The Beginning of a Journey

A place that holds a lot of meaning for me is the Statue of the Sacred Heart which is to the right of the main altar at the Cathedral of Saint Paul.

It was here that on a winter night back in 2000 I spent some time in prayer before going to a dinner hosted by Archbishop Flynn for perspective seminarians. I remember just feeling a sense of calm as I went to the dinner that night, and then left more certain about the path I felt called to take.

The journey there and ahead was a windy one. I was finishing up my degree at the U of M (in political science), and it was during that time I began to seriously discern the call to priesthood. A priest who was both a confessor and mentor from the parish I would volunteer at as a faith formation teacher for 8th graders and had gone to for years kept encouraging me to look at seminary. And so finally towards the end of my time at the "U," I began to take that seriously thinking I wasn't quite called to marriage despite dating while in college. And so like Moses going to the burning bush I looked at my vocation more closely, and after that dinner, despite nearly backing out at the last minute due to what I'd call "over-thinking," God gave me yet another sign, no one picking up the phone in the vice-rector's office who I was going to call to back out for a year.

In hindsight though, of course I'm glad no one answered the phone that day in August of 2001. But I also wasn't going to be ordained that September. I was at the start of a journey, and it's been quite the ride so far.

I share part of my story because our parish is honored to be praying for one of our members as he, too, starts his own journey: Charlie Barnick.

As he shares his story, he grew up here in Rosemount in a Catholic family, and as he went into college he got more serious about his focus. In college, he kept pursuing what he felt God was calling him to do as he lived out his faith. He'd play football and bring teammates to Adoration, lead them in prayer and even start a Bible Study Group. Praying about what to do, and getting some good advice from his grandfather, he visited the seminary and felt God was truly calling him to make this next step.

Charlie will be starting at the seminary this fall, and will be visiting with us at Masses this weekend at the 5 p.m. and 10:30 a.m. Masses.

Charlie is also a part of a program called the *Laboure* Society. They are based out of Eagan. They began as a means to help young men and women pursuing vocations. Many young men and women were being turned away by religious communities due to student loan debt, and so the Laboure Society was founded in 2001 to help men and women raise funds to pay off their student loans before entering religious formation/seminary life. They are headquartered here in the Twin Cities (the founder is a former parishioner from St. John Neumann).

Laboure trains their aspirants on how to fundraise, gives them quality formation and advice, and has had great success in assisting men and women achieve their goals and allow them to enter religious/seminary formation debt free. Laboure acts a bit like a third party: each aspirant raises funds and the money is sent directly to Laboure (the person does not see the money in their own bank account), and then Laboure will make payments to the student loan companies.

As with many men and women coming out of college, Charlie faced financial debt with college expenses, and by his work with *Laboure*, this will help him to enter into seminary hopefully debt-free, with funds raised helping him and others.

Charlie will also be doing some fundraising here at the parish next weekend, and I'm glad we're able to help him out as well. He'll be available after the 5 p.m. and 10:30 a.m. Masses too in the Gather Space to meet and greet people.

Getting to know him better it's great to see his excitement as he begins his seminary journey this fall. He has a great love for God and His Church. I know that like me the years ahead will be a time for him to both learn the faith more deeply, and also discern more deeply his call. Please join me in keeping him in prayer as he begins this journey.

As for the Sacred Heart shrine at the Cathedral, perhaps in one more sign from God, when I was ordained to the priesthood in 2007, we were given at random places to have our first blessing. I had no idea where I'd be asked to go as I made no request, but as you might have guessed it, I was asked to give blessings at the same place where I prayed 7 years prior, right in front of the Sacred Heart shrine.

Seminary was quite a journey, but like all of us I continue on the journey of life daily trying to grow in holiness, and God will continually be surprising me in new ways as time goes by. I don't know when or how the journey will end, but I do know I try to let Jesus take the wheel on the road of life every day.

Please join me in my prayers for Charlie as he begins this new chapter in his life.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Paul