

THE GIFT OF VOCATIONS



Fr. Vladimir Chripko, C.O.

"The priesthood of Jesus Christ is the joy of my life!"

I was born in Slovakia, the oldest of four children. I have two younger sisters and one brother. I first experienced my vocation to the priesthood in high school ... my pastor asked me if I was thinking of becoming a priest. At that time, enrollments in the seminary were very limited due to the Communist regime's persecution of the Church in our country.

From the age of three, I served as an altar server and was at church almost every day to serve at 6 am and evening Masses. We practiced our faith to witness our faith in a hostile Communist environment. We were an underground church. Catholics met in people's homes for prayers and mutual support. We could not leave the meeting together at the same time. We had to leave one-by-one to avoid notice. When I was in high school, I was repeatedly called to the police station after Sunday Mass for questioning about my being an altar server. After high school, I was unable to apply for higher education due to my service as an altar server; the Communist party controlled education. I served the mandatory two years military service.

Communism fell in 1989. In 1990, I entered the theological seminary and was ordained a priest on June 17, 1995. I never thought of going to America. My mother came to work in America in 1994 to earn some extra money that was used for the family and also to pay for the expenses of my first Mass celebration. After ordination, I worked as a dean of studies and discipline at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in the Archdiocese of Kosice. My sister moved to America, and I loved to visit her. I came to America several times and enjoyed getting to know this country better.

I had the opportunity to visit the Slovak communities in America and learned that they desperately needed Slovak priests ... I believed in my heart that God was calling me to serve them. I spoke with my bishop, and he allowed me to stay in America and to study English, which I did at BOCES from November 1999 to February 2000. On one of my visits I heard about Fr. George Torok, who at that time was serving the Slovak community in Clifton, NJ. I went there to attend Mass and to have the opportunity to meet Fr. George. It was a providential meeting, prepared, I believe, by the Holy Spirit. In 2002, I began working with Fr. George and served as a priest to many communities, including the Slovak parish of St. Michael in Trenton, St. Cyril and Methodius in Clifton, the Dominican Sisters' communities in Sparkill and Blauvelt, Holy Cross in Sleepy Hollow, and also, as a Catholic chaplain, at Rockland Psychiatric Hospital. I won a green card through the lottery and obtained citizenship five years later.

I realized after meeting with Fr. George that I had discovered, through the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, how I could fulfill my own way to be a priest. The Oratory of St. Philip Neri is not a religious order but a community of apostolic life. It adopts a more democratic governance. The Oratory is to be first of all a community of mutual support and love. The spirit of joy of St. Philip Neri animates our every action and prayer. Every Wednesday night we gather for a community dinner, each taking our turn to cook for the others (It's fun!). On Thursday nights we celebrate our Christian Seder, a beautiful tradition instituted by Fr. George.

Fr. George began the process of establishing an Oratory in 1995. I was among the four priests who co-founded the New York Congregation Oratory. On the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, Pope Benedict XVI issued the decree of our foundation. On August 15, 2007, the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we officially received the papal documents authorizing us to be the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in New York.

My hobbies?

I love to grill. I love to cook, and every Oratorian takes turns cooking for our community. I used to play hockey. Now I love to walk around Rockland or Congers Lake; sometimes it is difficult to find the time for such pleasure, but I try.

What is my hope for the parish of St Paul-St Ann?

My hope is that we can do something beautiful for God together and also for all of us to enjoy one day the eternal life in heaven. What is most important is that we be united in love and joy, work together as friends and family. Nothing is more important than a family that works and prays together and where love reigns. We work for the glory of God, and that will bring us together. The people of God in St. Paul and St. Ann's church are my joy!

Inspiring quotes?

All is Grace – St. Philip Neri – Be good if you can.

There are people in your life whom you unknowingly inspire simply by being you.

If being a Christian were illegal, would there be enough evidence to put you in jail?

Enjoy Life, It has an expiration date.

Be patient. God isn't finished with me yet.

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Fr. Roman Palecko, C.O.

"My great joy as a priest is to see the Sacredness of Sundays observed in families at Mass."

I grew up in a large city in Slovakia in a family of 13 children; I have six brothers and six sisters. Nine of my siblings still live in that city and so does my mom. My dad passed away three years ago. In the second grade, I began my very happy experience as an altar server at the Cathedral in my city, where I served until I entered the seminary two years after the fall of Communism. Five boys in my family served in the Cathedral as altar servers. There was a rectory connected to the Cathedral, and we had a constant rotation of young priests who were a very good influence on all the altar servers. Over 12 years I met so many young, wonderful priests! We played football with them and worked side-by-side with them, helping in the rectory, the garden, even washing the cars. We listened to many homilies, and some of their preaching had a strong influence on me personally. Sometimes it was their work with families that was an inspiration.

In those years it was very difficult to practice our Catholic faith due to Communism. My father was called in for questioning many times about our family being in Church. It made him angry. He never joined the Communist party.

Was it difficult to leave your family and home country to live in America? Personally, it was exciting to think of coming to America to serve as a priest ... I had curiosity and wonder about what it would be like. I had been to America before entering the Oratory when I came for five summers on vacation, though being on vacation somewhere is very different from living and working in that place. In preparation to work here, I studied English every day at BOCES in Nyack, never knowing I would serve at St. Ann's parish one day. I used to come to St. Ann's to pray but did not know anyone. I believe it was God's providence! I've learned in life that no matter how many plans you make ..., none will ever be as perfect as God's plan for you.

What gives you joy about your vocation as a priest? In my priestly ministry, what I really love and enjoy so much is to see young families with children sitting together at Mass. It pleases my soul and it's what my own family did every Sunday. It reveals that parents understand Mass is good for their kids. Sunday is set aside for God and family ..., it is "the Sacredness of Sundays in families." I also love when someone makes a really good confession ..., this is a great moment. Confession is a sacrament of God's mercy.

How did I come to the Oratorian community? I started to come for vacations in 2006 to visit Fr. Vladimir and Fr. Martin, friends who were three years ahead of me in the seminary. This is how I met Fr. George. At that time, they were preparing to open the Oratory. I was here in August 2007 and was present when our bishop from Slovakia and Cardinal Egan came to Tappan for the establishment of the New York Oratory of St. Philip Neri. The Oratory is a community of brother priests who live and work together. They support each other spiritually, pray together, and provide understanding and good advice. It is healthy for priests to live in community with brothers who support them in their work as priests. The Oratorians live as a community in friendship.

What is my hope for the parish of St. Paul-St. Ann? I would like for the parish of St. Paul-St. Ann to be the early, shining example of a healthy, merged parish in this area, to become the model of the future: two parish families becoming spiritually stronger together, growing in God's love and will for us. Merging is a model and the future within the Church....

What are my hobbies? I love swimming and to be by the ocean. I also love walking. Since having problems with my back, I use a Fitbit to track the number of steps when I go walking. When I was in high school I enjoyed walking two hours back home from school, sometimes ... 😊



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Fr. Peter Bujdos

"The Lord is my Shepherd."

I was born in the regional newborn hospital in the city of Svidnik, Slovakia, but grew up in another city, Stropkov. I have three brothers and one sister (the youngest) and I am in the middle. My family was a very nice, good, Catholic family who went to Mass every Sunday due to the faith of my parents, especially, my mother. Our family prayed every night together (my mother never missed!). During Communism, it was not easy to practice Catholicism. The Communist Party told parents if they gave their children religious education, they would not allow them to go on to higher education, and their children would just be workers. My parents were committed to teaching us the faith so we expected to be workers, but all of us finished Universities in Slovakia. As a child I never served as an altar server. Many priests heard the inner calling to the priesthood when they were altar servers, but this was a later calling for me. I was in the military service for one year at a time when there was no conflict. We lived in the barracks and helped if there was a flood, etc.

This was the time I changed my meaning for my life. For the first time I was alone, without my parents and siblings. In the military you have to sign up to go to Mass. I remember the first time going to Mass without my family. I started thinking about my own spiritual life. In this year, in my heart, I began to feel maybe I should give my life as a sacrifice for God. After the military I worked for one year before going into seminary at age 21 (a bit old for formation at that time.) In the last year in seminary (pastoral year) and for the next three years as a priest, I enjoyed living and working with the homeless. There were one or two priests and three to five lay people living with 60 to 80 homeless people, including men, women, families, and the sick in an old, dilapidated, large rectory. We helped build the housing.

How did I come to the Oratorian Community?

I knew Fr. Vladimir since I was student in seminary; he was Director of Discipline. He invited me to visit in 2002, my first time in America. I visited Fr. Vladimir three or four times in Tappan. On my visits I observed the community life of the Oratorians. This community attracted me to come to this country. As a diocesan priest, we rotated in different directions. In the Oratorian community, we are all diocesan priests who are friends; we work, pray, and have dinner together. We are ten priests who support each other, a very healthy family, like brothers.

What gives me joy about my vocation as a priest?

I love my priesthood and give praise to God for everything I receive in my priesthood. Being a priest is a public ministry ... but with love always comes sacrifice. After the initial enthusiasm of becoming a priest, there is a sober realization that there is much to learn. As a priest for 12 years, I am always learning; every day I'm learning something new. I am really thankful to God for everything. I have joy ... and awareness of God's love. "The Lord is my shepherd" was the motto for my first Mass.

The parable of the workers in the vineyard is my favorite. There is the worker who works all day and a worker who works for one hour. It is not easy to work in the vineyard, but the work is worthy. Working in God's vineyard gives me joy. It doesn't matter how long one is working in the vineyard — only that all people are in the vineyard — it is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Was there anyone in particular who influenced me to become a priest?

There were three seminarians in the military with me; at the time, studies were interrupted for military service. One of the seminarians was older and very special; a good man, passionate about his faith, and brave. We all attended Mass together and talked about spiritual things.

What is my hope for the parish of St. Paul-St. Ann?

My hope is for the parish to grow in faith, be strong in cooperation, respect, identity, and love.

What are my hobbies?

I like every kind of sport. I was a serious soccer player. I love running, cycling, hiking, swimming, skiing, traveling, and reading. I do not follow baseball or football but some parishioners asked me to pray for the Yankees!

THE GIFT OF VOCATIONS



Fr. Arogya Raju Narisetty

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

I was born in India, in the state of Andhra Pradesh, in the village of Ravipadu. We were five brothers, but the oldest passed away when he was 5. I have two older brothers (including Fr. Joseph) and one who is younger.

We were a hardworking family, the sons of a farmer. My mother was a homemaker. My brothers and I worked on the farm, cultivating, sowing, harvesting, and threshing.

My father and mother taught us to be hardworking and honest. My family was also a very pious Catholic family, so it was not difficult to practice our Catholic faith. The village was mostly Catholic, though there were families of other faiths too. My family was always in the Church before the third church bell rang (when the Mass was to begin). My brothers and I served as altar servers from around the age of 7, and each of us served for approximately eight years. I have great respect for my parents for teaching us good values and hard work. If you find anything good in me, certainly I owe it to my parents. They always insisted that we should be hardworking and honest. If I did something wrong, I used to first go and inform my mom and tell her why I did it.

In my country, I was a "junior lecturer" and taught 11th and 12th grade and was the principal of a junior college. I went on to get a master's degree in social work, in Christianity, and a diploma in guidance and counseling.

What gives me joy about my vocation as a priest?

I received the call to the priesthood at about age 12 or 13, after the seventh grade. My vocation to the priesthood is purely inspired by God. The call to the priesthood came from God before I was born. I feel it is God's call. My priesthood itself gives me joy -- being a priest, administering the sacraments, being able to minister to the spiritual needs of the people who are entrusted to my pastoral care, and preaching God's Word, as directed by the Spirit.

How did I come to know the Oratorian community?

Originally, I was ordained a Salesian in India but came to know the Oratorians through Fr. Ravi and my brother, Fr. Joseph. My brother, Joseph, had been a great support to me throughout my studies in the seminary.

What is my hope for the parish of St. Paul and St. Ann?

My hope for our parish is for it to be faith-centered around the Eucharist, the Gospel, and love of Jesus Christ, to accept and celebrate our diversity, and also to give a profound, solid foundation of the Catholic faith in the upbringing of the young generation.

What are my hobbies?

I read a lot of books and love sports. I love to play soccer, basketball, and volleyball. In college, I was captain of the cricket team, and I'm pretty good at table tennis. I exercise to stay fit. I also enjoy hiking and love certain adventures when I have the opportunity.



*Before I formed in my mother's womb
He chose me
and consecrated me.*

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Fr. George Torok, C.O.

"All Is Grace." — St. Philip Neri

No one in my family would have believed that I could become a priest. And since I became a priest outside of my native country, Slovakia, after having escaped imprisonments and concentration camps in Communist Czechoslovakia, my family was without any news about me until I came to the United States in 1968.

I cannot say that I received at any time a priestly call. There have never been calls, revelations, special graces, or events that are sometimes connected with a call to the priesthood. I like to think that before my mother conceived me in her womb I was set aside by the grace of God to be a priest. As far as I can go back in my memory, I always sensed that I would be a priest and that I could be nothing else but a priest.

I grew up under Communist oppression and always desired to live in a country with democratic freedoms. My dramatic escape from Slovakia in 1950, under Stalin, truly represented an Exodus from slavery to freedom, and I was willing to pay the price in perils and suffering in exchange for freedom.

I became a priest in Italy and since I had expertise in film production, I was allowed to pledge my life to working in media. The Lord allowed me to travel extensively around the world, producing film and television documentaries depicting the conditions of the poor, exiles, marginalized and underprivileged. Since I settled in the United States I reported on the workings of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council. I was privileged to be part of that most important event in the recent history of the Church.

Because I was separated for more than 50 years from my own bishop in Slovakia, I always desired to belong to a family of priests approved and blessed by the Church. In 1998 I began the formation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in New York. This undertaking received a special blessing from Edward Cardinal Egan and from the Holy Father Benedict XVI. In 2007 we were established as a Pontifical Community of St. Philip Neri in New York.

Before I made the choice of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, I carefully examined the alternatives offered to priests by the church and realized that the Oratory was the most joyful, liberating, and family-oriented institution that I could find in the Church.

In a few years the Lord has blessed our Oratory. Today it has eleven priests, with activities in parishes, media, hospital, healing ministries and hopefully more to come. Please pray that the Lord may send workers into His vineyard, into our Oratory, for the glory of God and salvation of many.

