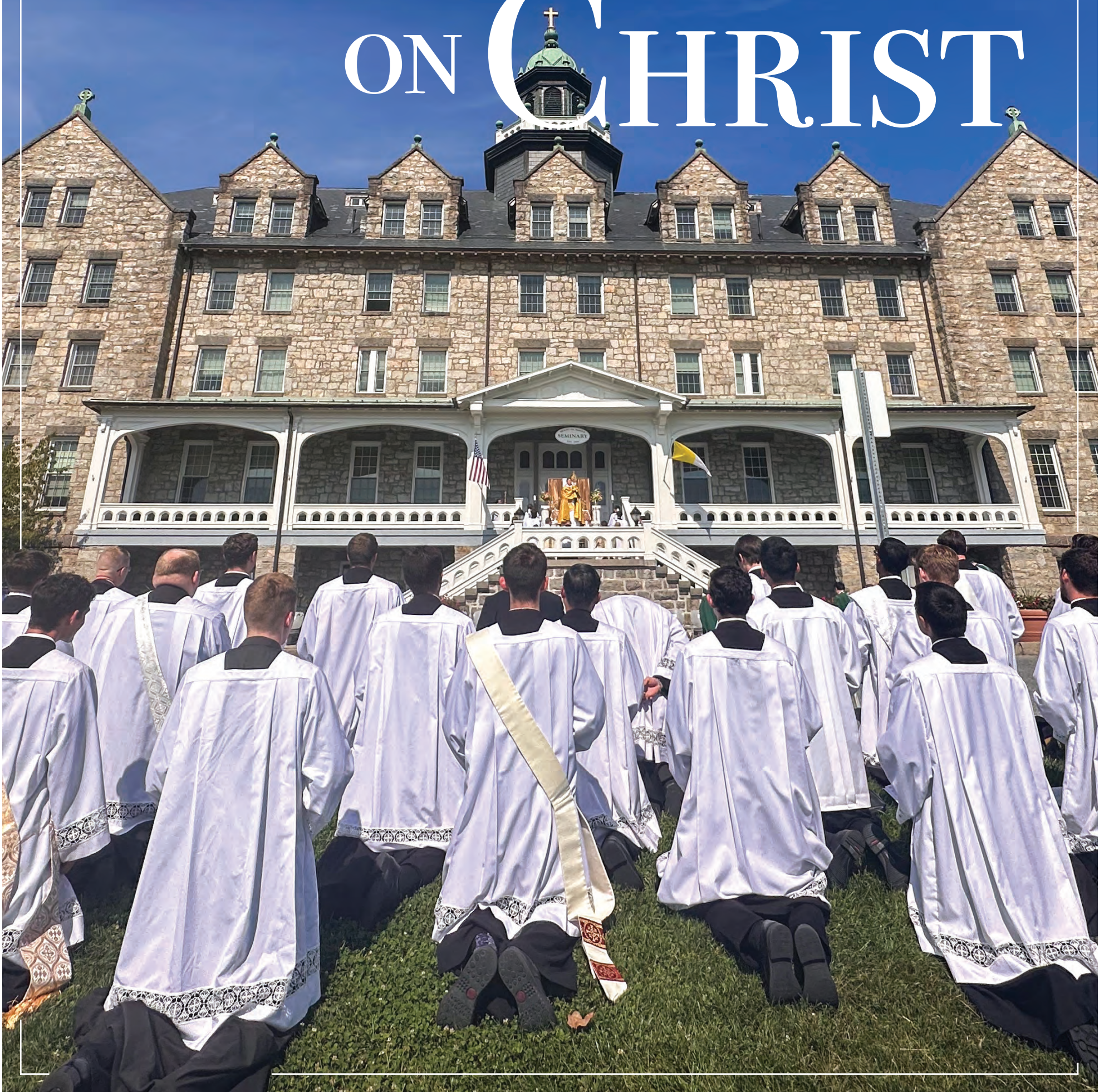



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CHRISTIAN BROTHERS

Religious serve as 'brothers' to troubled teens

Ocean Tides in Rhode Island opened 50 years ago and is still serving youth from ages 13-18

By Katie Yoder

For the troubled teenagers they serve in Rhode Island, the Brothers of the Christian Schools strive to be what their name suggests: brothers.

"We take the term 'brother' very seriously, that we are called to stand next to, to walk with, to accompany young people in pursuit of Christ, in pursuit of knowledge, and pursuit of truth," Brother Paul Avvento, FSC, director of the Office of Vocation Ministry, told Our Sunday Visitor.

At Ocean Tides school in Rhode Island, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, also known as the De La Salle Christian Brothers or Christian Brothers, minister to struggling young men at two campuses: the main campus, in Narragansett, and another, in Providence.

The school opened nearly 50 years ago, in 1975, to serve male youth ages 13-18 involved with the juvenile justice system and in need of diversionary counseling or residential treatment.

"Ocean Tides is a Lasallian school and residential program that is committed to providing a challenging, safe and healthy learning environment designed to meet the social, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual needs of each individual," Brother Paul, who previously taught there, described.

The brothers, founded by St. John Baptist de La Salle in the 17th century to provide educational opportunities for boys of poor or working-class families, sponsor the school. Today, De La Salle schools serve in 79 different countries worldwide.

Open doors

At Ocean Tides, both cam-



Students participate on a ropes course as part of a founders day activity for team, culture building and perseverance. Courtesy of Ocean Tides School in Rhode Island

pus present distinctive opportunities: a positive behavior program and positive behavioral supports, a small-class environment, individualized instruction based on IEPs (Individualized Education Plans), individual or group counseling, and career study or experience.

Among other things, the school offers on-site employment, real-world internships, and vocational or trade education, including in culinary arts, carpentry and woodworking, landscape design, engineering and technology.

—Brother Paul Avvento

Ocean Tides, Brother Paul highlighted, stands out from other, similar institutions in its approach. The staff and brothers interact with these young men not only as students but also as human persons. Caring for these teenagers is more than a job; it's a calling.

"We're what's called a non-restraint or a non-secure facility, in the sense that none of our doors are ever locked from the inside," Brother Paul said. "Our staff is not allowed to restrain students if they are attempting to leave."

Similar, alternative settings, he said, often resemble what peo-

ple think of as a detention center.

"Since our founding, we've really felt that that's not the way to transform hearts," he said. "So if a student tries to leave, we will walk with them, we will talk with them, we will do everything we can to reason and persuade or whatever else it might be and remind them of the consequences that they risk facing. But at the end of the day, it's their choice."

This approach, he said, makes a drastic difference in students' sense of agency and respect.

A student-centric focus

Brother Paul shared the similarities and differences between campuses.

The Narragansett campus — a 24/7, 365-day school and residential program — welcomes young men involved in the juvenile justice system. The Providence campus, which serves strictly as a school, educates teenagers referred from school districts for IEP services, small class sizes and individual attention.

"Ocean Tides youth experience significant levels of trauma and disrupted development, and the program tries to help fill in some of those gaps through its caring and supportive environment and educational, recreational and career development opportunities," he said.

Everyday Catholics can help in this mission, he said. This fall,



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they will hold a car show on Oct. 14 and an annual fundraiser on Oct. 20 in Narragansett. The school will also organize a cookie fundraiser beginning on Oct. 23, where people can purchase cookies made by students. Catholics can also donate online at www.oceantides.org.

A brother's role

Unlike years past, no brothers currently hold formal assignments at the school. But, Brother Paul said, the brothers today serve as mentors and walk with the young men in a special way.

He pointed to the beauty of the Narragansett campus sharing property with the Christian Brothers Center, which houses retired and active brothers.

"Even when brothers aren't in the school in formal roles, they are constantly interacting with students," he said, from eating together to sharing conversations.

He stressed the importance of students benefiting from interacting with people who, in their eyes, are not forced to care about them. Instead, they see the brothers freely choosing to accompany them.

A vocation

Brother Paul first encountered the brothers as a student at Manhattan College, a Lasallian Catholic college in Riverdale, New York.

"I was studying education and I was drawn to the brothers, the way they taught, the way they interacted with the students," he said.

After graduating, he spent seven years working in one of the brothers' schools in San Francisco while struggling with his vocation.

"I have never put more effort into anything as I did fighting my [religious] vocation throughout my 20s," he said. "I think deep down, I knew it and everyone I worked with [knew it]."

At the same time, he said, he felt called to marriage and family life. He reasoned that he was already doing the same work as



Three students volunteer at the Smith Hill block party in Providence. Courtesy of Brother Paul Avvento, FSC

the brothers. Then, his approach changed around when he turned 30.

"I stopped seeing vocation as 'What is God calling me to do?,' and I started seeing it as 'Who was God calling me to be?'" he remembered.

"Once I started seeing it as 'Who is God calling me to be?,' I realized I cannot be the person of faith, the person of presence, of accompaniment, of true Christian relationship with others, without being a brother — without experiencing the presence of God and community every day with my fellow brothers and then sharing that gift with my students and then bringing my students back into prayer with my brothers.

"That kind of life is the life that I needed to live," he concluded, "to be who God was calling me to be."

A teaching brother

Brother Paul called his time

at Ocean Tides, for nearly a year-and-a-half, his most brotherlike experience. He began teaching right before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, in February of 2020.

With some teachers, counselors and other staff no longer able to serve at the school, due to being at-risk or needing to care for their families, Brother Paul jumped in to teach multiple subjects (social studies and physics) as well as serving in the school's group-living environment outside of class, from playing basketball to holding video game tournaments.

He shared one of his favorite things to witness while teaching there: seeing the students engaged in something so enjoyable or innocent that they dropped the guard many of them have been forced to carry since a young age.

"Because they are so accustomed to being hurt by the world, by the people who are closest to them, that to open up and to just enjoy something or be innocent or vulnerable, for many of them, is the worst thing you could do," he explained. "And yet these moments where you would see the smile, that, it's like, they're still kids."

"In those moments," he said, "it's just beautiful."

Katie Yoder is a contributing editor for *Our Sunday Visitor*.



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BENEDICTINES

The four sisters, left to right: Sister Mary Paul, Sister Maria Johanna, Sister Margoretta and Mother Mary Anne. Courtesy photo

Welcoming everyone as Christ

*People seeking peace
and healing find it at this
monastery in the foot-
hills of Pennsylvania*

By Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller

The word “Pax,” which means peace, is over the main entrance to St. Emma Monastery in Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

“People tell us that as soon as they pull into the parking lot, they feel their concerns melting away from their hearts and they feel at peace,” said Mother Mary Ann Noll, OSB, prioress of the small community.

There are many reasons why people visit the Benedictine monastery. Hundreds are drawn to their summer flea market and Christmas open house, and there have been food festivals and stage performances. Customers shop at their Catholic gift and book store and the Treasure Shoppe that’s filled with high quality donated items.

People coming for group retreats, private retreats and

other occasions can stay in the retreat house, monastic guest house or in the well-appointed Robertshaw Country House. Others stop by to visit the shrines, attend morning Mass, or join the Benedictine sisters in praying the Liturgy of the Hours.

In the Rule of St. Benedict, all are welcome as Christ.

The sisters’ monastic life is their ministry: to be Christ-

*“The search for God
is lived here within St.
Emma’s. We are all God-
seekers and have that
hunger within us that
material things cannot
satisfy.”*

— Mother Mary Anne

centered and to become a spiritual center that draws people in. They seldom go out into the world, and instead, people come to them.

“The search for God is lived here within St. Emma’s,” Mother Mary Anne said. “We are all God-seekers and have that hunger within us that material things cannot satisfy.”

The beginning

The Benedictine presence came to these foothills of the Laurel Highlands in southwestern Pennsylvania in 1847 when Boniface Wimmer brought a group of monks to serve the German immigrants. That was the foundation for what became

St. Vincent Archabbey, seminary and college.

In February 1931, Mother Leonardo Fritz and 10 Benedictine sisters arrived to work in St. Vincent’s kitchens and dining rooms. Their intentions were to support the struggling motherhouse, Abtei St. Walburga in Germany. There were 40 sisters in Latrobe by 1939. Four years later, they purchased a house and 10 acres in Greensburg to use as their retreat and retirement home. That became St. Emma Monastery.

Mother Mary Anne met them when her family visited an uncle who was a priest at St. Vincent, and he sometimes brought some of the sisters to family dinners.

“Mother Leonardo would tell me, ‘One of these days, you will be one of us,’ and I always cringed,” she said. “I was 16 when someone asked me if I had ever considered being a nun, and I rather happily said, ‘Not really.’”

God had other plans. She was 17 when she heard the calling in her heart and 18 when it became clear to her that she was supposed to be at St. Emma’s.

“God has a way of doing that,” she said. “The very meaning of vocation is to call, and it’s very true that Jesus says, ‘I have chosen you, and you have not chosen me.’”

She joined after graduation



Mother Mary Anne places the veil on Sister Mary Paul. Sister Marian Johanna is in the background. Courtesy photos

from high school in 1962, a year after the novitiate was opened for American women. She was the fifth to enter. By 1987, the sisters still at St. Vincent's relocated to St. Emma's.

"I am blessed to have known all but the first five of our sisters," said Mother Mary Anne, who later earned a bachelor degree in psychology.

Meet the sisters

The monastery grew with additions to the retreat house; more shrines were installed and another chapel was built. The community purchased 105 additional surrounding acres and currently lease half of that

to a local farmer.

There were 28 sisters in 1993 when Mother Mary Anne became prioress of the community that in 2010 gained its independence as a conventual chapter.

Now there are five. One of them, Sister Petra Littlejohn, was a medical technologist before entering another community. She came to St. Emma's for a more structured prayer life and was there for 20 years. She is now in a nursing home.

Sister Maria Johanna Uhlott, was a biology teacher and also worked in nursing homes and in a rehabilitation center for adults with physical and cog-

FROM THE RULE OF SAINT BENEDICT



Public domain

Let all guests that happen to come be received as Christ, because He is going to say: "A guest was I and you received Me." And let suitable honor be shown to them all, especially to those who are of the household of the faith and to strangers. When therefore a guest shall have been announced, let him be met by the superior or by the brethren, with all due courtesy; and let them at once betake

themselves to prayer together and so let them associate together in peace, because the kiss of peace may not be offered first, but only when preceded by prayer, so as to avoid the snares of Satan: and in the salutation itself let all humility be manifest. Whenever guests arrive or depart, let Christ be adored in them—for Him indeed we receive in them—by bowing of the head or by full prostration. And when the guests have been received let them be taken to pray and then let the superior, or whomsoever he shall have appointed, sit with them. Let the divine law be read in the presence of a guest, that he may be edified; and after this let all courtesy be shown him.

— "How Guests Are To Be Received"
Chapter 53

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Statue of St. Walburga

nitive challenges. She felt called to vocation but stopped looking for the right community after six years of searching.

"Then I went on a personal retreat here, and within the first week, it just felt like home," she said. "It was a perfect mix between prayer and work, and community was the biggest draw."

Sister Margoretta Judy, is the oldest. She had been in another Benedictine community for 54 years before it closed.

"I expected to finish my life there, but I had to look for another place," she said. "I wanted to find a place where they wore full habits and prayed the whole seven hours of the Divine Office. I found that and much more when I came to St. Emma's in 2014. I found a loving community of prayerful sisters."

Sister Mary Paul Jenson, 43, finished her first vows last November.

"I worked in a machine shop doing quality control and making blueprints for operators," she said. "I was considering religious life and went looking for a community that prayed the full liturgy. That was very important to me. I found St. Emma's online and entered in 2019. I found

that the sisters have their own community, and the volunteers have their own community, and it was two separate communities coming together."

Volunteers at the monastery

The 75 dedicated volunteers are crucial to the monastery. They take care of housekeeping and the grounds, staff the shops and provide manpower for all of the events.

Home school groups come to help, and young men have completed Eagle Scout projects on the grounds. Generous benefactors have funded projects including a shrine of a life-size St. Pio at a confessional. It was created by internationally renowned Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz, who also created a life-size Last Supper with Jesus at the table with 12 benches. It's the most popular shrine at the monastery.

"One day a group brought food and sat at the table with their friend who had terminal cancer," Mother Mary Anne said. "She wanted to have lunch with Jesus."

Visitors sit and pray on the other side of the St. Pio confessional, and walk the Rosary

path across the field and into the woods. They pray at the outdoor Stations of the Cross, the Fatima shrine and the chapel dedicated to St. Walburga.

Those sacred places are part of the sisters' ministry to bring people to the monastery where they can seek God.

They also come for comfort, like the man who knocked on the door asking for prayers. His son had been murdered and he was on his way to meet with law enforcement.

Another time, a young couple asked if they could come to pray in the chapel. They had just experienced a miscarriage and were heartbroken. Another man called grieving over losing his 17-year-old daughter to cancer, and his wife had been diagnosed recently with stage four cancer. He needed prayers.

"God sends the ones who are supposed to be here, and we get to accompany them on the roller coaster of their lives," Mother Mary Anne said. "St. Emma's is a place where people can share the depths of their hearts, and St. Benedict asked us to listen with the ears of the heart."

Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller
writes from Pennsylvania.



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ON CAMPUS

One-third of all seminarians have this thing in common

The Fellowship of Catholic University Students is part of more than 1,000 vocation stories

By Anna Wilgenbusch

The statistics are alarming. The population of priests in the U.S. has fallen by at least 25,000 since 1965, according to data from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. Over three thousand parishes were pastor-less in 2022. Around the country, parishes are closing, merging, and struggling to meet the needs of their parishioners.

But when the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors polled seminarians in 2019, they discovered something surprising — more than one-third of U.S. seminarians indicated that FOCUS had impacted their discernment.

Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS), an

organization that trains and disperses missionaries to 193 college campuses across the U.S., offers hope to a nationwide priest shortage.

Encouraging priestly vocations


“If there is another apostolate in the Catholic Church that does more to encourage and support vocations to the priesthood and religious life, I don’t know who it would be,” said Msgr. James P. Shea, president of the University of Mary, in a FOCUS press release.

FOCUS ministers to students at 216 locations around the world, including eight international campuses and ten digital outreach campuses, as well as 23 parish locations. Prayer, a dating fast, and discernment are integral to the formation of its over 800 missionaries.

As of this year, 871 men have pursued the priesthood after their involvement with the organization, according to FOCUS.



Missionaries with the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, or FOCUS, work with Peruvians to mix cement for a retaining wall. CNS photo/courtesy FOCUS





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– Pope Francis

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Seminarians chat in front of Sacred Heart Major Seminary in 2021. CNS photo/Marek Dziekonski via Detroit Catholic

Discovering a priestly vocation in Togo

Samuel Gerbic, age 26, a seminarian at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary near his hometown of St. Louis, is one of them.

Gerbic earned his bachelor's degree in Engineering from Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois — a secular campus that does not have FOCUS missionaries. It wasn't until his sophomore year in college when he heard about the organization from a friend, who recommended a FOCUS mission trip to Africa to Gerbic.

Gerbic spent July 2017 in the small West African nation of Togo with a group of FOCUS missionaries led by Father William Ryan, who operates a mission there full-time.

"It was really receiving the gift of Christian fellowship and the clarity of the proclamation of the Gospel that inspired me with the desire to share that with everyone when I got home," Gerbic said.

Gerbic's faith was invigorated by his time in Africa. He entered FOCUS when he graduated in 2019 and began serving as a missionary at Wright State University in Fairborn, Ohio, that fall.

In January of Gerbic's second year serving at Wright State, he asked God in prayer what needed to change in the hearts of men to accept the Gospel.

"(In prayer) it became clear, in the context of FOCUS, that the Lord had been inviting me to share this gift of friendship and secure relationship and accompaniment, but that my desire was to give more than just friendship, then just accompaniment. It was to build this place, to provide a space of

healing and security that only a father can provide," Gerbic said.

Shortly after this experience in prayer, Gerbic began the application process to the seminary. He has four more years of study ahead of him before he will be ordained for the Diocese of St. Louis.

From missionary life to seminary life

Noah Orham, a 25-year-old from Savage, Minnesota, also experienced the call to priesthood through his faithfulness to prayer while a FOCUS missionary.

"If we are just being rooted in prayer, we will be free to say yes to the Lord, be free to say yes to the Holy Spirit because we actually know how the Holy Spirit

is working in our lives," said Orham, who graduated from North Dakota State in Fargo, North Dakota, in December of 2020 with a degree in civil engineering.

Orham's three years as a FOCUS missionary helped him realize that he desired to be on mission the way that only a priest can.

"Your whole entire day, your whole entire life, your whole entire schedule, is organized around prayer and the sacraments, which is why I think FOCUS has been so successful in encouraging vocations. Because it is not just trying to get you to do something, but it is encouraging you to be something," said Orham, who now resides at the St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Learning to abide in Christ

Gian Gonzalez, 28 years old, from Springfield, Virginia, is also among the one-third of seminarians who were impacted by FOCUS.

"FOCUS provided the space where I was able to listen to God's voice, understand that I was created for a purpose, and discover my vocation," Gonzalez wrote in an email. "Discernment begins with the first task of abiding."

Gonzalez graduated from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, in 2017, where he studied philosophy and economics. He served as a FOCUS missionary for five

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ABOUT FOCUS



CNS photo/courtesy Fellowship of Catholic University Students

FOCUS is an international Catholic outreach organization, serving nearly 200 college campuses and more than 20 parish communities. Through Bible studies, one-on-one mentorship, mission trips, conferences, and partnerships with priests, bishops and parishes, FOCUS missionaries walk alongside students and parishioners in their journey of faith, inspiring

and equipping them for a lifetime of Christ-centered evangelization and discipleship. Since FOCUS was founded in 1998, more than 1,000 people have entered the seminary or religious orders after connecting with a missionary on college campuses. More than 50,000 FOCUS alumni serve in parishes and communities across the world to continue their lifelong mission of evangelization and leading others to pursue lives of virtue and excellence.

A PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

O Father, you desire all of us to be happy.
Stir up the grace of a religious vocation in the hearts
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Grant to them the willingness and generosity
to give of themselves, their lives, their time and their
talents to the service of Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord
and Savior, and to His Holy Church.

May more men and women go forth as priests, deacons,
brothers and sisters to bring the truths of our Catholic faith
to all others so that soon they, too, may know You better
and love You more ...
and serving You, be truly happy. Amen.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

years, first at Boston University followed by two years at Mount St. Mary's University. Gonzalez has also directed or participated in over 10 mission trips including to Honduras, Mexico, Togo and Guyana.

It was on one of these mission trips — a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico — that he received the impetus to act on a call to the priesthood, which he had felt since childhood.

"After a challenging knee crawl, I prayed at the feet of Jesus and the Holy Spirit reawakened this call to the priesthood in a way that allured a response. It was Jesus in the Eucharist who asked, 'Wilt thou refuse?' A few moments later, I was amazed to see Fr. Ivany, my vocations director at the Basilica in Mexico. From there I prayed about the call and shortly applied," Gonzalez wrote.

He is currently a seminarian

at Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Maryland, for his propaedeutical year, a time of formation and prayer.

Gonzalez said that it is no surprise that FOCUS has borne so many vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and holy matrimony. More than one thousand people who were involved in FOCUS have entered the seminary or formation in religious life — a figure that FOCUS predicts will double in the next ten years.

"I believe it comes down to our three missionary habits: divine intimacy, authentic friendship, and clarity and conviction in spiritual multiplication," Gonzalez wrote. "FOCUS has created a culture of encounter that forms missionary disciples who courageously live out their vocation to the fullest."

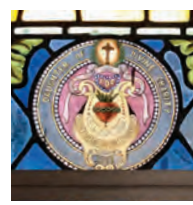
Anna Wilgenbusch is a freelance writer based in Minnesota.

"Countless young people involved with FOCUS, including student and missionary alumni, choose to discern a religious vocation as a result of their experiences with FOCUS Bible studies, discipleship, mission trips or national events such as SEEK. These young adults are on fire for their faith and possess a zeal for evangelization that is transforming the Church now — and will do so for years to come. My own priesthood has been strengthened through my involvement with FOCUS!"

— Monsignor James P. Shea
President, the University of Mary



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CARMELITES

Something old, something new

Carmelite nuns in Maryland are updating the oldest U.S. monastery

By Katie Yoder

In the quiet, wooded hills of southern Maryland, a hidden gem stands: the first Catholic monastery in the United States.

Founded in 1790, the Mount Carmel Monastery in La Plata — the first convent of religious women in the original 13 states and the first American Carmelite monastery — houses 10 Carmelite nuns. The cloistered nuns live a contemplative life, away from the public eye.

Their mission is a crucial one: In dedicating their lives to God, they serve as a beating heart, pumping life into the Church and the world with their prayers.

“We are the Discalced Carmelite Nuns and our charism and apostolate is to pray for souls, to pray for priests, and the needs of the Church and the world,” Mother Marie Bernardina of Divine Mercy, OCD, the prioress of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of the Carmel of Port Tobacco, told Our Sunday Visitor.

The nuns live and work inside the monastery. At the same time, they invite visitors to at-

tend Mass at their chapel, tour their historic buildings, relax in their gardens, and browse their gift shop that displays, among other things, their handmade quilts.

An updated chapel

This year, the nuns are adding something new to the old monastery, with their chapel expansion project.

“Our expanded and renovated chapel is going to be very beautiful and give God much glory and honor,” Mother Maria Bernardina revealed.

The chapel, built in 1954 on the site of the original chapel,



Pictured is the chapel and sanctuary that are currently being renovated. Courtesy photos

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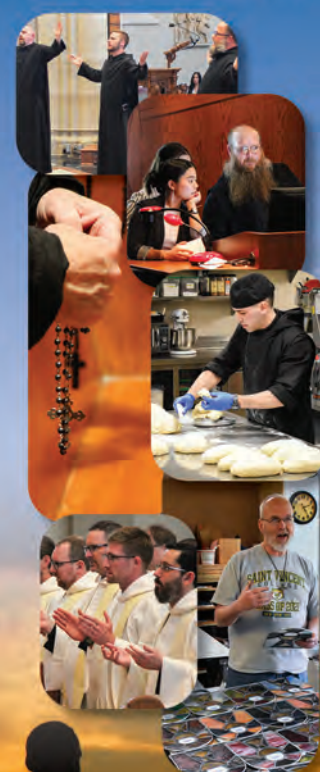
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Mount Carmel Monastery is the oldest foundation of Carmelite nuns in the U.S.

was left unfinished according to the designs of Philip H. Frohman, who is perhaps best known for his work on the Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

The project includes a new sanctuary with a stained-glass window of Our Lady of Mount Carmel as well as a new tabernacle, altar, statues of Our Lady, St. Joseph, and the Infant of Prague, and a life-size crucifix. It will also provide more room for the daily Mass goers, a new sacristy and confessional for the nuns, and a larger nuns' choir.

The chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the nuns hope, will be completed by December.

A piece of history

The monastery began after three Catholic women from southern Maryland wanted to enter a monastery in the mid-1700s. But, at the time, none existed.

"Catholics were denied religious freedom in the United States until the Bill of Rights in 1787 which guaranteed freedom of religion," Mother Marie Bernardina explained.

Instead, the women — Ann Matthews and her nieces Ann Teresa and Susanna Matthews — entered a Carmelite monastery in Belgium. Following the Bill of Rights, Ann Matthews, now Mother Bernardina Matthews, received a letter from her brother in Maryland.

"Now is the time to found [a monastery] in this country for peace is declared and religion is free," Father Ignatius Matthews, S.J., encouraged his sister.

His letter worked. Mother Marie, her nieces, and another sister sailed to America.

The nuns remained at the monastery until 1831, when they moved to Baltimore after the death of their spiritual director. They relocated for several reasons: the failure of the land to support them, the deterioration of the buildings, and financial

law disputes.

The nuns began teaching at a girls' school. At the same time, the locals in southern Maryland remembered the nuns — and prayed for their return.

More than 100 years later, in 1976, they did. Today, two of the original buildings still stand and are open to the public as a museum.

"These buildings were restored in 1935 by a group of lay women and men called the Restorers of Mount Carmel," Mother Marie Bernardina said, adding that the same group also built the 1954 chapel.

A way of life

The nuns' life is one of prayer: They pray the Divine Office in addition to dedicating time to quiet mental prayer, community prayers, and spiritual and Scripture reading.

Mother Marie Bernardina shared her current favorite prayer, from the "Surrender novena" by Father Dolindo Ruotolo: "O Jesus, I surrender myself to you, take care of everything!"

When nuns are not praying, they work. They create things to sell in the gift shop, send novena mailings, respond to the many prayer requests they receive, and maintain the monastery by cooking, cleaning, sewing and gardening.

At the end of their day, the nuns set aside time for recreation, which includes talking — and laughter.

The nuns, Mother Marie Bernardina said, pray daily for new vocations.

"This is the primary reason we created our website — to attract new vocations and awareness of our life of prayer for the many people who ask us to pray for them and their families," she said.

In addition to the nuns asking the Infant of Prague and St. Thérèse for vocations, their daily Mass goers pray to St. Joseph.

"We really do want young women to know that we're here,

even though we're very hidden," Mother Marie Bernardina said, adding that "this way of life is a way to serve God, if you have that call."

On their vocations page, the nuns provide information for discerning young women. They list, among other qualities, a sense of humor.

"God wants us to be fully human, as he created us to be," she explained.

A love story

Mother Marie Bernardina shared her own vocation story. Growing up Catholic in Bowie, Maryland, she described herself as a typical young adult. But, even with a federal government job, her own car, friends to see, parties to attend and boyfriends to date, she felt unhappy and restless.

Then, she said, two events shook her to her core: her brother committed suicide and her mother died of pancreatic cancer.

"I started wondering, 'What is the purpose of my life?'" she remembered.

She found happiness researching her faith, embarking on pilgrimages worldwide, and attending retreats and charismatic prayer groups. At the same time, she struggled to find "Mr. Right" to marry.

"I prayed a lot to discern what's God's will for me," she said. "I knew that I wouldn't be happy unless I did whatever God wanted me to do."

Even though she had never seen a nun or religious sister, she began investigating different orders. As she fell deeper in love with Jesus, the thought came to her: "Maybe Jesus is the husband I'm looking for."

She later began a 30-day consecration to Mary. The last day, she noticed, fell on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, patroness of the Carmelite order.

"What's a Carmel?" she remembered thinking. "What's Mount Carmel?"

She learned about a local Carmelite monastery in La Plata. She went and, to her surprise, discovered that nuns lived there.

"I was blown away by the radicalness of their life — a room of nuns behind a grille, clothed head to toe and very happy!" she recalled.

When she received the Carmelite habit in 1990, she took the religious name of the foundress, Mother Marie.

Katie Yoder is a contributing editor for Our Sunday Visitor.



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CAPUCHINS

‘Whatever the Church needs’

From Pittsburgh to Papua New Guinea, vocations are thriving in this order

By Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller
Ten Capuchin Franciscans of St. Augustine Province in Pittsburgh are missionaries in Papua New Guinea and 25 serve in Puerto Rico. In both locations, they minister to some of the poorest of the poor.

In the Lawrenceville neighborhood of Pittsburgh where the motherhouse is located, two brothers are in charge of The Port, an evangelization ministry founded in 2020 to focus on young adults in the city. There, the friars connect to the community with opportunities to encounter Christ in prayer, beauty, service and spiritual and intellectual formation.

In between those diverse assignments, the rest of the 100 friars from the province might be serving in parishes, prisons, classrooms, soup kitchens and street ministries. About 70% are priests and the others are brothers.

Their work is rooted in the charism of their founder, St. Francis of Assisi, and in the rich Franciscan history of sending men to do work where they are most needed.

“We all have a missionary spirit,” vocations director Father Rafael Anguiano, OFM Cap, said about their many ministries. “We work for the Catholic Church, so whatever the Church needs, if we have it, we give it to her.”

Growing vocations

St. Francis, who lived from 1181 to 1226, sought to live the Gospel life through deep appreciation for the beauty of God’s creation and a simple life of prayer and charity. The Capuchin Franciscans emerged in 1524 as a reform movement with renewed emphasis on the founder’s life of prayer and simplicity.



Capuchin brothers profess their simple vows on July 15, 2023, at St. Augustine Church in Pittsburgh, Pa. Matt Hindelang

The Province of St. Augustine in Pittsburgh was founded in 1873 when friars from Bavaria came to serve the German community in Lawrenceville. In addition to their presence in Papua New Guinea and Puerto Rico, they are also in parish assignments in several locations in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, with formation in postulancy in Philadelphia and post novitiate in Washington, D.C.

Father Rafael and four other Capuchins are at the newest assignment,

“God has definitely given me a beautiful ministry of working in recruitment. I have seen men growing in love for our Church and the Capuchin way of life, and that is very fulfilling.”

— Father Rafael Anguiano

a priory at Christ the King parish in Columbus, Ohio. They arrived in July.

“My provincial sent me here because there’s a great need of ministry to the Hispanic people at the parish,” he said. “This allows me to en-

counter men who want to know about the Capuchin way of life.”

Father Rafael studied with friars in his native Mexico.

“I was inspired by them by their prayer life and administering to the poor and the less fortunate,” he said. “I never thought I would be one of them, but I entered the Province of St. Augustine and made my final vows eight years ago.”

Their numbers are growing, he added, and most of the vocations come from men with college educations and master’s degrees and experience in the professional world.

“Most importantly, they have had in their journey experience with the Lord or with the Church and they are drawn to explore this calling,” he said. “Or they don’t find fulfillment in their jobs and want to find something more meaningful. God has definitely given me a beautiful ministry of working in recruitment. I have seen men growing in love for our Church and the Capuchin way of life, and that is very fulfilling. Everything is a gift from the Lord.”

A simple life

Brother Jim Mungovan is the guardian of the motherhouse where 20 retired friars live and 10 younger men have outside ministries. His vocation is rooted in lay volunteering.

“I wasn’t figuring on being a friar,” he said. “I thought I’d be married and have kids.”

But after two years of mission work in Papua New Guinea, he entered the Province of St. Augustine at age 39. He is now 59.

The Capuchins have been on that island nation since 1955.

“The men who went there were bringing the Church to people who had never seen white people before,” Brother Jim said. “When I got there, the Church in the bush was well established. Maybe 50% of the population is Christian, and a large portion of that is Catholic. Then there are Lutherans and smaller groups. We have vocations there and the diocesan priesthood is well established. So it’s a growing church.”

The people there, he said, taught him a great deal about

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Father Mike Perucho, vocations director for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, sings during Mass at the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors' 60th annual convention at Immaculate Conception Seminary in Huntington, N.Y., on Aug. 29. OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

Vocations expert sees hope for priestly vocations even amid secularism

A decrease in religious belief remains a "significant challenge" in cultivating religious vocations

By Gina Christian, OSV News

A decrease in religious belief remains a "significant challenge" in cultivating vocations to the priesthood, said a vocations expert at a recent conference.

Diocesan vocations directors continue "to work against a culture of secularism in which the purpose and meaning of one's life for so many of our young people ... is defined by themselves," Father Chuck Dornquast, director of vocations for the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida, told OSV News.

Father Dornquast shared his thoughts during the Aug. 28-Sept. 1 convention of the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors, or NVDVD, of which the priest is vice president.

Founded in 1962, the non-profit works closely with the U.S.

Conference of Catholic Bishops to promote and support priestly vocations. Membership is open to all Catholic dioceses and eparchies in the U.S., with associate memberships avail-

"The opportunity to spend this past week together afforded our newest vocation directors a chance to learn from their more experienced brothers."

— Rose Sullivan

able to Catholic dioceses outside of the U.S.

The convention, now in its 60th year, drew more than 218 priests, some 20 men and women religious, and lay men and women from six countries



Priests are seen praying during Eucharistic adoration at the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors' 60th annual convention. OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

to the Immaculate Conception Retreat Center in Huntington, New York, NCDVD executive director Rose Sullivan told OSV News.

“The opportunity to spend this past week together afforded our newest vocation directors a chance to learn from their more experienced brothers. More importantly they know that they will not be doing this work alone,” Sullivan added.

“Prayer, fraternity and conversations about the sacred ministry of vocations” were at the heart of the gathering, said Sullivan.

The solidarity experienced at the convention bolstered participants for the work of inviting young adults to consider vocations -- their living out the particular call to discipleship that Jesus Christ calls them to -- that are diametrically at odds with the prevailing culture, said Father Dornquast.

Youth and young adults have

“become the determiner of the meaning of their lives,” he said. “Seeking their own happiness is their primary goal, and (it’s) what they’re formed to seek after.”

Vocations directors are “working against that culture of secularism,” he said.

At the same time, those labors are not in vain, he added.

“Thankfully, we’re also witnessing great fruit,” said Father Dornquast. “There is a spirit of holiness which is coming

about in many young people across our country, and (we’re) finding the ways to work with them.”

With the Catholic Church in the U.S. celebrating the National Eucharistic Revival, nurturing devotion to the Eucharist is one of the ways in which vocation directors can encourage young men to discern whether Jesus has called them to the priesthood.

According to the 2023 “Survey of Ordinands to the Priesthood”



Father Chuck Dornquast, vocations director for the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Fla., celebrates Mass at the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors’ annual convention.

OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

by Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, regular Eucharistic adoration figured heavily in the pre-seminary prayer practices of the class of 2023, cited by 73% of the survey participants.

Following adoration was the rosary (66%), prayer group or

Bible study (45%), high school retreats (37%) and “lectio divina” (35%).

Parish youth groups, as well as participating in liturgical ministries such as altar server and lector, were also significant factors in vocational development.

A majority of the survey re-

spondents (63%) cited parish priests as those who most encouraged their priestly vocations.

Gina Christian is a National Reporter for OSV News.

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MEDIA NUNS

Introducing Christ through technology

The Daughters of St. Paul have a long legacy of using media to share the Gospel

By Katie Yoder

Growing up in a devout Catholic family, Sister Nancy Usselmann, FSP, knew of many religious orders. But, she said, she never considered joining one.

"Many of them would see me with my sisters and cousins around the same age and ask if we ever thought of becoming a [religious] sister," she said of her childhood in St. Louis. "I would immediately smile and say, 'Oh no, Sister. Not for me!'"

"I remember one sister behind the cloistered grille looking sad when I said that," she added. "I just keep thinking to myself, 'Oh Lord, I could NOT be silent!'"

Then, she met the Daughters of St. Paul, a religious order of more than 2,500 sisters worldwide who are dedicated to communicating — communicating Christ's love with their own lives and through the media.

"The Daughters of St. Paul are consecrated women religious, first and foremost, living a profound media spirituality that informs our media mission of evangelization," Sister Nancy described. "We live Christ and give Christ through the media and in the media culture."

Founded 1915 in Italy, the sisters known as "Media Nuns" pursue their mission in the spirit of St. Paul through various forms of media including publications, podcasts, social media, music and video. (Yes, that includes



Media nuns interviewing Clint Eastwood on the red carpet.

Courtesy of Sister Nancy Usselmann, FSP

a TikTok account with nearly three million likes.)

In the U.S. and Canada, they run nine Pauline Books and Media stores. But the sisters do more than sell books, according to Sister Nancy, who serves as director of the Pauline Center for Media Studies and specialist in media literacy education for the order.

"Our sisters are writers, producers, media literacy educators, film/TV review[er]s, international speakers, presenters of retreats and parish media missions, and

evangelizers," she said. "We seek to infuse the popular culture with an awareness of God's grace at work in the world and present everything in a Christian way, after the example of St. Paul the Apostle, the Church's greatest evangelizer."

Communicating Christ

Since their founding, the sisters have dedicated themselves to communicating Christ.

Their founder, Blessed James Alberione, appreciated the value of media, Sister Nancy said. She quoted him as saying: "The press, motion pictures, radio, and television today constitute the most urgent, most rapid, and most efficacious means of Catholic apostolate."

"He saw that to reach the masses of people with the message of the Gospel, we need to use the most rapid means possible," she commented. "Today that is every form of media — legacy media and digital media."

The mission of the Daughters of St. Paul, she said, is to direct people to Jesus Christ as the



Sister Nancy embraces technology. Courtesy of Sister Nancy Usselmann, FSP



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Media mindfulness

The sisters not only use media to communicate but also educate others on navigating today's world of communication. The Pauline Center for Media Studies, a project of the Daughters of St. Paul, develops and encourages media literacy, or media mindfulness, within the context of culture, education and faith formation.

Sister Nancy's top workshops address media mindfulness, living virtuously through social media, and instruction on becoming "cultural mystics."

"The popular media culture offers entertainment, news and opinions, some that are contrary to faith values," she said. "We have to be conscious of our media choices and how they do or do not align with Gospel values."

The sisters call this "media mindfulness."

"It is a method of asking questions of the media we engage with through critical inquiry to discover the values, ideologies and understanding of the human person that are embedded in media messages," Sister Nancy described. "We can then make informed choices of what media we choose to engage."

"This method also helps us to reflect and think before we post or respond on social media or gaming platforms to consider how we can be a virtuous presence online," she added.

She shared that part of the mission of Daughters of St. Paul is to teach people to become "media mindful" and to engage the media as cultural mystics.

"That means we bring our transformative experience of God as we delve into films, television series, social media, online games, music and any form of media to discover what deep human existential desires are present there," she said. "Those human yearnings are the starting point of leading people to God, for whom they seek, whether they are aware of that search or not."

"To be cultural mystics is an exercise in seeing God's pres-



Media nuns pose on the red carpet at the Catholics in Media Associates event. Courtesy of Sister Nancy Usselman, FSP

ence in the world, in the artistic questioning of popular media, and to become the bridge between our faith and the popular culture," she concluded.

Supporting the sisters

As media nuns, Sister Nancy said, they support others in the media by praying daily for all those who work in the media

industry as well as those who are influenced by media messages.

That includes people like actor Harrison Ford, she said.

"When I meet directors, actors and media professionals, I always tell them that there is a group of nuns that pray just for them. They are immensely appreciative," she revealed. "As Harrison Ford said after I told him we pray for him, 'That means more to me than you know.'"

Sister Nancy shared what everyday Catholics do to help support the Daughters of St. Paul, beginning by joining their page on Patreon, an online platform allowing them to offer a subscription service for their content.

She also encouraged Catholics to connect with the sisters online. Scan the QR code or visit their websites: daughtersofstpaul.com, pauline.org, bemediamindful.org. Follow them on social media with the handles @daughterstpaul, @paulinebooksandmedia, @paulinemediastudies and by searching for #medianuns.

A vocation

While she did not consider becoming a religious sister as a kid, Sister Nancy remembered enjoying movies, music and books from a young age.

Her life changed after her cousin invited her to a retreat day with the Daughters of St. Paul. While she felt reluctant, she went.

"As soon as I walked into their center, I saw that they use movies, music and books to speak about Jesus!" she recalled. "I remember thinking to myself, 'Now that is something I could do!'"

Even so, she hesitated to return.

"Still not convinced religious life was for me, I would find any excuse not to attend other retreat days when the sisters kept calling to invite me," she said. "I would sometimes go because my mother would say, 'You can't lie to a nun!'"

Mary also played a part in her vocation. The sisters handed her a prayer card to Mary, Queen of Apostles "To Know One's Own Vocation."

"I was going to Mass several times a week, and I would pray that prayer after Communion, asking Mary to help me to know my vocation in life," she said. "Then I would add, 'As long as it's not a nun!' Mary, I'm sure, had a good laugh!"

After several years and visits with the sisters, she said, she entered, to her family's surprise.

"But, here I am 34 years later," she said, "blessed and grateful to God for making me his media apostle!"

Katie Yoder is a contributing editor for Our Sunday Visitor.

Catholic Women: Are You Called to Religious Life in the Eastern Catholic Tradition?



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EUCCHARISTIC REVIVAL

From fugitive priests to growing abbeys

New Norbertine foundations reveal how these 'apostles of the Eucharist' are thriving

By Kimberley Heatherington,
OSV News

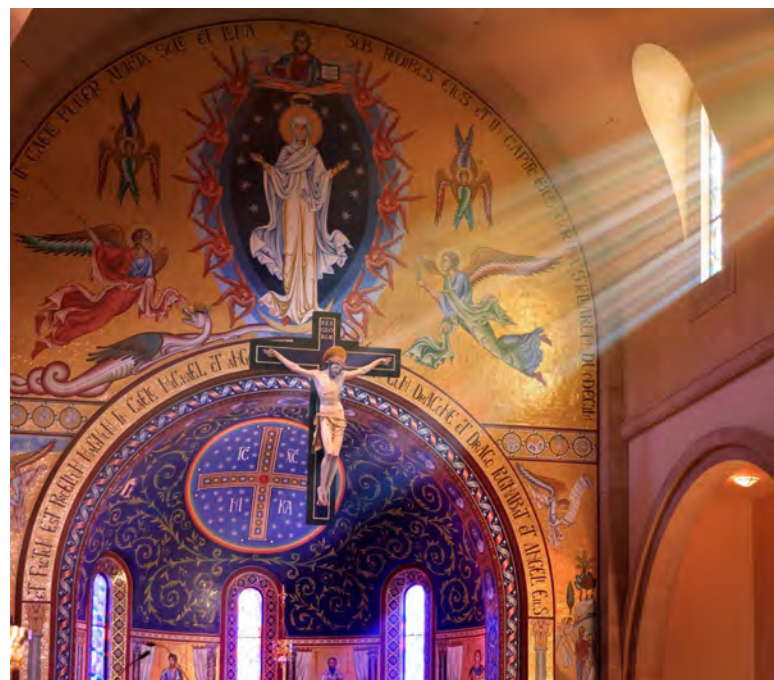
The Norbertines — one of the oldest surviving religious orders in the Catholic Church, established in France in 1120 — are not only, in the words of their founder St. Norbert of Xanten, "prepared for every good work."

They're also prepared to grow with both a new abbey in Orange County, California, and the repurposing of a century-plus-old convent and church in Springfield, Illinois.

"We've been blessed with a steady stream of vocations — there has been great growth," said Norbertine Abbot Eugene Hayes, the abbot of St. Michael's Abbey in Silverado, California. "And so in the early 2000s, we began to think about expansion."

That expansion culminated in May 2021 with the completion and dedication of an approximately \$120 million building project just nine miles away from its 1961-era predecessor, a second-generation St. Michael's Abbey that Liturgical Arts Journal hailed as "a glimmering beacon of unified totality." Its Romanesque proportions, earth-toned stucco walls, and terracotta-colored tile roof conjure an Italian locale, but also blend harmoniously with the surrounding Santa Ana Mountains.

The complex includes a monastery, church, guest house, conference center, administration buildings and more that are home to almost 100 Norbertines — over 50 priests and nearly 40 seminarians studying for the priesthood. Officially known as the Canons Regular of Prémontré (after their mother house in Prémontré, France), Norbertines live in common, celebrating Mass, daily chanting the Divine Office and responding to the needs of the community surrounding them.



The sanctuary of the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption at the Norbertines' St. Michael's Abbey in Silverado, Calif. OSV News

photo/courtesy St. Michael's Abbey

A new home for an old way of life

"It's a new abbey but it's an old foundation," Abbot Hayes told OSV News.

It's a foundation with a backstory worthy of a Hollywood spy thriller, too.

In July 1950, the abbot of the Norbertine abbey in Csorna, Hungary, received a secret tip: Communist authorities were soon to suppress the abbey and arrest its inhabitants. Seven priests of the community were determined — with the abbot's blessing — to flee to Austria. Crossing barbed-wired and mine-scattered fields, barely avoiding border guards and finally swimming a 60-foot-wide river, they eventually reached safety — and then New York in 1952.

The fearless leader of the group? Father Ladislaus Parker, the first abbot of St. Michael's.

"That was the beginning of our history," said Abbot Hayes. "Our founding abbot ... said that he would sum up the goal of the community that we would not reject anything good in the new, and we would maintain all that was good in the old," Abbot Hayes recalled.

Abbot Parker died in 2010 but "all of us have taken that to heart," shared Abbot Hayes. "When we speak about requests for help or new apostolates,

that's sort of the principle we fall back on: 'Can we do it; is it in line with our charism?'"

Norbertine Abbot Dane Radecki, abbot of St. Norbert Abbey in De Pere, Wisconsin — where the seven fugitive Hungarian priests first arrived from New York before leaving for California — said that principle requires a sort of apostolic balance.

"It's a tension wire that Norbert placed us on. We're constantly being drawn more and more into ministry by the demanding needs of the Church," Abbot Radecki told OSV News. "But at the same time, trying to not lose the focus of our liturgical life and our community life."

Abbot Hayes credits a very specific commitment to their 900-year-old traditions for the growth of Norbertine vocations.

"We have tried to maintain our fidelity to the Norbertine charism," Abbot Hayes said. "We are clerics — priests — living in common, celebrating the liturgy of the Church, and providing the care of souls in any place to which we have been summoned, to any apostolate we have been invited. That's the basis of our life."

Norbertine Father Jonathan Turba, St. Norbert's vocation director, thinks the turbulence

and division of the modern world also impacts discerners choosing amongst religious communities.

"We're apostles of reconciliation, and we're fed and guided by the Eucharistic love of Christ," Father Turba told OSV News. "Those two charisms really play out amidst the polarization."

A life fiercely devoted to the Eucharist also draws many inquirers.

"Our history is very much bound up with the mystery of the holy Eucharist," explained Abbot Hayes. "The initial representations of St. Norbert usually showed him with a book of Scriptures in his hand. But as time went on, he began to be looked to as an apostle of the

holy Eucharist."

The median age of St. Michael's Abbey residents — Norbertines who serve the community and parishes throughout the California dioceses of Orange, San Diego, San Bernardino and Fresno as well as the Los Angeles Archdiocese — is a fresh-faced 38.

"That's not the usual situation today, in religious communities," observed Abbot Hayes.

As the new St. Michael's Abbey in California neared completion, Abbot Hayes said invitations to start foundations in other dioceses began to arrive. Meetings and group community discernment followed.

"The judgment of every one of those groups was that we should accept the invitation

from Bishop (Thomas J.) Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois," said Abbot Hayes. "And so on July 1 of this year, we began the common life with seven of our priests being the founders of this new community."

Norbertine Father Augustine Puchner, prior of Corpus Christi Priory in Springfield, joked that, as a Milwaukee native, he was prepared for relocation from balmy California to the more frigid winters of Illinois.

As a name for the foundation was pondered, a flash of revelation provided the perfect answer.

"The inspiration came that since we're really a Eucharistic order — St. Norbert is a Eucharistic saint — and then

that we're in the midst of this Eucharist revival," the name therefore should be "something related to the Eucharist," Father Puchner said.

"When I first proposed the new name to Bishop Paprocki," said Father Puchner, "he was like, 'That's it; perfect. 'Corpus Christi' — of course. It's about the Eucharist.'"

Corpus Christi Priory is the former site of the Chiara Center, operated by the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis. The new, yet old, priory in Illinois is a reflection of its California sister, also with Romanesque towers, an earth-hued exterior and ruddy-tiled roof.

"The kind of bittersweet portion of the story is that the sisters' community has been

declining," said Father Puchner. "But they had the foresight and the wisdom to provide for a future on this beautiful piece of property by actively searching for another religious community."

The sisters remain on campus and the Norbertine fathers now serve as their chaplains.

With no signs of slowing growth yet evident, the Norbertines are daily defying the narrative of decline surrounding contemporary religious vocations.

"It's good news for the Church," said Father Puchner. "It really is a good news story for the whole church."

Kimberley Heatherington writes for OSV News from Virginia.



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