



Arleen D Souza photo

Vancouver's new Vocations Office team: Father Juan Lucca, Father Mark McGuckin, Father James Hughes, and Father Raffaele Salvino. "We can support one another without feeling overwhelmed," says Father Hughes.

Vocations takes on a team approach

In 1999, one year after ordination to the diocesan priesthood, I was asked to co-direct the Vocations Office of the Archdiocese of Vancouver; almost 25 years later I am asked to be the Vocations Director again!

It is amazing to notice how much the work of promoting vocations to the priesthood and religious life while working with seminarians has changed over the years. Back in the previous century, we had quite a number of seminarians discerning their vocation – between 25 and 28 seminarians from Philosophy to Theology studies at one time.

Today, we have 14 seminarians in total. This diminishing number over the years has also been reflective in the shortage of priests we currently have serving parishes and meeting all kinds of pastoral needs.

Despite this dearth, I have noticed several areas of the work that could be considered an improvement or even a needed change. While seminary formation might extend a little longer than previous generations of seminarians, the newer "Spirituality Year" is trying to catch areas of needed development early on as the men transition into the new and welcome lifestyle of the seminary from the darker secular society they have freely chosen to leave.

At the other end of formation, transitional deacons are also given more time to develop their skillset as they take on more responsibilities in preparation for the priesthood.

Moreover, the Vocations Office now takes on a team

approach, with four priests doing its work in a part-time mode rather than hiring a full-time director. Even though we all have parish assignments, this new leadership style allows us to divide the workload so that we can support one another without feeling overwhelmed or alone.

My focus of work is as director of seminarians and lead administrator of the Vocations Office at the John Paul II Pastoral Centre. Father Mark McGuckin is assistant director, working with inquirers discerning a potential call to the priesthood and helping with applications to the seminary. Father Juan Lucca and Father Raffaele Salvino are focusing on outreach to help engage the culture of the young to truly be open to the Lord's call amidst the noisy world we inhabit. This good work is all rounded out by Palmira Braganza, who as part-time office assistant helps to organize and keep us all on task.

Even though many things have changed over the years, promoting and sustaining the work of vocations to the priesthood and religious life has always been a team effort in the Church. God has not stopped calling young men and women to their vocations; we simply need to amplify the call so that they may better respond!

We thank you, the benefactors of the St. John Vianney Fund, for your support and prayers over the years.

Father James Hughes
Director of Vocations and Seminarians
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Reflecting on Spirituality Year

Seminarians preparing for priesthood in the Archdiocese of Vancouver are welcoming the extra “Spirituality Year” introduced after the [2016 Vatican document](#) *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*. The “propaedeutic stage” is intended to “provide a solid basis for the spiritual life and to nurture a greater self-awareness for personal growth.” Here’s what they had to say about the period, when they are immersed in personal development, spiritual direction, time in prayer, and a month of full-time service in the community before they dive into eight years of academic study.



Above, Archdiocese of Vancouver seminarians at their convocation in August. Below, seminarians Luis Esquivel, John Krump, Paul Vo, and Michael Roy.

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The spirituality year was a transformational year in my life. It was a reset from the kind of life that I had, and helped me to reorient my priorities around prayer.
Now that I’m taking classes, I can see that the spirituality year has helped me not only to put prayer at the centre, but also to be more focused, and to know that when needed, I can put distractions away (internet, cell phone) and focus on work.

– Luis Esquivel



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I’m very glad my spirituality year offered frequent opportunities for service in Catholic ministries and communities.

– Michael Roy



Michael Roy

I’m so thankful I was given a year to become familiar with the community life and prayer schedule of seminary before beginning studies. Moving from the autonomy and comfort of home life to the more communal and structured seminary was, for me, a massive transition. If I had had to begin studies immediately on top of navigating that transition, I would have become overwhelmed and burnt out very quickly.

Due to the extent of our studies and other duties this year, we are left with little time for “on-the-ground” pastoral experience. And yet, this is arguably the area that encompasses the majority of the priest’s day-to-day life. Thus, I’m very glad my spirituality year offered frequent opportunities for service in Catholic ministries and communities.

During my spirituality year,

I spent a full month in a Calgary L’Arche home living alongside and serving disabled adults, and for the rest of the year I volunteered weekly with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul sorting donations in their warehouse and delivering furniture to those in need.

Both experiences gave me invaluable understanding of the pastoral life of a priest. They allowed me to discover my own strengths and weaknesses in pastoral settings as well as grow in appreciation for the charitable efforts of so many lay faithful.

It was also an incredible blessing being at St. Joseph’s for numerous reasons. I saw great value in being immersed in the Archdiocese of Edmonton, learning what the Church is like there and seeing how it differs from Vancouver.

I also got to experience a significantly different style of formation. The diocesan priests at St. Joseph’s and the Benedic-

tine monks at Christ the King have different spiritualities, formation styles, and teaching methods, both of which have borne fruit for my vocation in different ways.

Perhaps the greatest blessing of my time at St. Joseph’s was the community I was immersed in. I bonded deeply with the men there, especially my spirituality year brothers. Beginning a journey together as monumental as priestly formation gave us a profound kinship that we continue to share despite being separated. Leaving such an amazing community was a great difficulty. However, a priest I was discussing it with told me that the sorrow of leaving one seminary for another is not that different from the sorrow of leaving one parish for another as a priest. In that sense, the pain of this transition is itself deeply formative in preparing my heart and mind for the struggles I’m bound to encounter in priestly life. □

John Krump

Spirituality year was transformational for me – a reset from the kind of life I had while helping me reorient my priorities around prayer.

Now that I’m in class I see how the year has helped me to put prayer at the centre, be more focused, and know that when needed I can put distractions away to focus on work.

Each Tuesday during the year was a silent day when we didn’t talk for 20 hours with the exception of community prayer and morning class time. This gave me appreciation for silence and meditative prayer. With classes, homework, and community prayer, there’s not a lot of time left in my schedule. Meditative prayer is my recharge, and without it I probably would have left the seminary.

Classes during the

year included basic Catholic teaching, much of it eye-opening, from Jeff Cavain’s Bible Timeline to John Paul II’s Theology of the Body, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and papal documents on priesthood. Without these foundational stones of Catholic teaching, I couldn’t appreciate what I’m learning now.

We also read spiritual classics like St. Teresa of Avila’s *Way of Perfection* and St. Ignatius of Loyola’s autobiography, starting a habit of spiritual reading for me.

Thursdays were dedicated to apostolic work – in my case with St. Vincent de Paul delivering furniture and sorting donations in the warehouse. I also lived with a L’Arche community in Calgary for a month, working with people with intellectual disabilities. This humbling and inspiring work helped me to step out of my

comfort zone. (A theme of seminary life is being more comfortable with being uncomfortable).

Our year-long media fast meant no movies, computers or phones except for a limited time on weekends when I used it to talk to friends and family. This was fruitful because it removed distractions and allowed me to focus on prayer, especially meditative. I had a lot more time on my hands, which I used for new hobbies and being more intentional about relationships with others, especially my brother seminarians.

Christ the King in Mission is a different seminary than St. Joseph’s but it still has a recognizable rhythm to it. Learning the value of silence helped me understand the value of community and importance of integration, not to mention making me more aware of my technology usage. □

Five months a priest and still amazed to be called

When a young man from Central Africa walked between the towering pillars of Holy Rosary Cathedral dressed in white, about to take the life-changing vows of a priest, he could hardly hold the tears back.

Father Medard Kamanzi, now assistant pastor at St. Francis de Sales Parish in Burnaby, says after almost five months on the job, he is still amazed by God's mercy and his calling to be a priest.

"It's the joy of celebrating the Mass – how it feels being able to bring Jesus to the people, to really experience offering life to people, the spiritual life that comes from Jesus Christ," he said.

He is also deeply moved by God's mercy in the confessional and while offering the anointing of the sick those who are gravely ill.

"When you enter the room they are almost sleepy and discouraged, and when you start praying, you see them changing, getting strength, and responding. That has been very



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At 15 years old, Father Medard Kamanzi was inspired by visiting missionaries of the Neocatechumenal Way to find healing and ultimately his priestly vocation.

touching, to see how the sacraments are real and life-giving."

For Father Kamanzi, who was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo but spent most of his life in Rwanda, walking down the aisle of the Vancouver cathedral was only

a short leg of a long journey to the priesthood that began when missionaries visited the home of a young teenager with a dark heart.

His childhood in Rwanda was painted with darkness and a feeling that God had aban-

doned him. After enduring a serious illness and a two-week coma as a young child, he suffered side effects including uncontrollable drooling and a neck so bent that his head nearly touched his shoulders.

As a result he faced constant bullying, mistreatment, and was called stupid so many times he started to believe it. His view of himself and his purpose became so grim, "I didn't see the difference between living and dying. I had this dark feeling in my soul." Later in life, the inner wounds still plagued his self-esteem and tainted his view of God.

"I felt that God was not loving towards me, that he made a mistake, the way he allowed me to experience this suffering. I had a lot of anger against my parents, my siblings, my teachers. I was very bitter."

The first time he experienced God's love in a real way was when missionaries stayed in his home. Members of the Neocatechumenal Way, a Catholic group with a charism for faith formation and missionary work, arrived to serve

the local people and were invited to live with his parents and siblings.

Joining the Neocatechumenal Way community was life changing. "For the first time, I felt accepted. No one called me names; they called me by my proper name. They gave me a place to express myself, my suffering, and I began to feel like a normal human being."

The travelling missionaries set young Medard on a path toward healing that started to change the direction of his life. He finished school and spent one year at a seminary in Congo to discern if he was called for the priesthood.

Then in 2013, Archbishop J. Michael Miller of Vancouver opened Vancouver's Redemptoris Mater seminary. Under the auspices of the Neocatechumenal Way, it was designed to form priests with missionary hearts. Medard was one of the handful of young men who made up its first class.

The seminary taught him a great many things about prayer, spirituality, and Catholic teaching, but the most pow-

erful experience for him was evangelizing across Canada on a yearlong mission in Ottawa, Winnipeg, Fort MacMurray, Calgary, and Saskatoon. Travelling with a priest and a full-time missionary family and relying on volunteers in each city to take them in to their homes showed him his vocation had come full circle from Rwanda, where missionaries had stayed with his family.

"This really touched me and showed me that God had a plan that he wanted to fulfil. My desire at 15 years old to become a missionary and preach the good news, God was fulfilling it."

By the time he walked down the aisle to say his vows as a priest, his eyes were wet with emotion. God had walked with him this far and was with him on the next leg of the journey.

"In that moment, I realized how great a grace it is that God has considered me to be his servant and to represent his son and to be an image of Christ for the people. I felt very unworthy and very grateful." □

Trying to balance the schedule, rhythm of life

Father Patrick Le was in middle school when he first caught a glimpse of something so joyful and powerful ... well, as they say, you never forget your first love.

"Even though I thought about other vocations, it was always there, my first love as it were: diocesan priesthood," said Father Le, ordained in the Archdiocese of Vancouver almost five months ago.

He was only 10 or 11 years old when he noticed his parish priest at the time, Father Richard Au, serving the faithful joyfully and with meaning. At a young age he realized he wanted to do the same.

As his faith grew, so did his desire for the priesthood. In Grade 7, Patrick went to Vietnam to visit family and along with a large crowd of people he witnessed a miracle at the shrine of Our Lady of Tapao, where the statue seemed to be inhaling and exhaling.

"Each person comes to faith in a different way, and for me it happened to be a breathing statue," he laughed. But the "greatest miracle is the conversion of heart and when someone turns to the Lord."

The Tapao statue ignited a spark in his chest that the witness of his parish priest and a books on sainthood and Eucharistic miracles fanned into flame. Soon he was going to daily Mass and thinking that if he became a priest, he could never miss Mass again.

He entered the Seminary of Christ the King in Mission in Grade 8 and completed his high school studies there. Again, the powerful witness of his mentors, the monks at Westminster Abbey, helped him realize his calling to be a priest.

"The seminary gave me everything, spiritually, pastorally. I truly call all the monks up there my fathers ... they raised me up."

He describes his deep desire to be close to the Eucharist as a natural step toward the priesthood.

Father Le was ordained at Holy Rosary Cathedral July 1 and is now serving as an assistant pastor at St. Matthew's Parish in Surrey. As the third largest parish in the archdiocese, it's a busy community and he is trying to find a balance in his schedule and rhythm of life.

The summer was full of weddings, marriage preparation, and related paperwork, and

the fall seemed to be particularly busy with funerals. Besides these central responsibilities, there are many one-on-one meetings and spiritual direction, visits to schools, meetings with various parish groups, confessions, and up to 10 hours a week of homily writing, along with other tasks.

Although it's been a challenging transition from deacon to priest, it's been made smoother by several factors, including his continued connection with the monks in Mission. He visits them often, seeking prayerful support and spiritual direction.

He is also grateful for the openness that high school students have shown him. "It's very encouraging and the Holy Spirit is moving and lots of young people are responding to the call of the Lord, if not to the priestly or religious vocation, into ministry, into serving, into bringing other people to Christ," he said.

The support of parishioners has also been a source of joy, and he has found Catholics of the Archdiocese of Vancouver seem to "love their priests."

Has anything surprised him about his first love, his dream, his calling, so far?



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Father Patrick Le's summer of weddings was followed by a fall full of funerals at the third-largest parish in the Archdiocese.

"The biggest surprise is the grace of God and waking up every day, regardless of what the schedule is like or how busy it is – the gratitude and the joy of having the privilege of serving God and his people. It never wears away." □