

REGINA CLERI

ora pro nobis

THE EUCHARISTIC HEART

FEATURES

When Priests Sing | A Eucharistic Man: Remembering Fr. Ryan Stawaisz | A Marian Vocation

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THE RECTOR'S CORNER

Dear Alumni and Friends of the Seminary,

The Peace of the Lord be with you always! These words, uttered humbly by the priest in the sacrifice of the Mass, greet those gathered around the Altar shortly before they approach for Holy Communion. It is a peace that the world cannot give. It is a peace that could only have been heralded by angels in that first celebration of the Nativity in Bethlehem. It is a peace that we long for especially in these days of growing animosity and confusion. I hope you will join me in echoing these glad tidings as we start a new year.

We at St. Mary's know and are reminded each day that the Lord who gives himself to us in the Eucharist is at the heart of this peace. We thus thought it timely to make the focus of this edition's Regina Cleri "A Eucharistic Heart." The development of such a heart is both the grounds for and the fruit of deeper conversion. As St. Augustine exclaimed famously in his Confessions: "I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace." It is only by turning to the Blessed Sacrament that we can have the courage and confidence to make of our lives an offering – so that others, too, may experience and long for the Lord's peace.

We have had many privileged opportunities to reflect on and beg ever anew for this peace throughout this past year. Perhaps the most prominent of these being the completion of the long-awaited dormitory which now graces the seminary campus. The culmination of more than a decade of work and patience, it is the first new structure to be built at St. Mary's in twenty years. It was a joy to join Cardinal DiNardo in its blessing on September 12, the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary, and make the great move over to the new dorm (now with individual

bathrooms) soon after. The cornerstone which adorns its façade includes a pertinent quote from the prophet Isaiah: "Et sedebit populus meus In pulchritudine pacis" – "And my people will abide in a peaceful habitation" (Is 32:18). We are grateful for our many benefactors who, especially through the IGNITE campaign, have made this peace that comes with God's reign a reality in such a tangible way.

The new dorm has proven a fine place for peaceful study and reflection, especially on the many ways music and its properties can provide valuable lessons for the spiritual life. From the principles of harmony and its analogy to the well-ordered soul, to the effect music can have on the shaping of our desires, many of the Rector's Conferences this semester have highlighted how a Eucharistic Heart and the struggle for heroic virtue is well-served by fostering a Christian musicality. I hope you will find the reflections of our new Director of Sacred Music, Mr. Turner, helpful and enlightening in this regard.

A heart that burns for the peace of Christ and sings with a symphony of virtues is the desire of the St. Mary's Seminary community. How wonderful that we have the example and support of so many priests (living and deceased), some of whom you will meet in these pages, to assist us along the way. We are further blessed to know of your prayers and material support so that we might form in our men truly Eucharistic Hearts. May the prayers of Mary, our mother, help us all to know and live the Peace of Christ.



WELCOMING FR. RICHARD HINKLEY

Fr. Richard Hinkley is the new Director of Spiritual Formation at St. Mary's. He was born and raised in southwest Houston, attending St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church and School. His father was born and raised in Miami in an Anglo-American household while his mother's family was born in Havana, Cuba.

After finishing high school at Strake Jesuit, Fr. Hinkley went to the University of Notre Dame for four years where he majored in Theology and Classics. Taking a year off from school to work at a downtown law office, he studied law at the University of Houston before entering the seminary in the fall of 2008.

His first two years of seminary were spent at Holy Trinity Seminary in Irving, TX, and afterwards he studied in Rome at the Pontifical North American College. Ordained a priest on June 7, 2014, he spent his first summer as the

temporary administrator of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in downtown Houston. He then finished his licentiate studies at the Atheneum of Saint Anselm in Rome, with a specialization in Sacraments.

He went on to serve as Parochial Vicar at St. Thomas More parish in the Meyerland area, St. Helen parish in Pearland and St. John Vianney parish in west Houston before joining the Seminary faculty this fall.

Fr. Hinkley speaks Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and French fluently and has a fine appreciation for Caribbean cuisine. Many of his family members are engineers, and in addition to enjoying science in his free time, Fr. Richard cooks, reads, and visits with friends. His brilliant mind, humor, and wit have been immediate boons to the house, where he has also been able to serve as the formation advisor for the pre-theologian seminarians.





LETTING GOD DO HIS WORK

REV. RICHARD HINKLEY, S.T.L.

He should let God deal with his creature.

The Official Directory of 1599 to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola counsels the spiritual director with these words regarding the “qualities and duties” the director ought to demonstrate with respect to his directee. I believe this instruction, and the explanatory sentences that follow it, lies at the heart of the characteristics that make for a successful spiritual director. I have found that to be the case in my life, and anecdotally in the lives of many who hold my respect. Even when outside of the context of Ignatian spirituality and the Exercises, *mutatis mutandis* the observance of this principle alone helps to ensure that the privileged relationship of a spiritual director with his directee not only avoids being merely a projection of the director’s own desires upon the seminarian, but reinforces the fundamental principle of spiritual

direction, that the true director is always the Holy Spirit, in dialogue with and at work on his creature.

I strove to keep these thoughts in the forefront of my mind as the weeks and months passed during my first year assigned to St. Mary’s Seminary as Director of Spiritual Formation. It was certainly an unanticipated placement, when the proposal was first put before me. I am not yet 10 years ordained (PNAC ‘14), and most of my training and experience to this point have been in the realm of either parish ministry or teaching, in particular from my specialization in Sacramental Theology.

Nevertheless, considering that the Lord has so often in my life, as he does so often with all of us, introduced me to new paths that I had not considered previously—such was the case, after all, with my sacramental studies to begin with—I gave my assent and was appointed.

Knowing that I lacked much with

regard to years of experience as well as studies specific to spiritual theology, I knew that I was going to have to prepare to be stretched in many different senses. For one, I knew that I would need to prepare my ego for the inevitability of beginning a new apostolate that would leave me open to admitting my ignorance, my errors, and my own poverty. It would need to be a time of intentional and active listening—seeking the advice of others who already possessed training and years of experience in the field of spiritual direction. The three weeks that I spent during the Summer of 2021 in Omaha, Nebraska, along with Msgr. Chester Borski and Fr. Jasper Liggio, at the Seminar for Seminary Spiritual Directors given by the Institute of Priestly Formation, was a critical experience with regard to immediate preparation for the types of situations and experiences I would come in contact with at the beginning of the year of formation.

He should let God deal with his creature.

That paragraph continues elaborating the point, and counseling that the director assume an attitude of indifference with respect to whatever outcome may arise from the seminarians experiences, above all in prayer. This is obviously neither obvious nor easy. One would expect the director to have a predetermined inclination towards keeping a man within formation. Is the posture of indifference an exaggeration or at least too radical for an institution forming diocesan priests? I would respond negatively. If the seminarian communicates to his director what he has received from the Lord in sincere, generous, and assiduous prayer, the director has no outcome to fear or avoid, save of the one that steers clear of that which is genuinely judged to be the Divine will.

Of course, the director at no point ceases to guide and encourage the seminarians with regard to the presumed goals of formation, representing in that respect the mind and heart of the Church for the seminarian, (See PPF, 132). But in such instances where it, “is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it,” the director is most useful and most beneficial for the seminarian to the degree that he gets out of the way. That, for me, is a major consolation. Not because it is license for idleness or fatalism, but that it gives clear directions to me that I am neither the primary nor secondary character in the drama unfolding before me. No, I’m just Fr. Richard, listening, praying, and speaking when necessary.



WELCOMING MR. ZACHARY TURNER



This semester, St. Mary's is pleased to welcome Mr. Zachary Turner to our faculty as the Director of Sacred Music. Zachary has worked professionally in Catholic parishes as a Music Director and Associate Music Director for over ten years. For four years, he directed a seminarian schola while employed by the Institute of Priestly Formation during its Summer Seminarian Retreat in Omaha, Nebraska. He completed five years as Director of Music for an Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston school known and respected for its exemplary music program. He has demonstrated success with choruses of children, youth, and adults through the implementation of rigorous, but engaging curricula using an inviting pedagogical approach.

He continues to be professionally engaged as a recitalist—both in organ and piano. He and his wife (a professional opera singer) maintain professional and collaborative relationships with local musicians and performers from such renowned educational and musical organizations as Rice University, the University of Houston, the University of St. Thomas, Ars Lyrica, Houston Grand Opera, and the Mercury Ensemble to name a few.

Mr. Turner's state of life as a blessed husband and father of six children, coupled with a deep love of the Catholic priesthood, makes him eminently suited to help form spiritual fathers at St. Mary's.

WHEN PRIESTS SING

MR. ZACHARY TURNER, M.M.

My heart overflows with a goodly theme; I address my verses to the king; (Psalm 45:1)

In his short and final novel, 20th-century, French author, Georges Bernanos, employs the form of a music lesson to introduce us to the tragically-destined Mouchette (after whom the novelette is named). The lesson takes place in the midst of those in her class, and sadly, presents an opportunity for all, including her teacher, to indulge in a favorite pastime of ridiculing the haggardly and impoverished girl to scorn. In spite of having demonstrable abilities, Mouchette's voice breaks, to the envious delight of her classmates. Amid the ridicule, Mouchette wrathfully declares, "Music disgusts me!" Only too ready to offer a retort, after proclaiming her a "savage", the teacher self-sanctimoniously declares, "Music comes before knowledge everywhere."

Much has already been said regarding music and singing in the liturgy. While its importance has been emphasized by clergy and lay alike, apathy toward liturgical singing, especially among Catholics, is all too apparent. Problems have been diagnosed, solutions have been proposed, camps of opinion are established and, not surprisingly, many of these differ. Of course, the general listlessness of singing the Mass, or singing at Mass, is not true everywhere. There are notable institutions and parishes which boast robust and active participation by the singing faithful. Often, these places include exemplary music programs of both professional and amateur musicians to assist them. There are also a good number of priests who are committedly singing the Mass to, for, and with their flock.

"One sings because one has something about which to sing."

But, what of those of us who don't sing or struggle with singing? Whether real or perceived, we might find situations like Mouchette's all too relatable. For those of us that do sing, and strive to promote active, vibrant singing in the liturgy, how do we accomplish this in a manner that is not self-sanctimonious? Admittedly, the illustration from Bernanos' novel is a hyperbolic and grotesque analogy, but it helps to illuminate truths which are all too real - real for our world, real for our parishes, and, even, real for our seminaries.

It is tempting to simplify the ailment and, thus, simplify the remedy by attributing the problem to the growing lack of musical literacy or the decline of musical culture. This is not without cause. The fact is,



singing was a greater part of daily life in prior generations. We have certainly lost (or are losing) something of which we did a great deal more back in the “good ole days”. The famous American conductor, Leonard Bernstein, used to touch on this theme frequently in his beloved Young People’s Concerts broadcasts. But, is musical torpor really a byproduct of musical illiteracy?

I would argue this is not entirely the case. In its essence, singing is more than a neutral human function that is performed in either a desultory or compulsory manner. Rather, one sings because one has something about which to sing. To my mind, it seems there was a time when people “knew” they had something to sing about and sang about it. This not necessarily be regarding God, or Faith, or the Transcendentals, etc. On a natural level, singing, even about the most trivial things (flowers, the weather, work), was much more commonplace. Furthermore, this “about” is not just related to “the content contained in my song”. This “about” is, at its locus, the relational response to an encounter with reality (by whatever degree).

In modern pianos, the strings are stretched almost violently, one could say, to create the necessary tension to produce sound. Until, however, it is struck by the hammer, it is just a silent string under strain. When struck the string not only vibrates with its own fundamental pitch, but also rings with the pitches (overtones) that are also “contained” within it and, if properly tuned and free from dampers (meaning the damper pedal is down), other strings, though unstruck, resonate sympathetically to the resounding string that was struck. They are, quite literally, “picking up good vibrations”.

I think it is absolutely crucial that our priests sing to us and that we sing back to them. The priest, struck by the reality of his liturgical and ministerial function, vibrates thrillingly in response therefrom. We, in turn, sympathize and respond not just to the priest, but to our own encounter with the dynamism and potency of the liturgical encounter. More than anyone, we actually have something to sing about! To be sure, there are times, and it will likely be most of the time, where our emotional sensitivity does not correspond to the reality before us (might we, at times, even be “disgusted”?). Paradoxically, it is often in those moments where our “purest” acts of willful singing are the nexus of the most profound moments of inspiration to our brothers and sisters around us. This is a form of “singing” which transcends vanity of virtuosity or pedagogical pontification. It is a moment we receive, and with which we resonate, vibrate, and harmonize. Those who have “ears to hear” will, then, respond in kind.



A EUCHARISTIC MAN

In Memory of Fr. Ryan Stawaisz

Rev. Mr. Christopher Meyer, '22

Stories of seminary and priestly fraternity cannot be easily translated. But in honor of my friend Fr. Ryan Stawaisz, and in hopes of edifying alumni of St. Mary's Seminary and the faithful, I would like to attempt to share some of his stories.

I still remember when I started seminary, and seminarian Ryan, whom I had known at Texas A&M, reached out to me. He showed me the ropes and introduced me to everyone he could before he went on his pastoral year. Ryan told me not to buy a cassock and surplice yet (which were required for serving seminary liturgies) because he had those for me, and I could buy something further along. Little

did I know what Ryan had in store. The cassock looked like a Halloween costume and the white surplice had a noticeable purple tint. Let me tell you, classmates still joke about my first-year liturgical attire. I wish I could say that Ryan was hazing the new seminarian, but the reality is that he carried a paradoxical combination of thoughtfulness and humility that lead to many situations like this in his time in seminary. While considerate of others, Ryan could not very well consider that others almost always possessed more pride than himself.

Fr. Ryan was a man of great preparation, but he was also a man who lived in the moment. I remember one Saturday morning, I asked Dcn. Ryan if he had

plans. He told me he had some papers he should probably work on, and then asked what I was up to. I told him I was tempted to go visit my uncle's brewery in Nacogdoches—over four hours round trip. Fifteen minutes later, Dcn. Ryan and I were in the car with another seminarian he had recruited. It was a blast. And Fr. Ryan must have finished those papers eventually because they ordained him to the priesthood that June.

Early in Fr. Ryan's second year of priesthood, his last year on earth, we were texting with each other after receiving some difficult news about a priest. As Fr. Ryan often did, he quickly moved the conversation towards our own edification, our own path to holiness. We texted about how we absolutely must hold each other accountable. I told him, "if we have to meet once a month at 5am to make sure a bunch of us can be there, we will do it." He responded, "I'm down! I hate getting up early, but I will do it for this." After going over some more details of our future 5:00 AM priest accountability group, he ended by saying, "Any reason we should wait for you to be ordained (to get started)?" I laughed and said we could start after my diaconate ordination. He replied, "Sounds good. All heaven rejoices on that day. Thanks for the chat. I needed to talk it out." That is the way Fr. Ryan ended conversations—with humor, with encouragement, with love.

Fr. Ryan was a tremendous teammate on the basketball floor. He was never one to take it easy in practice. Quite a few of us can remember being in the way of a Stawaisz drive to the basket. Nothing a little ice couldn't fix. What stands out about Fr. Ryan on the basketball court is not that he was the best player, though he definitely was, but that he was the hardest worker. He started at point guard for St. Mary's Seminary. Although the best scorer on the team, he oftentimes did not lead the team in scoring because he valued

getting everyone comfortable and involved in the offense. He valued playing as team and winning basketball games. Fr. Ryan's basketball abilities were particularly magnificent, considering that he had lost a significant part of his hip the first time he had cancer. He had been told by his doctor that he may not be able to run again. Little did that doctor know, he would be soon be leading vertical jump training programs with fellow seminarians and snagging double digit rebounds against the priests in the annual Priests vs. Seminarians basketball game.

I can remember a particular night before the Third Annual Priests vs. Seminarians Basketball Game in March 2019. The seminarians had lost the first two games, so there was a lot of pressure to win in that third year. A lot of us were in the gym after dinner time putting up shots. That eventually turned into practicing free throws. At 10pm, there were three players on the court. Dcn. David Michael Moses, Dcn. Ryan, and myself. Dcn. Stawaisz suggested that we have a free throw contest. We would each take one shot at a time, until we went through ten times. Most free throws made out of ten. Then he added, "Third place gives first place \$5." Thirty free throws later, I owed Dcn. Ryan \$5. And I wanted another chance. We all agreed. Thirty free throws later, I owed Dcn. Ryan \$10. As we walked back to the dorm, I told him I would go grab the \$10 from my wallet. He said, "Don't worry about it. You will beat me next time." Looking back to that day, Fr. Ryan Stawaisz was never interested in taking anyone's money. He wanted to make things competitive, so we would be better prepared for the next day. With



Dcn. Ryan as our captain, we went on to beat the priests big time. Dcn. Stawaisz was not named the MVP of that game. In fact, the second-place free throw shooter Dcn. David Michael was. But we all know that Stawaisz was the engine that day, leading the team in rebounds, assists, and energy.

Fr. Ricardo Arriola, a classmate at St. Mary's Seminary, recalls the time that seminarian Ryan Stawaisz walked up to him early in the morning before 7:30 morning prayer, telling him about a dream. "Ryan told me he had seen a bunch of priests walking in the streets carrying a cross. When he asked them where they were going, they answered: to worship."

"He planned to love God and his will through these difficult times."

Most people would just credit this kind of dream to a lack of sleep and too much time in seminary. Not Ryan. A few weeks later, he was putting together an event for discerners and seminarians. On a Friday in Lent, the men took shifts carrying a large cross (built by Ryan, of course) from St. Mary's Seminary to the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. They prayed the Stations of the Cross along the 8.3 mile route, stopping every half-mile. The event would continue throughout Fr. Ryan's time at seminary, and those seminarians and discerners would soon see a much tougher shift than a simple half-mile, taken by Fr. Ryan Stawaisz himself, who would admirably carry his cross of a cancer diagnosis throughout the remainder of his life as a priest.

On May 7, 2019, less than a month before his ordination to the priesthood, Dcn. Ryan Stawaisz preached the homily at the seminary mass. All of us there will never forget it. The first reading that day was Acts 7:51-8:1: The martyrdom of St. Stephen. Dcn. Ryan pointed out that Stephen was martyred just a very short time after becoming a deacon, and that God's timing seemed odd. But that Stephen is



a saint because he loved God and the will of God through the very end. In that homily, Dcn. Ryan told all of his brother seminarians that his cancer had returned—after seven healthy years in the seminary and right before his ordination to the priesthood. God's timing seemed odd. But the soon-to-be Fr. Ryan told us that he planned to imitate St. Stephen. He planned to love God and his will through these difficult times.

The seminarians, myself included, were incredibly moved that day. But it was the days, weeks, months, and ultimately two years following that homily that spoke the loudest. Fr. Ryan Stawaisz spent the remainder of his time on earth fulfilling that promise he made. He anointed the sick when he was sicker than them. He accompanied others through suffering when he himself bore even more on his shoulders. He repeatedly chose to love. As Fr. Ryan's classmate Fr. David Michael Moses put it in his eulogy, "Anyone can stand up there on ordination day and promise to give his life and promise to be faithful, but we don't really know if he means it, until we see how it turns out. Well, now we know Fr. Ryan meant it. We know he loved his own in the world, and he loved us to the end."

It saddens me that Fr. Ryan Stawaisz and I never had that 5am priest accountability group. But he lives among us. Fr. Ryan remains a part of the mystical body of Christ. He has finished the race. He is done saying mass, hearing confessions, anointing the sick, and playing basketball. And today, he is closer to us than he's ever been. Because he's close to Jesus. There is only one way we can respond. By imitating Fr. Ryan and loving until the very end.



WELCOMING FR. JASPER LIGGIO

Rev. Jasper Liggio, of the Diocese of Victoria, joined the spiritual direction team this past year. Fr. Jasper, a late vocation, was raised in Dickinson to a loving family. He attended True Cross Catholic School through eighth grade. Afterwards, he attended Kirwin High School in Galveston. He studied at Alvin Junior College and College of the Mainland in Texas City, continuing his education at Sam Houston State University. In 1972, he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration.

After college, Fr. Jasper worked in a variety of roles. He was owner of Liggio's Tire and Service Center and Wrecking Service, while also serving as a firefighter with the Dickinson Volunteer Fire Department. He rose the ranks and was chief of the department for 25 years. He served on the Dickinson City Council, Planning Committee, Economic Development Committee and Zoning Board. His practical wisdom stemming from his life experience is a wonderful asset to the house.

During that time, Fr. Jasper continued to serve at the Shrine of the Holy Cross on the Pastoral Council, Finance Council, and on the school's Board of Education. He

was also a leader in the Men's Club, Bazaar Committee, and the committee for Art and Environment. He was an instituted acolyte, a perpetual adoration adorer, and a sacristan. He remains a member of the Knights of Columbus Council #3217.

Fr. Jasper always felt too busy to listen to what God was asking of him. However, there was a void in Fr. Jasper's heart that always felt full when he was helping at the church. In 2010, Fr. Jasper was accepted into the Seminary for the Diocese of Victoria, attending Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Cromwell, CT.

Ordained to the priesthood on May 24, 2014, he first served as the parochial vicar of Our Lady of Sorrows in Victoria. In 2017, he was made pastor of St. Michael Catholic Church and Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Cuero, TX, Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Meyersville, TX, and St. Aloysius Catholic Church in Westhoff, TX. We are more than excited to have him joining our formation team.



SNAPSHOTS







A MARIAN VOCATION

KEENAN ANNICHARICO, '27

I grew up Catholic, going to St. Laurence Catholic School through 8th grade. Though this gave me a foundation in the faith, I never fully knew why we believed these things. I knew my faith was important, but once I got to public high school, I started seeing the world as far more enticing. I saw the faith and its “rules” as very restrictive, often thinking to myself, “Who could possibly enjoy their life by abiding by all of these rules? How could anyone ever have fun?” I never sought out these answers or cared to.

Temporal pleasures started to satisfy me by the end of my junior year of high school. Going into my senior year, my parents got divorced. This did not help me, and I was often out partying with friends. In college, everything got worse—I’ll spare you the details. After graduating college, I moved back home and began working. My lifestyle on the weekend remained as it had been. However, I was beginning to realize that these things weren’t making me happy. In fact, I was miserable.

In 2018, my younger brother (pictured left) began to take his faith much more seriously. He also realized how unhappy I was, and so he began to push me to come back to the Mass, to start going to confession again, and to start praying the rosary. At first, I was very much against all these things, but I gradually started to take my faith more seriously. By the start of 2019, I got a new job and found myself struggling less and less with my lifestyle, but I still had falls. After one incident, I found myself under spiritual attack, anxious and stressed that

I was still struggling with my concupiscence. A priest helped me realize that this anxiety was coming from Satan. While on my way to a Rockets playoff game, I called my brother to talk about this, and he told me not to get discouraged, to go to confession, and to continue to pray my rosary. I told him I would, and then asked him a silly question. I asked if it is okay to pray for a sports team to win, in this case the Rockets. He laughed and told me that there were surely better things you can pray for, but said that what I could do was to make a deal with Mary.

He said that I should promise her that I would pray all four mysteries of the rosary every day for seven days, hoping that Mary would help the Rockets win. He had told me in the past about the incredible graces that came from reciting the entire rosary every day: how Mary would “order his mind” to Christ, how she helped with temptation, and gave him a greater zeal for the faith.

I was hesitant, but I wanted my Rockets to finally overcome the Warriors, so I agreed to do it. Unfortunately, that night, the Rockets lost and left the playoffs. But I had made a promise. So, the next day, May 10th, 2019, I began praying four rosaries a day, and I have not stopped praying four rosaries a day since. It has changed my life in every conceivable way. Mary helped me overcome those things I had always struggled with. My desire for the Eucharist, my desire to spend time with Our Lord in adoration, my desire to go to confession all increased greatly. I had never experienced such a desire before. Mary and her rosary opened all these doors for me. I found myself caring more about others, their happiness, and the salvation of their souls. It was all because of Mary bringing me, at times dragging me, to her Son, saying, “Look at Him. He is all you need; all you will ever need. I will teach you to love him, to be like him. Only with Him you can be happy.” My desire to become a priest grew quickly as I became more and more involved in the Church, and I entered formation this past summer.

Mary took me from being a degenerate partier that only cared about himself to a first-year seminarian seeking to do God’s will as best he can. She softens the hardest of hearts and conforms them evermore to her Son’s.

PRESENCE AND SACRAMENT

A Summer in the Hospital

DAVID RAMIREZ, '24



This past summer, through the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, I was blessed to be able to take part in a hospital chaplaincy hospital experience facilitated by the Catholic Chaplains Corps and Baylor-St. Luke's Hospital in the Texas Medical Center. It is a great blessing to encounter the human person in such a vulnerable place as a hospital bed. It is a great blessing to offer the loving gaze and presence of Christ, bringing a glimpse of hope and joy to the suffering.

The program consisted of time in a classroom and time with the patients and staff. While the classroom was extremely helpful in learning tools for pastoral care such as active listening, and learning how to help patients express their grief and pain, it was the hospital visitation that made a greater impression on me. After shadowing different hospital chaplains, eventually I was able to make these visits on my own. I was introduced to the workings of the hospital as a whole, and I began to understand the crucial chaplain's role in the healing process. The chaplain is essential because of what he brings and who he represents. I knew this, but to participate in it impacted and affirmed my sense of vocation and ministry.

We were assigned to different units of the hospital to experience the role of the chaplain in different hospital settings. I found that every soul I encountered, even those of the grieving family members at the bedside—once I got past my own fears and discomforts—was a soul that was yearning to receive true love and hope.

In my time on the floor, I came to appreciate even more how truly blessed we are as Catholics. How beautiful it is that we can bring Christ, who is man's hope, to those whom we have been charged with bringing hope as chaplains. This is not just by being present with them,

but also through prayer and the sacraments. There is a crucial relationship between the “ministry of presence”—walking with and being with the other without an agenda—and the sacramental reality of the Church. If we only focus on the former, we risk becoming a “buddy”: a social distraction that gets us in the door and helps the patient open up and listen while making them feel good for a few minutes, yet leaving them without giving them the essence of what they truly need—healing and hope. If we focus on the latter, we become sacrament dispensers, walking vending machines of the mysteries of Christ and His Church without the meditation between the human and divine realities. It was a gift to observe and learn these dangers of both sides of chaplaincy and priesthood.

Patients are visited often throughout the day, but they can be the loneliest of people. Every visit from their medical teams requires of them facts and statistics. It is the chaplain that enters the patient's room and has no other agenda other than the patient himself. He is the person that enters the room and wants to know how the person is doing. He desires more than just a clinical diagnosis; he wants to know the person before him. Is he alone? How did he get here? What gives him joy and hope? Does he even have a sense of joy or hope?

Earlier, I referred to Him whom every patient needs. Once we enter into that human encounter in which the person feels seen, heard, and loved, then we make present the Divine Physician who will bring them their true and total healing. When the chaplain understands his role as the bearer of Christ to the sorrowing, suffering, and dying, his perspective of his work and ministry is able to take on its deeper meaning.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

A EUCCHARISTIC RENEWAL

WITH REV. JONATHAN RAIA, '09



What is your background?

"I was ordained in 2009, served four years at St. William in Round Rock, was at St. Mary's at Texas A&M for a year, which was an experience of a great and thriving campus ministry, even though that was enemy territory. That was my second time there. I was there as a transitional deacon as well. Then I was vocation director for six years, obviously getting to work with a lot of young people discerning their vocations and making important life decisions and getting to spend a lot of time in our four large campus ministries in our diocese. In July 2020, I was sent to the University of Texas, and having had such an important college experience here as a student at the University Catholic Center, it's awesome just being back and able to be Chaplain here."

How do you deal with discernment at the college level?

"The college years are such an important time in people's lives. So many people are making choices that effect the rest of their lives: the kind of person they're going to be, the virtues or vices that form, the friends they surround themselves with, and obviously discerning where they're called in terms of the "Big-V", Vocation and discerning steps towards a career as well. My own experience of having heard the call fairly early, I think around first communion age, even coming to UT feeling that I was likely to enter seminary after graduating, I still feel I did by far the mature discernment

of my vocation while in college. Campus ministry was hugely important in that.

In my experience as vocation director and on the priest side of things at A&M, Baylor, Texas State, and UT, both at the parishes and the Borromeo House of Discernment, I have seen how campus ministry very directly relates to future priests. It's a hugely important time."

What does the prayer life look like at the UCC?

"When I came in, I knew the FOCUS missionaries were very committed to praying a 'holy hour' every day, and it was important to me to be able to join them. I know that if I don't do it as soon as I get into the office, I know I won't do it. Tuesday through Friday, we do a holy hour from 8:30-9:30 with missionaries and students, and staff will join as well. We close with morning prayer and benediction. On Thursdays, we start at 8:30, and continue with exposition until benediction at 5:00 p.m. We repose and expose the Blessed Sacrament before and after daily mass. It builds me up and the other priests to pray with other people, especially the missionaries and students. It's been an anchoring thing for the community."

Could you tell me about the new crucifix at the UCC?

"It was designed by my brother who did his training at the Liturgical Institute. He conceived the idea as "Tree

of Life, Living Vine.” The cross is the Tree of Life and the Vine being depicted coming from the wounds of Christ, and if you get up close you can see the blood drips from his wounds into the vine, and the vine throughout has little hints of red. It points to the sacraments as the way we participate in the life of Christ and the Trinity, which is pictured at the top of the cross.

On the ends of the horizontal bars and the bottom there are twelve doves, which is very directly a nod to St. Mary’s Seminary. The twelve birds stand for the twelve apostles and the way the sacramental life of Christ comes to us through apostolic succession and the Church. The image of the vine with the birds is in the apse of St. Clemente in Rome and locally at St. Mary’s Seminary, which was an important place of prayer for me for four years. My brother wanted to have that local connection, having done work and talks at St. Mary’s and knowing how important it is for forming priests for the Diocese of Austin and many others in the state.

The imagery of the vine and branches is also an essential image from John ch. 15, which is the foundation of one our groups for freshmen as well as for our Catholic fraternity, LOA. Mary and John being beside the cross is also a connection to our Schoenstatt University Men

and Women. Over half of our student groups are connected in some way to the imagery of the cross.”

Is there any advice you would give to brother priests and seminarians?

“We hear it all the time, and I know that it’s obvious, but it’s viscerally true that your prayer life is the most important thing and if it’s not there, things go south really quickly. I’ve been a priest for 12 years, but this is my first time being a pastor. There’s a lot of stress, like managing the budget and rebuilding our development program. There are a lot of things coming at me, but every day being able to come into the chapel and entrust everything to the Lord, I come out feeling lighter—I have a real feeling of rest being able to entrust everything to Him. I receive the strength for the day in prayer, all the more now than ever before. I cannot start the day without spending that time before the Lord, letting Him love me and being reminded of my own identity of being in Him and not in what I do or in any worldly success.”





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