the seminary, and priesthood flourishes and bears fruit with new vocations when priests today live community in practical, visible ways. ■

Father Iorio is the director of Vocations and Priestly Life and Ministry for the diocese as well as the pastor of St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Madisonville.

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Loving and serving others through one's vocation gives witness to the Holy Trinity. Dominican Sister Mary Rose Bingham, a former principal of Overbrook School in Nashville and now principal of Cathedral Academy in New Orleans, talks with one of her students, Taylor Lucien, 8, about her Hurricane Katrina experience.

Jesus is instructive: "If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven (Matthew 18:19). The Good Shepherd, therefore, invites us to pray to the heavenly Father, to pray unitedly and insistently, that he may send vocations for the service of the church as communion.

Harvesting the pastoral experience of past centuries, the Second Vatican Council highlighted the importance of educating future priests to an authentic ecclesial communion. In this regard, we read in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*: "Exercising the office of Christ, the shepherd and head, according to their share of his authority, the priests, in the name of the bishop, gather the family of God together as a brotherhood enlivened by one spirit. Through Christ they lead them in the Holy Spirit to God the Father" (No. 6).

The post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* echoes this statement of the council when it underlines that the priest is "the servant of the church as communion because—in union with the bishop and closely related to the presbyterate—he builds up the unity of the church community in harmony of diverse vocations, charisms, and services" (n. 16).

It is indispensable that within the Christian people every ministry and charism be directed to full communion; and it is the duty of the bishop and priests to promote this communion in harmony with every other church vocation and service.

The consecrated life too, of its very nature, is at the service of this communion, as highlighted by my venerable predecessor John Paul II in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: "The consecrated life can certainly be credited with having effectively helped to keep alive in the church the obligation of fraternity as a form of witness to the Trinity. By constantly promoting fraternal love, also in the form of common life, the consecrated life has shown that sharing in the Trinitarian communion can change human relationships and create a new type of solidarity" (No. 41).

At the center of every Christian community is the Eucharist, the source and summit of the life of the church. Whoever places himself at the service of the Gospel, if he lives the Eucharist, makes progress in love of God and neighbor and thus contributes to building the church as communion. We can affirm that "Eucharistic love" motivates and founds the vocational activity of the whole church because, as I wrote in the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, vocations to the priesthood and to other ministries and services flourish within the people of God wherever there are those in whom Christ can be seen through his word, in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist.

This is so because "in the church's liturgy, in her prayer, in the living community of believers, we experience the love of God, we perceive his presence, and we thus learn to recognize that presence in our daily lives. He loved us first, and he continues to do so; we too then can respond with love" (No. 17).

Lastly, we turn to Mary, who supported the first community where "all these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14), so that she may help the church in today's world to be an icon of the Trinity, an eloquent sign of divine love for all people. May the Virgin, who promptly answered the call of the Father, saying, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1:38), intercede so that the Christian people will not lack servants of divine joy: priests who, in communion with their bishops, announce the Gospel faithfully and celebrate the sacraments, take care of the people of God, and are ready to evangelize all humanity.

May she ensure, also in our times, an increase in the number of consecrated persons who go against the current, living the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience and give witness in a prophetic way to Christ and his liberating message of salvation.

Dear brothers and sisters whom the Lord calls to particular vocations in the church: I would like to entrust you in a special way to Mary, so that she, who more than anyone else understood the meaning of the words of Jesus, "My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21), may teach you to listen to her divine Son. May she help you to say with your lives: "Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God" (cf. Hebrews 10:7). With these wishes, I assure each one of you a special remembrance in prayer and from my heart I bless you all. ■

—Benedict XVI

Surprised continued from page 1



Choosing priesthood or religious life doesn't mean giving up normal life. Above, priests and seminarians from the Pontifical North American College celebrate March 3 in Rome after winning a match against the Pontifical Urbanian University in the first round of the newly formed Clericus Cup soccer tournament.

was married and have three grown children who are very supportive of my call to the priesthood
 tried out for the Texas A&M football team
 am a cancer survivor
 was an art director for a sportswear company
 love dancing and am good at it
 actually am afraid of public speaking, but once I start I sometimes can't stop
 lived in Egypt and traveled extensively when I was working in oil-field exploration
 love to water ski, wakeboard, and snow ski
 was deeply influenced by Pope John Paul II at World Youth Day in Denver when he said, "Be not afraid . . . God has a special plan for your life . . . follow him"
 was a very successful businessman before coming to the seminary
 hated going to Catholic school as a kid and almost left the church in college
 used to own a hot-air

balloon company
 have a pilot's license and enjoy flying single-engine planes
 resigned from my teaching job one semester short of tenure in order to enter the seminary
 worked for a thoroughbred trade publication as managing editor of an investor newsletter that analyzed the racing and auction performance of stallions' offspring
 was in a rock band
 felt the call to priesthood when I was 11 years old
 was an Olympic hopeful in the sport of curling
 am a professional baseball umpire
 decided to enter the seminary while on a pilgrimage at World Youth Day 2000 in Rome
 enjoy parachuting and bungee jumping
 have more than 25 years of experience in white-water rafting and have rafted some of the most exciting and remote rivers in the American West

like to brew beer and play ultimate Frisbee
 love playing in the dirt
 am the only Catholic in my entire family, over six generations
 once worked as a bartender at a golf course
 worked in law enforcement while discerning the priesthood
 was one of thousands of Vietnamese refugees struggling with the cold, hunger, sickness, and loneliness in refugee camps in Hong Kong. Priests and nuns came to visit us, and I "met" Jesus in the examples of their dedication and service to the poor.
 am a farmer at heart
 built custom computers and taught myself computer programming in high school while living on my parents' purebred beef ranch
 have been to a game at every Major League Baseball stadium
 love listening to Greek folk music
 was an All-Ohio football player in high school but

always thought I was called to be a priest
 I helped start TGW.com (The Golf Warehouse) and didn't consider a vocation until college
 was a diocesan seminarian from Vietnam. After the fall of Saigon my seminary was closed, and I tried to escape Vietnam to continue my vocation but was caught and put in a labor camp for six months.
 graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and served aboard nuclear submarines in the Pacific
 received the call to the priesthood when I was 16 years old while reading the story of the life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux
 was a fisherman before entering the seminary
 came to the United States for a vacation, to have a good time. God's sense of humor is so great that he only changed one letter so that vacation turned out to be a vocation, and the best time of my life is yet to come—as his priest! ■

Life at the Abbey: work, prayer, community

The Benedictine sisters' life proceeds as it has for centuries, yet it still attracts young women.

By PAULA GLOVER

VIRGINIA DALE, Colo. (CNS)—At the Abbey of St. Walburga in Virginia Dale, life is marked by the pattern of the Liturgy of the Hours—matins, lauds, prime, terce, sext, none, vespers, compline—and is as peaceful as breathing in and out.

It is a life of work and prayer, in which work is prayer and the fruits of one's work are readily visible and pertinent to daily life: the cattle are fed, the crops are planted, the linens cleaned, and meals are cooked for guests.

It's a life that increasingly draws young women such as Angela Read, who recently turned 21 in the monastery, located just north of Fort Collins.

It is the clear mission of the monastery that the Benedictine superior, Mother Marie-Michael Newe, believes draws the women, regardless of age.

"I believe that when a woman comes here to visit our community, our priorities are simple and clear," Mother Marie-Michael told the *Wyoming Catholic Register*, newspaper of the Diocese of Cheyenne.

"We follow the holy rule of St. Benedict, we live in community, under an abbess, and all of this is for the love of God. Our prayer life and our search for God we take very seriously, leading us to 'prefer nothing to the love of Christ,'" she said.

The abbey is located in the Archdiocese of Denver, which borders the Cheyenne Diocese.

Read is a member of what has been called the "John Paul II generation," young Catholics who grew up under the late pope. She was encouraged in her Catholicism by her mother, but at a young age she began coming into the faith on her own.

Her contact with the Benedictines began when she was a child in Boulder, living near where the monastery used to be located. She recalled going to the yearly monastery fair, seeing the nuns in habits and wondering, "Will I ever do that?"



Postulant Angela Read, right, talks with Benedictine Sister Maria-Walburga Schortemeyer about fixing a tractor at the Abbey of St. Walburga in Virginia Dale, Colo. The Benedictine sisters wear a wimple and veil while working and don a complete religious habit for prayer.

Her journey toward the monastery came into greater focus when she received the sacrament of confirmation. The priest said, "I'm going to make her a nun."

"He saw something in me I didn't see in myself," she recalled in an interview in between moving chairs and mopping the dining room in the retreat center. She is now a postulant at the abbey.

The women are postulants for one year and novices for two. They then take temporary vows, committing to three more years in the monastery before taking permanent vows.

Looking back to her youth, Read remembered a conversion in which "I came to a point where my faith was my own. I felt as though God said, 'You will do this.' I realized God exists and is involved in my life and I'll be a nun."

Still, after high school, she chose to attend Benedictine College in Atchison, Kan.

The dorm experience

was a bit difficult, but she learned to get along with a variety of people, paving the way for her experience in the monastery.

Even when Read was in high school, she would visit the Abbey of St. Walburga and mop the floors. When she decided it was time to get serious about her vocation as a nun, she visited a Carmelite monastery. She spent her time thinking to herself, *That's not how they do it at Walburga*. Finally, she said, "Why don't I just go to Walburga?"

Read said people cannot come to religious life because they are running away from something.

"You have to learn to be a good person wherever you are," she said.

Those trying to discern a vocation, she added, should "listen to God with your heart. Wait. Listen. Pray."

"It's important for people to understand that young women don't become a nun because they are ugly, nerdy girls who can't do anything else," Read said. "The impression is that this

is something people do who are weird and have nothing else to do.

"This isn't for wimps," she said, smiling, as she anticipated her afternoon tasks of feeding and watering the cattle and helping fix a tractor. "You have

to do it out of love and a desire to give of yourself."

The monastery supports itself with retreats and a gift shop and feeds the sisters with meat and eggs from its farm. The older sisters repackage and sell altar breads.

Benedictine Sister Hildegard Dubnick, vocation director and coordinator of the retreat house, said living in a religious community isn't easier than living in a family. "It's just different."

Benedictines are called to one monastery, unlike other religious orders, whose members might change from place to place or live on their own.

Benedictines who do live in other places—such as two members of St. Walburga who each served for five years at the Vatican—retain their membership in their home monastery.

Sister Hildegard said it is possible to transfer from one house to another, but it isn't advised, particularly if one is trying to get away from a particularly irritating person.

"God picks people and puts them together," she said, laughing, "and if you pick up and go somewhere else, someone with that same irritating habit will be there too because you need to learn from that."

She advised people to just stay and learn to cope.

"It's like being in a rock tumbler," Sister Hildegard said. "Everyone is rolling against everyone else, and at the end we are all shiny gemstones." ■

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Postulants follow along as Benedictine Sister Magdalena Berndlamier reads the Gospel during the Liturgy of the Hours at the Abbey of St. Walburga. The Benedictine way of prayer and work, alternating throughout the day, has drawn a number of young women to the contemplative monastic community.

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with him. Listen to him in prayer. Follow the desire of your heart because if you're called to religious life, that will be the desire of your heart. You'll still have the attraction to marriage, you'll still have the attraction to family life, but the desire of your heart will be that complete gift to God. And if you're called to marriage, that will be the desire of your heart and ultimately what draws you, so God doesn't call us to something that he doesn't give us a desire for.

I would also say check it out. Go visit the religious community. You need to know the reality of the life. You need to see it concretely lived before you can reject it or accept it.

Sister Maria Sarradet, OP, teacher, St. Mary School, Oak Ridge, first profession Aug. 10, 2002, at the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia motherhouse, Nashville

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: There's so much. God has been so good to me, I don't think I could narrow it down to one thing. The community is so supportive and the community wants us to be holy. They want our holiness and our relationship to Christ, so [I'm thankful for] the support of the community in fostering a relationship with Christ.

Q: What has been your greatest challenge as a sister?

A: I guess it would probably be remaining faithful or remaining true to vows that I'm professing, you know, to persevere to the end, to be everything he's calling me to be: poor, chaste and obedient.

Q: What do you enjoy most about being a sister?

A: Our prayer life. The Divine Office, daily Mass.

Q: Who inspired you to become a sister?

A: I went to school with Mercy Sisters. They were very faithful women, and I have always looked up to them. As a matter of fact, one of them called me not too long ago from Ireland just to wish me luck, so I know they're praying for me.

Q: What advice would you offer a young woman discerning a call to religious life?

A: If you truly feel that urgency toward



Sister Maria Sarradet

religious life, say yes because it's such a happy life, it is such a joy-filled life.

Brother Andrew Thome, CFA, Alexian Brothers' representative with PACE (Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly), Chattanooga; entered novitiate Sept. 14, 1982, at Alexian Brothers Novitiate, Chicago

Q: What are you most thankful for?

A: Just the call. I'm most grateful for the call and the people who were instrumental in helping me to discern the call.

Q: What has been your greatest challenge as a brother?

A: There's always the challenge of having other people in control of your life. It's the issue of obedience. I like to call it the poverty of obedience because almost everything about it comes under the poverty of something. I think the vow of poverty is extremely important because certainly



Brother Andrew Thome

the poverty of not being able to make your own decisions all the time is very real. But it's not a painful situation. It's something I feel I have more or less embraced, the living out of my vocation.

Q: What do you enjoy most about being a brother?

A: Being able to do for others and help others, to be at the disposal of others, being able to place myself at the disposal of others according to their needs.

Q: Who inspired you to become a brother?

A: I'm a convert, so I didn't have the luxury of being taught in a parochial school or being influenced by those people early in life. I was 44 when I joined the Catholic Church. There was a sister in the parish library, and we became friends. I enjoyed having a confidante and an adviser, so to speak, a spiritual director. Her name was Sister Betty Donahue.

Q: What advice would you offer a young man discerning a call to religious life?

A: Not to be afraid of at least investigating the call to religious life. If you think it's impossible for you, I can tell you that it's not. . . . It was no major decision on my part. The whole thing just seemed to gain a life of its own. It's kind of like it was taken totally out of my hands. It was being directed by God and the Holy Spirit. ■