Formation OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

What’s Inside
2 Letter from the Rector
3 St. John Vianney 200th Anniversary
4-6 Seminarian Formation
8 Get to Know the Seminarians
Spiritual Consolation

The key to unlocking the mystery of one’s vocation is recognition of “spiritual consolation” accompanying desire, God’s fingerprint upon the heart. The seminarian’s quest is itself transformative, drawing him into union with his Creator.

Recently, a seminarian came to me with questions about discernment. Processing out loud, I recounted, “The happiest priest is passionately in love with God, committed to a daily holy hour before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and whose ministry is therefore rich in grace. The happiest married man protects his family’s primary focus on Jesus Christ. Grace and joy flow from that core principal into all other activities, including school, sports, travel, work, and politics.”

He was grateful for the feedback, but he needed more. I therefore suggested that he look at the options of priesthood and marriage from a different angle. Compare the sacrifices of each, asking in the process, “Which cross am I more attracted to?” I provided examples from various real life scenarios. A priest may be called at 2:00 a.m. to drive through a snowstorm to the hospital to anoint and sit with a dying parishioner, or he may be sent to minister to refugees where he shares their poverty. A married man may get up in the night to comfort his sick child, or he may sacrifice his personal or career goals for his family. While the sacrifices of both vocations are admirable, I do believe the grace of a vocation establishes a deep enduring affection for the primacy of one over the other. The meditation seemed to help this young man.

That same day another seminarian stated that he thought he could embrace the priesthood because he had sound friendships with other men from his diocese who were in the seminary or soon planning to enter. I shared with him, “Men will come and go throughout seminary discernment. No doubt your diocesan brothers will offer the kind of love, encouragement and accountability that are needed in the priesthood. However, the ultimate indicator of a true vocation is spiritual consolation accompanying desire, including: peace with the Creator, joy that attracts to heaven, a soul inflamed with love for God, and increases of faith, hope and love.”

He returned to the chapel wherein he experienced tremendous consolation from God around the idea of priesthood. At Saint John Vianney College Seminary, liturgical prayer, Sacraments, holy hours, rosaries and spiritual direction are all vehicles for a man to experience spiritual consolation as a gift from God, a signpost of his destiny.

First-year seminarians are pictured with Archbishop Thomas Rodi in the Cathedral-Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Mobile, Alabama, at the conclusion of their January Term retreat and service trip.
2015 Marks 200th Anniversary of
St. John Vianney’s Ordination

The French bishops of the Dioceses of Lyon, Grenoble and Belley-Ars have declared 2015 a
jubilee year in honor of the 200th anniversary of the priestly ordination of SJV’s namesake
St. John Vianney, Curé of Ars. The jubilee year began on February 8 and will continue through
December 8, 2015.

St. John Vianney was ordained to the priesthood on
August 13, 1815, at the Major Seminary of Grenoble. His
reputation as a tireless confessor was well known
throughout the Christian world. He died on August 4, 1859, and was declared a saint by Pope Pius XI on
May 31, 1925. His body now rests in the Shrine
of St. John Vianney in Ars, France. St. John
Vianney is the patron saint of all priests.

St. John Vianney, pray for the SJV
seminarians throughout your jubilee year.

“The priesthood is the
love of the heart of Jesus.”

– ST. JOHN VIANNEY

Original artwork by Christopher Santer (pacemstudio.com)
Mobile, Alabama
1,159 miles from SJV

First-year seminarian Nick Smith (Diocese of Des Moines) joined Fr. John Bauer, formator and spiritual director, and 43 of his brother seminarians for the 24-hour bus ride to the Gulf Coast region.

While the primary focus was service to the people of the Diocese of Mobile, the trip began with a 40-hour silent retreat at the historic Visitation Monastery outside of Mobile, founded in 1833. After a long bus ride and a lot of “togetherness,” 40 hours of silence was a gift.

Like many of his brother seminarians on the trip, this was Smith’s first silent retreat. “I got to rest in the Lord and come to know Him and His love for me,” he commented. “I rediscovered that the Lord is always with me. Constant dialogue with Jesus is vital to my spiritual formation.”

Throughout the trip, Smith read A Man of the Beatitudes: Pier Giorgio Frassati by Luciana Frassati Gawronska, as well as Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel). He reflected on the joy that drove Blessed Pier Giorgio’s ministry - and now Pope Francis in his work - as he served the poor and disadvantaged in the city of Mobile for a week.

Above: A long bus ride to Alabama is tiring but worth the trip.
Middle and bottom: SJV men tour the Cathedral-Basilica in Mobile.
At the end of the retreat, a little sightseeing was in order. They visited the USS ALABAMA, a retired Navy battleship in the Bay of Mobile, before heading to the Gulf of Mexico. Some of the men had not seen the ocean before and many jumped in to test the water.

The men were then divided into teams to work on local projects organized by Catholic Social Services. With tool belts, rakes and shovels, they were able to help with several home and yard projects for those in need.

Southern hospitality was on full display each evening as the seminarians were invited to local parishes for dinner hosted by various groups, including the Knights of Columbus, Serra Club, and local youth groups. “It was wonderful to be with the people and see their love for priests and the faith,” Smith said. “And, I think we all agree that we had more than enough to eat that week!”

The trip concluded with evening prayer, a tour of the Cathedral-Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, and dinner with Mobile Archbishop Thomas Rodi. The next day, the men loaded the bus for the return trip home, with a stop at the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament, founded by Mother Angelica’s community of the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration, in Hanceville, Alabama.

When asked if he would like to do this type of trip again, Smith commented, “Absolutely. Not only were the retreat and work week a blessing, but you can’t beat 70 degrees and sunshine in January!”

On a more serious note, he added, “Seeing how much people hunger for the faith rekindled in me the desire to serve the people of God.”

Above: Fr. John Bauer inspires the “troops” as they tour the USS ALABAMA. Middle: (left to right) William Beardmore, Greg Alberts, Troy Timmerman, and Robert Ernest inspect the deck of the retired Navy battleship. Bottom: The USS ALABAMA.
Broom Tree, South Dakota
Eight Days of Silence

While the bus of first-year seminarians left for the South, second-, third- and fourth-year men boarded their respective buses for an eight-day Ignatian retreat in South Dakota.

Nine spiritual directors and 43 second-year seminarians settled into the wide-open spaces of the “Mount Rushmore State.” Owned and operated by the Diocese of Sioux Falls, Broom Tree Retreat and Conference Center is an ideal location for the men to encounter the Lord in silence.

Christian Rodakowski (Diocese of Bismarck) was a little nervous heading into an extended silent retreat, but he found his rhythm a couple days into the experience. “The wide open area took me back to my own surroundings in North Dakota, and the clear sky comforted me,” he said. “Eventually, I found the Lord leading me and I allowed Him to do the work.”

John McFadden (Diocese of Rockford) agreed. He, too, was a little unsure about the extended silence at the beginning, but discovered that prayer is “primarily about letting God love me in His own time, not mine.”

Like Rodakowski and McFadden, Ben Baker (Diocese of Des Moines) had never experienced a silent retreat like this before. “I realized the Lord took me out of my comfort zone and there was nothing to fear,” he learned. “It is always a temptation for me to try to control my prayer life and experience God in my own time. On retreat, I learned that His love for me is beyond understanding, and my happiness lies in receiving this love.”

Clearly, the simple, natural setting of Broom Tree is conducive to the spiritual immersion of a silent retreat. The peaceful grounds on the prairie, adjacent to Lake Marindahl, allowed the men to encounter truth and beauty in their prayer life that week.
Abbey of the Hills, South Dakota
A Benedictine Retreat

Formerly named Blue Cloud Abbey and established by a group of Benedictine monks in 1950, Abbey of the Hills is located in Marvin, South Dakota. Originally, the monks of the abbey ministered to the Native American tribes. While the name and mission have changed, the peaceful nature of the retreat center has not.

Led by Fr. Gene Tiffany of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis and Fr. Paul Gitter, formator and spiritual director at SJV, this is where 13 third-year men and 22 seniors settled for the last week of January to find God in the solitude. The 100,000 square-foot property gave the seminarians plenty of room to walk, pray and focus on their interior life. While this was the first SJV retreat at Abbey of the Hills, Fr. Tiffany has lead the January seminarian retreat for 23 years.

“Abbey of the Hills was perfect for our needs,” said Fr. Gitter. “There is plenty of space for the seminarians to pray in the solitude of this old Benedictine monastery.”

Senior Thomas Rausch (Diocese of Sioux Falls) felt very much at home while on retreat, even as he served as the retreat organizer. He noticed the ever-present Benedictine spirituality of work, prayer and community throughout the week, drawing him closer to his brother seminarians, even in the silence.

While at the Abbey, Rausch chose to meditate on the story of the Prodigal Son. His goal after the retreat was to bring the Gospel lesson back to campus with him, saying, “I want to accept the joy that God is trying to give me instead of hiding in cynicism and pessimism.”

The trip back to St. Paul gave the men time to share their retreat experiences before returning to campus and re-entering into daily formation and discernment. Classes began again on February 2, bringing this holy time away to a close. More than 130 seminarians were spiritually ready for a new semester.
Getting To Know The SJV Seminarians

Paul Befort

Age: 22
Home diocese: Saint Paul and Minneapolis
Year at SJV: senior

Why you love being Catholic: Confession and the Church’s social teaching of the dignity of every human person.

Someone who influenced you in your faith: The Blessed Virgin Mary

Age you first considered priesthood: I think I was quite young, as I have thought about it ever since I can remember.

What you love best about SJV: It is full of other men who are striving to grow in virtue and holiness.

Best vacation: A road trip to the International Schoenstatt Retreat Center in Waukesha, WI

Hobbies: Gardening, reading, baking, cooking, spending time with friends, going on road trips, running, playing ultimate Frisbee, spending time outdoors

Favorite food: Cheese or fresh fruit

Favorite campus event: Charismata

Favorite college course: “Online Ethics” with Dr. Winter; “Catholic Studies 101” with Dr. Boyle; “Spiritual Theology” with Fr. Murray

Favorite saint: St. John Paul II

Ford Chambliss

Age: 21
Home diocese: Mobile, AL
Year at SJV: junior

Why you love being Catholic: The Sacraments

Someone who influenced you in your faith: My grandparents

Age you first considered priesthood: 17

What you love best about SJV: The people and prayer life

Surprising fact about you: I have attended three colleges.

Claim to fame: I am the current “bucket ball” record holder on third floor.

Best vacation: Orange Beach, AL

Hobbies: Watch college football, play Fifa, take naps

Favorite food: Seafood

Favorite movie: Rudy

Favorite campus event: Dinner

Favorite college course: “Ping Pong” at the University of Southern Alabama

Favorite saint: St. Charles Borromeo

Andrew Ayers

Age: 22
Home diocese: Grand Rapids, MI
Year at SJV: senior

Why you love being Catholic: I love the Catholic Church’s teaching on the cross, allowing us to face suffering with the strength of God.

Someone who influenced you in your faith: My parents

Age you first considered priesthood: 6

What you love best about SJV: I love how happy I have been in my four years here.

Surprising fact about you: I do not use a personal computer.

Claim to fame: I play the tin whistle.

Best vacation: Christmas vacation to my sister’s house in Connecticut

Hobbies: I love to design buildings.

Favorite food: Fish

Favorite movie: Alfred Hitchcock’s Rebecca

Favorite campus event: Catholic Studies Talent Show

Favorite college course: Moral Theology

Favorite saint: St. Andrew
Since 2007, the SJV seminarians have beaten the winter blues at the annual Dust Bowl, an evening of relaxation, entertainment, and, for the men from the South and West, a taste of home.

Cowboy hats, boots and overalls are typically the dress code; fried chicken, sweet tea and corn bread are often on the menu. Country music fills the air and the games begin.

Responsibilities for planning and running the Dust Bowl are passed down each year to a new pair of seminarians. This year, second-year seminarians Nicholas Brown and Miles Newkirk (Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana) changed it up a bit and treated their brother seminarians to “A Night in Kokomo,” in honor of the Indiana city with a long history of industrial and technical “firsts.”

“The main purpose of the Dust Bowl is to give the guys something to look forward to in the winter, with many of us not being able to go home as often as we’d like,” Brown says. “It lifts our spirits and we bond as a seminary.”

Although the men can expect some good old-fashioned fun every year, the main events are always a surprise. In the past, there has been a mechanical bull, hatchet throwing, and even hamster races. This year, the seminarians learned some Kokomo history, were entertained by a skit, and participated in an evening of games.

“A group of seminarians played bluegrass music while others participated in fruit bobbing, shooting cans with slingshots, car racing, and sunflower seed spitting,” says Newkirk. “Everyone was entertained!”

Sometimes, it is just the tradition that everyone looks forward to.
Dear friends,

During my first few months at SJV, there have been several opportunities to listen and learn. In doing so, I am humbled and amazed by your generosity and heart for the mission of providing essential training today for tomorrow’s Catholic priests. On behalf of the thousands of young men who have walked through these doors over the past 47 years, of the men currently in discernment, and of those yet to come, thank you!

Many young men have grown in their faith and love for Christ and His Church as a result of the formation they receive at SJV. They have been called by God to spend their college years discerning their vocation. During their time at SJV, they receive a first-class education, a systemic formation in Christian character, and a traditional Catholic program of spiritual growth. Whether God is calling them to enter major seminary or another vocation, their time at SJV is filled with a deepening of their faith and commitment to serve our Church and her people.

I have been blessed to witness the courage and zeal of these young men in their acts of service and love for the Church and for one another. It is very reassuring to know that many of these young men will be going on to become tomorrow’s priests. It gives me great hope to realize that some of these men will be witnessing the marriages of our children, baptizing our grandchildren, hearing our confessions, and burying our loved ones.

Many of you have given of your time, talent, and treasure to support the formation at SJV. I personally invite you to join me - to listen and learn - how God may be calling you to continue to support the mission and this great work. Many good things are in place for continued success at Saint John Vianney College Seminary, and there are some very exciting things just around the corner that will continue to make SJV the premier college seminary in the country.

Come, listen and learn how God is calling us all to even greater things: for our seminaries, for our Church, and for the world.

May God bless you,

Tizoc Rosales
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Before graduating from the University of St. Thomas in 1986, an SJV senior told his rector during his final evaluation, “These have been the best years of my life, but I will not be pursuing the priesthood.” The rector was then Msgr. Richard Pates, now Bishop Pates of the Diocese of Des Moines. The student was Paul Etienne, now Bishop Etienne of the Diocese of Cheyenne.

Bishop Etienne recalls that interview with a smile that lights up his whole face, saying, “Little did I know what God had planned.”

In fact, it was an unconventional path to college for the young man from Tell City, Indiana. After graduating from high school in 1977, Etienne bought a house and was successfully managing a clothing store in his home town. He had dreams of growing the business and starting a family. His future seemed clear.

After six years of working toward these goals, his restless heart was stirring and he came to the University of St. Thomas to pursue a degree in business. It was during his time at SJV when his relationship with Jesus became personal. “SJV is a very powerful place for me even today,” Etienne says. “I realize now how important the fraternity, prayer life, outstanding education and opportunity for discernment were to me.”

With the interview with his rector and graduation behind him, Etienne accepted a position with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops as the assistant coordinator for the 1987 Papal Visit of Pope John Paul II to the United States. After the papal visit, he realized he could not ignore the Lord any longer. In 1988, he returned to the seminary at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, received a degree (STL) in Spiritual Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis in 1992. In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI appointed him Bishop of Cheyenne. “Ultimately, God won,” he says with a laugh.

What does Bishop Etienne want the SJV seminarians to know? “Pay attention to what is going on in your heart,” he says. “You do not need 100 percent certainty about your vocation, you just need to be open. God will help you sort it out. Every vocation is a matter of being ‘chosen.’ Free will acceptance is required, but God chooses, and we are chosen.”

_SJV Alumni - We like to hear from you!
Please contact Tizoc Rosales, Director of Development:
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11th Annual Vianney Cup
Monday, September 21, 2015
Midland Hills Country Club
Roseville, Minnesota

11:00 a.m.
Registration and Lunch – Driving Range Open

12:00 p.m.
Opening Prayer and Shotgun Start

4:30 p.m.
Social Hour

5:15 p.m.
Dinner followed by awards and program, featuring more than 130 seminarians

7:00 p.m.
Adjourn

For more information or to register, contact:
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