My Favorite Vocation Stories

A Small Collection

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This Pamphlet is to assist in Vocation awareness. Each story has been chosen to represent how God calls us to our vocation, whether it be to the Priesthood, Religious, Married Life, or Single.

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Forward

This is a collection of vocation stories either collected through personal interviews of individuals or from their own stories presented to me though videos available online. The stories come from Priests, Sisters and laypersons I have encountered over this last year while sharing at Mass, in my other ministries of Serra International, and with other conversations. Each story has been reviewed personally by the individuals in the stories and released for this use within Serra International as a Vocation Awareness tool.

The format for these stories is intended to be a short story to be told verbally in brief individual moments not to last over 2 minutes in length. I have used each of these in our Vocation Awareness program presented to 8th graders in the Diocese of San Jose.

Two themes are present in these stories:

God speaks to us in different ways using all our senses. Sometimes, his message comes as a physical sign, sometimes through another person, sometimes when we are fully aware, and sometimes through dreams. In all cases, we have been open to the love of Christ coming into our hearts at unexpecting moments.

I thank each of you in sharing your stories and continue to pray for vocations daily

Bruce Newnan, 2019

Sr. Maura McAndrews, OCD , "Blessed by Family, Religious and Friends"

"I have been blessed in my birth family, my parish family, and the priests and sisters who have taught and nourished my faith during my 16 years of Catholic education". Although she was nurtured by her extensive family and parish's exemplary faith, she never felt called to religious life (but firmly believed it was a wonderful and worthy vocation) until she was introduced to the Discalced Carmelite Community.

When she was studying at Santa Clara University, she was laying the foundation for her career as a certified public accountant. "I loved accounting and it was good career choice". However, during her junior year at SCU, a group of friends brought her over to the Carmelite Monastery located in Santa Clara. "It is good to have friends who will lead you to Jesus and who will help you to follow the Gospel."

Thereafter, she volunteered her time to the nuns, in whatever way they needed - painting, gardening etc. As she worked and prayed at the monastery, she felt a tugging in my heart. "I felt as St. Augustine phrased it: 'You inspire us, O Lord, to delight in praising you, because you made us for yourself; our hearts are restless until they rest in you.'"
One day as she was painting in the monastery's garden, she experienced what Mary Magdalene must have felt in the garden after the Resurrection looking for our Lord (John 20:13-18). "That day I felt called by name as I was working and praying in the monastery garden. The Lord was calling me, I just had to turn around and hear His voice. At that moment when He did call me I could never doubt that it was Him - He called me by name that resounded to the very depth of my being." Just like Mary Magdalene, **"Maura, this is where you are to be!".**

"The contemplative life, which embodied for me the joy of Christ's friendship and praising Him in the life of prayer, was calling me. The Lord was knocking at my door; was I ready to hear Him? I needed to grow in Wisdom and receptiveness to His call. Then one day, I was open that it was God's will for me to be a daughter of St. Teresa of Jesus in the Carmelite family. Since that day, I treasure my journey in Carmel and my vocation in the Church. My discernment to enter religious life was and is counter cultural, and many are not willing to travel it. When I revealed my decision to enter the monastery, some of my loved ones wondered if I had lost my mind." Also, because of the cloistered life of Discalced Carmelites, they thought she would be cutting herself off from them and from the world. But through the many years, they learned that in fact her vocation would bring their lives and the entire world closer into her heart and the prayers of all the nuns. It is a great privilege of the Carmelite nun to embrace the whole world's joys and sorrows in their prayer before our Lord. A Carmelite nun's vocation is a most rewarding and beautiful life; bestowing "the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8:21)
Sr. Maura McAndrews, OCD

Fr. Jonathan Yu Dumlao, IVE "Out of the Darkness and Into the Light"

Just a normal background. Born in of Santa Clara, California (CA), raised in San Jose, and studied at San Jose State University. He was baptized but did not go to mass. In his twenties, a Protestant friend led him to Bible studies. "Being a Protestant, he probably thought that he was converting me. He was! But towards Catholicism!" He led Jonathan home!

Car accident and other deaths in his family took a toll on him and took him to a dark place. But, he started reading the Bible for the first time ever in his life and he just inexplicably "got it,". "The Word was just speaking to me, loud and clear!

A plea for Help! Jonathan came to Our Lady of Peace(OLOP) prayed to Mama Mary by means of a statue of her in the back of the Church. He remembers holding her left hand and praying with all my heart "**Mary, please help me, guide me!"**

Later, he was at a retreat and went to confession(after 20 years),.completed the RCIA program and He began receiving Holy Communion and later Confirmation on May 2005.

The Shared Dream…Dreams have a way of communicating with us throughout history and Jonathan and his mother shared the same dream at the same time: "My mother and I were in a prayer circle with her Cursillo group with everyone holding hands. Suddenly, she broke the prayer circle and said, **'My son is going to be a priest.'** Everyone started clapping. That's when he woke up, startled in a good way. It was then that he began to be attracted to this idea of the priesthood."

Give me some sign! A short time later He was going on a retreat and he prayed to **St. Thérèse "Look, I'm going to this retreat. You need to give me some sign—roses, or something—if I'm called to be a priest."**

"St. Thérèse hasn't answered my prayer yet." Then, he looked down and noticed two roses, One white next to the statue, then one at his feet, a red rose.. You now know him as Father Jonathan. with Our Lady of Peace Church in Santa Clara, Ca.

Fr. Jonathan Yu Dumlao, IVE

Sr. Altar Vocation Story – God is Persistent

Sr. Altar SSVM

Maria Perisimo was the typical girl in high school, involved in school, social activities as well as church. But, as a sophomore, Maria was approach by a Sister who asked her if she had ever considered being a Nun **(The first knock at the door**.) Maria's conception of "Sisters" included the dress and the solemn image of nuns. She could not imagine that would be a life for her. Maria could not even consider it as a possibility.

The opportunity arised to send some students to a youth religious conference. She accepted the trip. The week-end was fine but she was not convinced that this could be a possibility. **Again a 2nd knock at the door**.

Now as a senior in high school, Maria was conflicted. She knew there was more that she wanted. She had a yearning to **be** more.

Later she was asked to visit some Sisters on a retreat. She thought the life of a Sister would be lacking love, joy, fun. But what she experienced was the Sisters were so supporting, and was living life to the fullness – laughing, enjoying the fun and the company and living a full and complete life. **At this point, God had knocked for a 3rd time**. The Joy and Happiness felt in that week-end changed all of Maria's concepts of what religious life would be. She entered the convent for religious life; and is now St. Altar.

Sr. Altar, SSVM

Lou Poncini – Very Humble Father and Keeper of the Faith

I met Lou and his wife Evon during my Altar serving at Carmelite Monastery. It was at a picnic held over the Summer of 2017. “It all about Time, Talent, and Treasure”, I was talking to a bunch of parish friends. God has given me some marvelous gifts of an inquisitive mind, capability to solve very complex problems in science and engineering, a wonderful wife, the gift of storytelling, etc. I said that my serving as an altar server is only one way that I give back to the Lord my time, talent and Treasure. He waited until I stopped speaking and then said “I don’t have any of the talents that you have. I wasn’t educated beyond high school. I worked in an average job. What do I have to bring as far as time, talent and treasure?”

I asked if he was married. He said to a wonderful wife Evon of 65 years. (Wow!) Did you have kids? – At that point he starting to lite up. He said they had 9 children. When asked if they were practicing Catholics, He really started beaming. “I have 9 children all good Catholics and in them I have 2 Priests and 4 of them considered religious life.

I was stunned – Here is a man that just blew me away – He not only has a good wife, wonderful children that he is proud of, but He had one more thing: the gift of Faith that he passed onto his family. It was his and Evon’s Faith that was the strong bond with their children, their devoted lives to Christ that made a difference. How can anyone hold a candle to that! Wow! What a blessing! And What a Gift!

Sister Fiat "For a greater Eucharistic love"

She was raised in a beautiful family in which the faith saturated the whole of her life experiencing the Lord's personal love. She grew up going to Catholic school and truly always trying to be in relationship with the Lord. Her relationship with Him deepened greatly in high school, specifically through her prayer and the community of a youth group.

After high school, she spent a year doing missionary work with NET (National Evangelization Teams) Ministries. Here she evangelized with Catholic retreats for middle and high school youth across the country. In this year, she became aware of her heart's desires for greater intimacy with Jesus in prayer, intentional Christian community, and sharing with gospel with others.

Following this year, she began working part time for the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration doing some simple housekeeping work to pay for her education. "As I worked around these sisters, I very quickly fell in love with them. I was impressed with their joyful peace, the way they loved one another, and the way they cared for me."

During college, as her intimacy with Jesus grew in prayer, she began to become aware of the invitation to be totally His. She prayed about religious life more and more, talked to family and friends about it, and felt the Holy Spirit's confirmation. Thus, she began to visit religious communities, which continually affirmed the Lord's call for religious life in general for her but felt unaware of the specific community.

After some time, she went on a discernment retreat with the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration.

"At one moment on that retreat, I was praying in our adoration chapel. The Lord brought back to my mind many moments in my life in which I had prayed for a greater Eucharistic love and that the entirety of my life would be 'spent out' in adoration of His most holy Eucharistic Body and Blood. I realized this is where He wanted me to dedicate myself to Him. I believed Jesus was inviting me to become a Sister of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration."

After the example of St. Francis, the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration strive to combine the contemplative life with the active in perpetual adoration and the works of mercy. Sister Fiat

Sr. Mary Gianna, DLJC "From None to Nun"

I never imagined God would call me to religious life. Growing up without any faith, I did not know what life was about and did not have a sense of direction.

Every day my freshman and sophomore years in High School, I would go to the library to study during lunch. My life changed forever on April 20th, 1999. In Art class just before lunch, I suddenly had an overwhelming urge to leave school. I remember thinking, "There is no way I am staying here. There is no way anyone is going to talk me into staying!" The thought was to go home.

I felt in a hurry. I ran into my friend Rebecca in front of the library and talked her into leaving with me. We got into my car and started driving away, when I looked back in my rearview mirror and saw hundreds of my classmates running away from school. I found out there was a shooting at my High School, Columbine High School. Two of my schoolmates opened fire, killing 12 students, 1 teacher and wounding 24 others before taking their own lives. Most of the shooting happened in the Library!

I wondered what made me leave school that day. Why that one day? I remember being told God had a plan for my life. But I did not know God at that time.

Not knowing how to deal with everything that happened and still wanting to fit in, I started hanging out with a new group of friends and going out to parties. I thought if I fit in, had a relationship, then I would be happy. Everything I filled my life with made me feel more empty, longing for more. By my senior year I hit rock bottom. I lost all hope and fell into despair.

One of my friends invited me to the Catholic Church for youth group one night. I met a youth minister there who seemed so bright and full of life! She had something in her life that was missing in mine. She radiated God's love and joy! She shared with me over coffee about a God who passionately loved me. I realized all my life I had been longing to know God and His love and that He would be the only one that would fulfill me. "Our hearts are restless until they rest in God!" (Saint Augustine). In the Fall, I entered a Catholic University where I was fully immersed in the Catholic faith. I was Baptized, Confirmed and received first Holy Communion. Never had I felt so much joy and peace. I was home!

I reflected a lot on the shootings at my High School. I have been deeply touched by the story of Rachel Joy Scott. She was shot by one of the shooters, and then asked, "Do you still believe in God?" She responded, "You know I do! He continued to shoot her and said, "Then go be with Him". I was amazed! Here was a girl that was so passionate about her faith that she was willing to say, "Yes!" and die for Christ. What would I have said? I didn't have faith. Then I realized God knew this was where I would be today. As Rachel was able to say, "Yes!" and die for Christ, I can say, "Yes!" and live for Him! As I have said, "Yes!" to God, I have been amazed how He has led and guided me.

In the Summer of 2008, I asked God to help me enter into Mass in a way I had never experienced before. All through Mass, I felt God lavishing me with His love and grace. At one point I looked up and felt so profoundly the Lord's presence before me. I felt He was calling me to be his Bride, to love Him with an undivided heart and to lead other people to experience His love. From that moment on, my life was changed! I felt the call to the religious life and a great freedom to give God everything!

Sr. Mary Gianna, DLJC

Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ

Fr. Gary Thomas "I can help heal those souls"

His Vocation began at his Baptism when he is called by name to belong to God.

Earliest days of discernment; 5th grade, the desire to become a priest started slowly.

Options then: All Souls Elementary Catholic school in South San Francisco and St. Joseph's HS.

But, the 2nd Vatican council (1962-1965) caused an upheaval in the Church – very confusing even to the Priests. Women and Sisters were more prepared as they understood the council. By his 8th grade many priests left the priesthood to get married. He had a choice – go to public HS then go to Seminary or go to work. At age 14 he had to go to work and worked in Funeral Home doing odd jobs.

At age 19 He became a layman in the mortuary business. He had 3 opportunities to buy funeral homes or going to St. Patrick's seminary. At that point he interviewed some priests and they were instrumental in Gary's rethinking about the priesthood. His call began to grow as he became more active at Church layman's activities: Eucharistic Minister, Lector, etc.

Fr. Jim Mifsud, S.M., a Marianist priest who had a very dynamic and passionate personality, was the priest whose talk on 29 May 1978 confirmed his vocational call.
Fr Jim stated the following regarding the discernment of a religious vocation:
1) One can visualize oneself in that role
2) One has excitement and passion when visualizing oneself in that role
3) One has an excitement about speaking about one's faith and sees oneself in a role of service to others.
Gary heard these words and knew they were speaking to him because he personally saw himself in that role, was excited and passionate and could not contain himself about speaking about his faith.

Why does he love his job? The job is different every day, celebrating the sacraments and Mass. He was driven from an early age to work ethically, to stay constantly busy and his life is very enriching. And, after finishing his Seminary work in 1983, Gary became the 2nd Priest to be ordained in Diocese of San Jose.

In 2005, Bishop was asked to appoint an Exorcist for the new Diocese.

"Today's culture is losing faith, being very confused, and feeling a state of Chaos. 30% of all US are surveyed as not affiliated." "The reason: Loss of absolute truths. Virtue, 10 commandments, asking the fundamental question, "what is the point of Life?"" Humanism

"What does the youth today want? They are striving to enriching their lives, to get involved in lives intimately. I can help heal those souls.".

Fr. Gary Thomas

Fr. Prosper Molengi "No, this is what I Want to do!"

When did you know you wanted to become a priest?

Prosper grew up in a large but poor city in the Congo. No electricity, no water. While he was a Baptist growing up, his family managed to send him to Catholic school since it was the best schooling available to their family. Prosper had a love of school and a love for the priest - for the priest took care of the kids. Prosper followed him during Prosper's early years at school.

He learned his catechism from the Sisters there at the school – Daughters of Charity.

At 13 yrs old, Prosper visited the poor with food and soup 1 day/week. He gathered and sold fire wood for cooking. "I earned a small amount of money from the wood and bought food for the poor.

Then, the farmers gave me land to grow food for the poor", where soon he formed a group of young friends his age to help him. The group was called "Young Group". In these early times Prosper had a vision to learn more to bring it back to my community. He knew that learning was the key to his vision so every chance he had he would be at the library – studying. He entered a Seminary. While in his first years as a Seminarian, he met a beautiful girl, but he was conflicted, "Seminarian seeing a girl?"

"Religion vocation versus Married life, "This was heavy on his heart." His girl felt that Prosper had the Calling so She encouraged him. So, Prosper stayed another year in the Seminary.

Staying another year, he questioned: "Is this the only thing you can do? **No, this is what I Want to do!"**

He joined Ascension Fathers, St. Vincent de Paul Society and spent the next 5 years in study, then 4 yrs in his final studies – theology "The gift of Joy I want to protect forever!"

Prosper Molengi was ordained in 1998.

Since then, he was in Paris, and in Rome, achieved a Degree in Canon Law and finally 7 yrs more to become a Doctor in Canon Law. He came to US and served in Patterson, California prior to coming to St. Clare Parish.

Fr. Prosper Molengi

Sister Mary Grace

I was born and raised in Kokomo, Indiana. I went to Sts. Joan of Arc and Patrick school from pre-K to the 8th grade and then transferred to a public high school. All throughout grade school I always wondered why we had to attend Mass every Monday and Friday, especially since I went every Sunday with my family. My parents always made sure we were at Mass on Sunday, but this is all our faith consisted of. I never understood that Christ was truly present in the Eucharist and that the purpose of Mass was to receive Him.

During my freshman year of high school this all changed. I was preparing for Confirmation and I had to attend at least one retreat. At this retreat there were 800 other high school students all excited to be there and on fire with their Faith. I remember thinking, "Just get through the retreat then you can go home and forget all about it". I was wrong, it would end up being a memory that has stuck with me and one that I will never forget. One evening, all of the retreatants were kneeling in front of the Blessed Sacrament on a hard gym floor. It finally hit me...Christ was there with us! In that moment was the first time I prayed and was actually talking to God. I prayed, "Lord, you must really love all of us if you left us your Body and Blood and want to be a part of my life..." I realized the love God had for me and I felt this strong desire to give my whole life over to Him who gave us His life on the Cross.

At the time I did not understand what giving my life to the Lord really meant nor did I realize that he would call me to the Religious Life. When the first thought of religious life came to mind, I became very scared. I thought there was no way the Lord could call me to a life of following Him as His bride because I did not deserve it. When I finally opened up and told a friend that the Lord might be calling me to religious life, she was totally supportive and invited me to come with her to a retreat here at our Motherhouse. My first response was, "NO WAY…" She was very persistent with me and I finally gave in. I came with her for a weekend "Come and See". When it came time to leave my mom came to pick both of us up. I got into the back seat and began to cry as we drove down the drive. A still small voice inside of me told me that this is where I would spend the rest of my life. I kept visiting the Sisters and taking advantage of every opportunity to come visit the Motherhouse. High school graduation came, and I felt ready to enter the convent, since I had visited so many times. But I felt the Lord was telling me to wait at least one year. So, I did and attended Indiana University Kokomo one year before entering. I entered in September 2010 as a postulant, received the habit on August 10, 2011 and made first vows on August 10, 2013.

The Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration continue to serve in Germany, the United States, the Philippines, and Brazil. The Provincial House of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Province is located in Mishawaka, Indiana. From there we serve in the Archdioceses of Chicago and Indianapolis, and the Dioceses of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Lafayette-in-Indiana, and Gary.

Sister Mary Grace, Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration

Sister Ignatia - "What should I do?"

Shooting Hoops – Just wasn't enough for me to giving my whole self.

An average teenager trying to figure out "What should I do?" She grew up with a strong faith in elementary school and high school but not in Catholic school. Through high school she did not spend much time considering a vocation, but once I had to decide on colleges and majors the question of "What should I do?" resounded in my mind. I knew that if I would spend my life doing something it had to be what God had planned for me and through it I would be able to do "good" in the world. When I thought of all the things I 'would like' to do, I could not justify giving my whole self to any of them. So, I started my fall semester as a freshman with my major undeclared because nothing seemed "enough."

While at the university I played on the basketball team and through that met one of our sisters who acted as our spiritual support. I still was somewhat scared of discernment and at first worked hard to avoid the idea. However, as the season went on, I came to know the sister and found we had many common interests; being a sister started to become less and less foreign. During our shooting practices I gave in to my curiosity and began to ask her about her life and why she decided to become a sister.

As I began this process of discernment, I spent more time in prayer and going to the sacraments, all the while asking, "What should I do?" During my second year I decided on a social work major but the question of religious life was still unsettled. I was very attracted to religious life and not only that but the particular way that our sisters lived religious life. The spirit and joy of the sisters was tangible, and I wanted to be a part of it. They encouraged me to take more time for personal prayer because it was God who was leading me, and the more contact I had with Him the more peace I would have in my heart. During my sophomore year a couple opportunities came up for me to visit the sisters' Motherhouse. Each time I went, I felt "at home" with the sisters and experienced much peace during my stay with them. It became clear as the semester continued that my only desire was to become a sister. Every other desire I had up to that point had faded away; I no longer had a desire to finish my social work major nor did I have a desire to play basketball like I used to. Towards the end of the year I visited the Motherhouse during a four-day break. Just thinking that I could be in the convent a year from then brought me so much joy. The Lord had given me such grace and certainty that during that visit I requested to enter the community.

When I returned to the university my close friends and my parents shared my joy and assured me of their support. My parents both were able to see me interact with the community and received much peace, seeing clearly that it was part of God's plan for me to enter. I spent my last semester studying abroad and traveled to beautiful pilgrimage sites and studied theology, but all the while I knew my heart was in Motherhouse. Even though I saw many beautiful and holy things my most beautiful time abroad was spent before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. I can only be grateful for God's overflowing grace. He called me to this vocation and placed within my heart the desire to be with Him.

Sister Ignatia

Sr. Mary Louise – Waiting for Prince Charming

The sad part of our life is not the bad things that happen to us, but the stuff we don't say YES to. I'm not taking about just stuff, but like things of grace, mercy and healing. Our life is really tragic if we don't say yes to those things – That's the sad part.

I grew up in a very large very happy Catholic but slightly crazy family. Growing up I would call myself a hard core romantic. I read the romantic traditional books, watched romantic movies, loved Hollywood love scenes. I believed there was out there my Gilbert Blithe or my Mr. Darcy. We would meet, fall in love, get married, and live happily ever after. In my mind, I would follow the life that my parents had.

I've had tragedies in my life but not as shaking like Luke 13 (Blood mixed with pagan blood). I lost my Dad at age 39. I don't think children really adapt to the loss of one of their parents. You make the best of it. In my family it was the same to try to make a new start, a new place, a new house, new schools, but again another tragedy – a house fire in that new house. We were homeless for 3 months. We did not live on the streets but were shuttled between families, hotels, friends. We didn't have any of our material things, and it was a very difficult time. During that time I took a trip to Italy and was concerned with myself, my friends, fashion, my social calendar.

One night in Rome outside piazza of St. Peters. The moon was rising over St. Peters. It was as if Prince Charming got down on his knee and proposed marriage– only it was Jesus All of a sudden I knew in my heart that I was called to be the bride of Christ. My response to Christ's invitation was actually a long time in coming. It was clear in my heart that it was what God wanted me to do, but it was not what I wanted to do. I did meet the Carmelite Sisters and became one. But it was about 18 months in after I entered the convent that I came to the point that I was free. I could say yes to the what God was inviting me to do, or I could say No and he would let me go. But I realized that deep down in my heart I wanted to say yes. As I looked at other times, I have said no to the stuff of my life I realized that they would not be as sad as saying no to this invitation. So here I am saying yes to my life and very happy. Being happy ever after is a day to day affair and it is something that I choose everyday choosing to be happy. Am I going to choose the happiness the Lord is offering me or am I going to get stuck in the sad things and my life really becomes a tragedy? What are the blessings, the graces, the healings Jesus is offering you today?

Sr. Mary Louise

Fr. Steve Davoren A Vocation Call From a child

A policeman working the beat in Los Angeles had a call from one of his two worst nightmares. No, not murder, but a case of Child abuse.

He was called to a house and went to the door. A little girl about 8 came to the door with gloves on her hands. He asked if the parents were home and the answer was “No, people took my parents away, but a nice lady was there”. A little while later the police man asked why she had gloves on. She said she did it to herself. During the process of the interview the little girl was examined by the social worker and the policeman. Upon examining her back, she was deeply scared and when the gloves were removed both her palms had burn scars.

There was an outpour of response from the community over the course of a couple of weeks while she recovered in the hospital. The community brought lots of toys and teddy bears to this young girl.

The police officer came to visit her often in the hospital where she was with others. He found her giving away all of her toys and teddy bears to other patients except for a large white teddy bear. This one she kept for a few weeks.

Then one day when Steven was at the hospital, she brought the big white teddy bear to a little boy, a burn victim. And, she said “Don’t be afraid, I am with you”. In that moment the police officer got that Christ was speaking to him. He is now Fr. Steve Davoren and is now a priest of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

That day the Lord spoke through the little girl to his heart.

How will you know God is talking to you?

Fr. Steve Davoren

Notes: