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Discernment and Spiritual Direction

By Jerry Higgins, O.F.M Capuchin

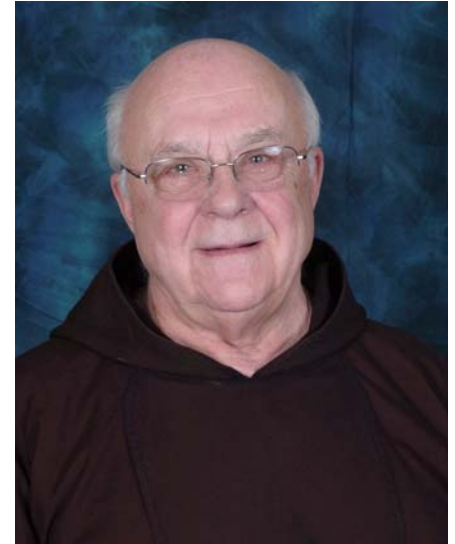
I would like to share with you a very personal story. This happened way back when I was in first grade at St. Bernard's School in Watertown, Wisconsin. We are all at Mass. It was during this Mass I experienced a voice in my head as clear as day, "You will be a priest and it will be hard." Interesting. I had no more thought of that until high school when I began to think seriously about religious life, the priesthood and the seminary. The Dominican sisters and priests at my parish and Edgewood High School in Madison, Wisconsin became my "spiritual directors."

Richard Rohr, O.F.M., describes discernment "as the perception of the Lord's presence in life, within all its circumstances, knowing what the issues are, and what His word or call might be."

Here the spiritual director (or soul friend) is important to help in sifting through your issues, thoughts and helping you to listen in prayer. God's word is spoken in the real situations of your life past and present. Why are these thoughts about religious life in your life now?

The task of discernment is to sift through all the thoughts, the situations and the various alternatives to discover what ONE choice is actually the response to God's call here and now. For that to happen there must be an honest desire to hear what the Lord is saying, prayer to the Spirit to lead to truth, trust in the help of others, and readiness to listen with openness.

One needs to gather all possible information – say about the Capuchins. Use a simple journal to write down questions, thoughts and feelings. Meet as often as possible with the Friars at the special gatherings during the year, keeping contact with Br. Jerry and Fr. John and maybe a personal contact with one of the professed friars. Some of the signs that this is right for you will usually be a sense of internal peace, contentment and satisfaction – "this is what I am seeking" – there is joy in your heart. This does not mean that there won't be questions. A confirmation of your choice will be the acceptance by the Order of your discernment and asking you to take the step into candidacy. The discernment of course will go on through the other stages into postulancy, novitiate, temporary vows and the final commitment.



Vocation Update

During my 60 plus years of religious life there have been peaks and valleys, laughter and tears and to be honest even thoughts of throwing in the sponge. As the call said “you will be a priest and it will be difficult.”

Vocation Update sometimes likes to include a short biography of guest contributors so that inquirers can get to know the stories of some of the friars. Special thanks to Jerry Higgins for this article.

On the 50th anniversary of Jerry Higgins' profession a friend of his gave him a picture of a man on a journey, and so it has been. He was born and grew up in and around Madison, Wisconsin. It was in 1945 that he came to St. Lawrence Seminary as a student. He joined the Capuchins in 1947 and was finally professed in 1951. His first assignment in 1955 was as vocation director. 12 years later he went to St. Paul to teach, be a counselor, and coach at three high schools: Cretin, Hill and Hill Murray. He was involved in Marriage Encounter and spent the last five years as Pastor of St. Jude's Parish in Mathomedi. He began a sabbatical of study in 1983 by rafting down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon before spending a year at the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, CA. He has a Master's in Education from Marquette, a Master's in Applied Spirituality from the University of San Francisco and a Doctorate in Spirituality from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Since 2004 he has been stationed at St. Lawrence Seminary ministering as spiritual director and also as chaplain to the Sisters of St. Agnes in nearby Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Before coming back to St. Lawrence Seminary, he was a spiritual director and associate professor of spiritual formation for the 2nd year theologians at Sacred Heart School of Theology in Milwaukee, Wisconsin - a school for second career men studying for the priesthood. He spent fifteen years there. He has been to Europe several times - especially noteworthy was the study tour of our Franciscan heritage in Italy, especially in Assisi. He has also been on a study tour to Israel with faculty, staff, students and alumni from Sacred Heart School of Theology.

How does one begin to discern a religious vocation?

Contact Fr. John Holly 920-915-4400
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Br. Jerry Johnson 773-475-6206
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or visit www.CapuchinFranciscans.org
and click on <How to Begin>

Candidate Rooftop Cookout

Sat. July 3, 2010
St. Clare Friary, Chicago

Arrival: late afternoon
Grill time: around 7 PM

Contact Br. Jerry or Fr. John for reservations.
See contact details to the left.
Guest rooms available for travelers

First Profession of Vows Ceremony

Saturday, July 31, 2010
St. Francis Parish, Milwaukee
10:30 AM Mass