



Into the Depths

Formation: A Full-Time Job

Every morning the sweet song from the nesting birds comes in through my window at Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary, and I immediately wake up refreshed and ready to take on the day. I get dressed and ready to go downstairs to the chapel to start with prayer and Mass. The rest of my day is perfect too. I am carried on a lounge chair basically everywhere I go and I rarely lift a finger for any sort of work. Mostly, I just sit around and pray all day. Until, of course, I realize that I do not live in a Disney film. The real work begins when I stop dreaming.

In reality, formation and discernment is a full-time job. I really do start my day with the prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours and Mass. If I didn't, I would never make it through the rest of the day. The grace I receive in that morning encounter with Christ is my daily fuel, without which I could never hope to run. The average day in the seminary includes three key elements: prayer, school, and fraternity. The most important part of seminary formation is to be rooted in prayer and the sacraments. As a community, we have Mass each day, as well as praying Morning and Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours together. We are also asked to enter into the habit or a daily hour of prayer, and Eucharistic Adoration is offered five days a week.

Prayer is not, however, all we do at seminary, although that would be nice. We also do this thing called getting an education, which is a very important part of our lives. In the stage of formation I

am in—second year of college seminary—I am striving towards a degree in philosophy. For those of you who, like myself before I entered, wonder why I am not learning theology right now, I will try to explain this phenomena quite simply: philosophy is a key element of our education which helps us to learn the art of thinking. We need this ability so that we can better understand the depths of our faith instead of taking it at face value.

The last major part of seminary formation is fraternity. I live with about forty brother seminarians from all around the Midwest. Each one is striving for the same goal, a life of virtue and holiness aimed at discernment of the priesthood. It is a great gift to have so many brothers around to

aid me in my discernment and to teach me many valuable life skills, such as patience.

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Into the Depths of Mercy

We are excited to announce that, through the initiative of Bishop Jenky and the collaboration of three diocesan offices, the Diocesan Summer Institute will be restarting this June 4th. The focus this year will be on prayer, and our keynote speaker is Dan Burke, founder of the Avila Foundation and spiritualdirection.com, executive director of the National Catholic Register, and host of *Divine Intimacy Radio* podcast

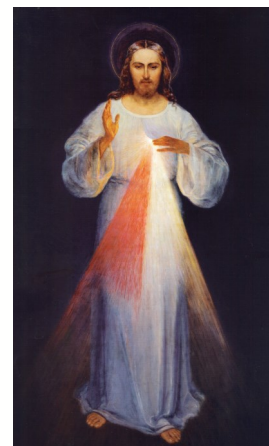
Dan will share his conversion story, along with some wisdom on the great spiritual heritage of

the Catholic Church. We are intentionally making the focus very simple so that we can plunge as deeply into the depths of prayer as possible. In addition to Dan's talks, several other speakers will present on prayer, *lectio divina*, and the interior life. These presenters include Peter Howard, co-founder of Heroic Families and expert on Venerable Fulton Sheen; Sr. M. Benedicta Bourke, a Franciscan Sister of the Martyr St. George who serves at Alleman Catholic High School in Rock

Island; and Fr. Adam Cesarek, parochial vicar of St. Mary's in Pontiac. Bishop Jenky will celebrate Mass, and there will be time for Eucharistic adoration, confessions, and guided meditation.

To register, go to cdop.org/depths-of-mercy or call Shirley Plaag at (309) 671-1550. We are confident that this will be

an event of deep spiritual renewal where we can all learn the basics of the Church's teachings on prayer and fall more deeply in love with our merciful God.



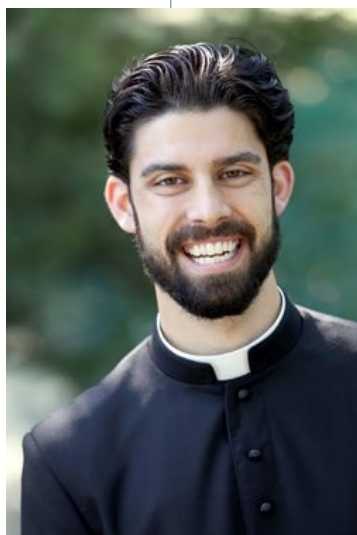
From Now On, You Will be Fishers of Men by Fr. Tim Hepner

"Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man," Peter said. But Jesus replied, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be fishers of men." And St. Luke tells us that after that, Peter and his companions "left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:11). St. Peter's total commitment to Jesus Christ came once he had experienced the miraculous catch of fish and the mercy of Jesus. This was the beginning of priestly formation. Two thousand years later, the basics are still there: a man encounters the person of Christ and, despite his unworthiness, chooses to set everything else aside so that he can follow him and be a witness to his ministry. Through a period of growing in prayer, learning, and human formation, he is made ready to set out and preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and save souls.

Like Peter, the men who begin their priestly ministry are not perfect. They still bring their own weaknesses and sin. But they have been purified through seminary, growing in prayer and learning to focus outward toward the other, rather than inward toward the self.

And, after the bishop ordains them, they are

given the indelible character of the priest, which provides them the graces they need to teach, govern, and sanctify God's people. This grace helps to supply what they lack, and without it priestly ministry is utterly impossible. In my own priesthood, there have been plenty of times when I felt that this grace was all I had to rely on.



But, as St. Thomas Aquinas said, grace builds on nature. A man who is preparing to be a priest has to be willing to work, with God's help, on growing in natural virtue and addressing his human defects. And we who take part in these men's formation owe it to Jesus and his Church to make sure that they are good, virtuous seminarians before they are ordained priests. More than ever, the Church needs not only holy men, but men who are integrated, well-balanced, emotionally healthy, empathetic, strong leaders. Given the climate of today's culture, this is increasingly difficult. But the bishop and our vocations team are proud of

our seminarians, who really do strive to become the best versions of themselves. They understand the old adage,

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Spiritual Works of Mercy: Taking Action with Our Faith

Instruct the Ignorant: Volunteer to teach CCD, RCIA, or lead a Bible Study.

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Counsel the Doubtful: Speak and listen to someone who is going through a difficult time.

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Admonish Sinners: Speak with truth and charity about the beauty of the Church's moral teachings (e.g. Theology of the Body).

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Bear Wrongs Patiently: Pray for the most difficult person in your life.

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Forgive offenses willingly: Say "I forgive you" out loud to someone when they apologize.

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Comfort the Afflicted: Pray for those persecuted for their faith.

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Praying for the Living & Dead: Pray a divine mercy chaplet with your family for their intentions & the souls in purgatory.

Passage to Pray With:

YOU ARE SALT AND LIGHT

"You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father. ~Matthew 5:13-16



Fishers cont'd.

"As the seminarian, so too the priest," and they are very good men who are docile and eager to grow.

Yes, grace builds on human nature, because the priest must be human in order to minister to humans. He must be "another Christ," and Jesus chose to save us through his own humanity. And the great thing about having priests who are human is that each human nature is unique.

On May 28th, the bishop will ordain Michael Pica to the priesthood, and all of the hard work of seminary formation that Michael has done will be anointed by the divine grace of the sacrament of holy orders. Michael won't leave his human gifts behind, but bring them with him into his ministry. I have been blessed to know Michael for a long time. We spent a summer together when I was the parochial vicar in Monmouth, Raritan, and Alexis and Michael was a seminarian. He is always eager to do his best, and has an innocent cheerfulness about him. Michael comes from a big family of boys, and fraternity with his brother seminarians has always been important to him. Being a brother to other priests is essential in diocesan ministry, and I am confident that Michael will excel in this area.

Ordination season is always an exciting time for the Church, and for the past 17 years that I have been going to ordinations I've realized that the graces given to the newly ordained "spill over" on to everyone else who is present—whether they are there physically in the cathedral, or they are spiritually present through their prayers and support.

Please don't forget to pray for Michael as he begins his ministry. All of us priests rely on the spiritual support of the people of the diocese, but young priests are in special need of it. The first few years of priesthood are formative and crucial. In seminary we are given the principles which form a solid foundation for our life and ministry. But in "the real world" we set out into the often murky depths of the world clouded by sin and human complications. A good priest never compromises the Church's principles, but he is called to apply them pastorally. There are many things that "they don't teach you in seminary." But that's because you can only learn them by experience. Just as there is no operator's manual for marriage and parenthood, there isn't one for priesthood either.

But for Michael, as with every priest since the first Apostles, the ultimate foundation for ministry is the initial encounter with Jesus's divine life and mercy. When we know him and we rely on his mercy and grace, there is no obstacle or complication that is too great. It was Jesus who first called us, Jesus who formed us, and Jesus who will always sustain us. Please pray that we priests may always be faithful to Him. Please pray for Michael Pica as he begins the incredible adventure of being a fisher of men.

Quote of the Month

Let the doctrine you teach be true nourishment for the people of God. Let the example of your life attract the followers of Christ, so that by word and action you may build up the house which is God's Church. In the same way you must carry out your mission of sanctifying in the power of Christ. Your ministry will perfect the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful by uniting it with Christ's sacrifice, the sacrifice which is offered sacramentally through your hands. Know what you are doing and imitate the mystery you celebrate. In the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection, make every effort to die to sin and to walk in the new life of Christ....Always remember the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve, and to seek out and rescue those who were lost.

~ The Roman Missal, Homily for Priestly Ordination

THE LIFE OF PRAYER:

"You are everywhere in me, and I in you; then in whatever situation I may find myself, in whatever peril whatever enemy may rise up against me, I have my support always with me. This thought alone can in a moment scatter all my trials, above all those uprisings of nature which at times I find so strong, and which in spite of myself, make me fear for my perseverance, and tremble at the sight of the perfect emptiness in which it has pleased God to place me."

~St. Augustine *Confessions*

My brothers are always there for me to keep me on the right path and keep me focused on the goal of my discernment, growth in holiness, and relationship with Christ.

There is more to life at seminary than just prayer, school, and fraternity. We also have time to cultivate hobbies and passions. One of my personal favorites is hiking. I have been blessed to be sent to Winona, Minnesota, where our campus is surrounded by bluffs, so I have the constant opportunity to go hiking. I also have the constant opportunity to get lost in the bluffs, which has happened more than I would care to admit. My hikes in the bluffs are very representative of formation. I am always challenged to climb a bluff a new way. Sometimes I succeed in reaching the top. Other times I fail. Every so often I fall down, but never get seriously injured. And I am always

very happy to have an adventure. It doesn't matter how many times I have gotten lost, slid down a snowy bluff that I could not hope to make it to the top, or run into a thorn bush. At the end of the day I could never have been more blessed than to hike in the bluffs. The same is true of my formation in seminary.



~Tony Alwan, Seminarian for the Diocese of Peoria

FOLLOW ME.

Everyone is called to something. What's your calling?

WANT TO SUPPORT PRIESTLY VOCATIONS? KNOW A YOUNG MAN WHO MAY BE CALLED? CONTACT US:

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