

THE PASTOR'S DESK

September 6, 2009 - "How Did I Get Here?" - A Vocation Story



Dear Parishioners,

One good way to see if you are doing God's will is to find yourself asking "How did I get here?" Because the chances are God will lead you where you did not expect to go. As I am installed as your Pastor, that question comes back to me again: "How did I get here?" At a recent Vocations Committee meeting, I recounted my vocation story. These stories tell of the events that drew you to a particular calling in life. Most of us have such a story.

Married couples can tell how they met, dated, fell in love, got engaged, etc. Each of us can give an account of the events that brought us where we are. But, for a vocation within the Church, there is an extra layer, a "something else", present. This is because a vocation within the Church would make no sense without the Church. The Priesthood and Consecrated Life only have meaning because of Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God, His mission of salvation, and the Church He established. For a priest or religious, this makes a vocation story all the more compelling, since the calling has no natural counterpart. While I can recount the events that brought me here, there is a hidden movement of the Holy Spirit at work. The drama of religious vocations is also compelling because, at every stage of the calling, God is always respecting our freedom.

About twenty years ago, I was a lawyer in a small town in Southern Maryland. I always went to Mass on Sunday, but did little else to practice the faith. I really did not have a prayer life. I would drop a dollar into the collection. As I was coming out of Mass one day, the Director of Religious Education for the parish asked me if I would help with the RCIA. My first question was "What is the RCIA?" After finding out what it is, I shocked myself by not saying "No" immediately. Well, I became a catechist and a sponsor in the RCIA for the next three years. This was an incredible experience. It really opened my eyes to the depths of the Faith and how God works in people's lives.

One Sunday at my parish, there was a "Called by Name" program where people submit the names of those whom they think have a vocation. Well, I had gotten to be so active in the parish, that my name was put in over twenty times. I had also begun to tithe the parish, going for a dollar a week to over fifty dollars a week. I received a letter from the Vocations Office of the Archdiocese inviting me to a small reception. Again, I shocked myself by not saying "No" right away. I went.

Then I spent the next three years of "off and on" participation in the affiliates program the Archdiocese has for those discerning a vocation to the Priesthood. The biggest problem I had was in making the commitment to go the seminary. I had the sense that I had to be sure of my vocation before I entered the seminary. Well, I went to a "Project Andrew Dinner" where the affiliates met with seminarians. There were two seminarians I talked with that day who assured me that I did not need to be certain before applying to enter the seminary. This was a great relief. This lifted a great weight off of me. But, strangely enough, once I entered the seminary I never looked back. I was confident I had a vocation from that day on.

In the spring of 1994, I applied to the Archdiocese and was accepted. I spent two years at Theological College studying Philosophy at Catholic University; then, on to Rome for Theology and formation at the North American College. I was ordained in 2000 and, ever since, I have been asking myself the question: "How did I get here?" By the way, the two seminarians I spoke with left the seminary and were never ordained. The Vocations Director who recruited me and signed me up was Fr. Mark Brennan, the pastor at St. Martin's.

Please pray for vocations. Also, encourage young people to make a vocation one of the possible callings for their life.

**God bless,
Fr. LaHood**

Mark Your Calendars: October 6th at 7:00 pm - St. Luke Productions presents "VIANNEY", the gripping story of the remarkable priest who battled the devil to save souls. Tickets will be \$10 for adults and \$5 for youth 17 and under. Sign-up now for tickets by calling the rectory at 301-977-5492. In this "Year of the Priests", this performance would be a great way in the spirit to pray for vocations. So come join in the celebration.