

A little bit about my first year as a seminarian. My time in Missouri at Conception Abbey and Seminary was overall a great experience growing spiritually, intellectually and pastorally. Since it was a propaedeutic year, I had the opportunity to focus on prayer and getting used to seminary life. The great part about attending a seminary run by Benedictine monks is that their zeal for prayer and study is infectious, so I found it to be a blessing to be in an environment centered around the contemplation of God. My prayer life as a seminarian at Conception consisted of praying the Liturgy of the Hours, daily Mass, Eucharistic adoration, the rosary and ora et labora. It may sound like a lot, but it energized and sustained me throughout my first year and instilled habits of prayer that continue to be a source of constant renewal.

Seminary isn't just praying all day though; I had a full courseload of classes that ranged from Scripture to Shakespeare which were informative and enlightening. Catholic seminaries are essentially liberal arts colleges where you major in a bachelor of philosophy, then move on to study theology afterwards. So, there are a lot of language, history, literature, and philosophy courses like logic and epistemology; except in the propaedeutic year because philosophy can be rigorous which can disrupt the intention behind a propaedeutic year. Another objective of the propaedeutic year is to improve pastoral skills, which for me involved traveling to Kansas City about once a month to assist the Poor of Jesus Christ and Simple House; the latter being a lay ministry and the former a mendicant religious order. However, both of their charisms are serving and befriending the homeless and impoverished by going to where they are with food and open arms. Helping them alongside my seminarian brothers was an invaluable experience. I made some of my best friends at Conception since you live, work, pray and hangout with each other every day, encouraging one another to become better men, discerning the priesthood together and pursuing holiness. I'm confident the next generation of priests will continue to be very intelligent and faithful men!

And if I had to choose a favorite moment from my first year, it would probably be ringing the bells Easter morning or the election of our new holy father Pope Leo. My job during Easter was ringing a massive bell in the basilica, which pulls you up five feet into the air because it's so big, and it's a special experience since the monks only ring it once a year at Easter. And being at seminary when the election happened was incredible because of the thrill and suspense of a papal election. Everyone including the students and staff ran down to the seminarian lounge after the black smoke appeared to watch who would walk out onto the balcony of St. Peter's. The excitement in the room when Pope Leo walked out was easily on par with the White Sox winning the world series.

Once school ended in May, I returned to Tucson and was assigned to St. Mark the Evangelist for the summer to help serve the community by assisting in the parish office with various ministries and with all the liturgies. It was another great experience as a seminarian to learn the inner workings of how a parish operates, and it especially helped affirm me in my vocation to the priesthood.