

Savannah Priest Publishes Book

A new book guides readers step-by-step through discerning a vocation to priesthood

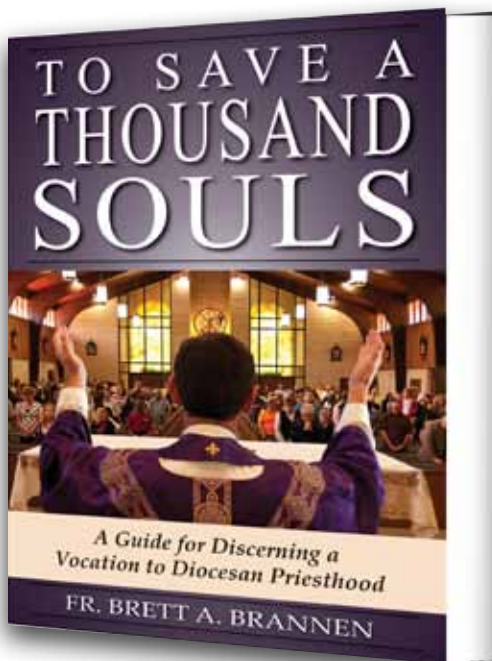


Fr. Brett Brannen, former Vocation Director for the Diocese of Savannah, and now vice-rector of Mount St. Mary's Seminary, has recently written a book about discerning a vocation to priesthood.

To Save a Thousand Souls is a 400-page volume that Bishop Boland has called a "treasure chest" and many other bishops and vocation directors have praised.

Fr. Jim Mazzone, a vocation director in Massachusetts, recently wrote, "It's the most comprehensive and easy-to-read book for men in discernment, and it will hold up as such, I predict, for decades."

Much of the book contains stories—many from Fr. Brannen's personal experience—that elucidate important aspects of discerning a priestly vocation. Readers have commented that it manages to convey important concepts without use of heavy theological language. For example, one chapter is titled "God Said Go and I Said No" and addresses the significance of discovering God's call for one's life.



Available at www.VianneyVocations.com

Catholic parents are finding the book to be a valuable resource. Michelle Migone, a founder of the Serra Club in Augusta, said it was "life-changing" for her. "It made me realize how important it is to help my son seek and understand God's will for him," she said.

Rachel Balducci, a columnist for the Southern Cross, wrote on her popular blog, "I realized this book is for me as much as it could be for my brother or my son. After reading it, I walked away inspired in my own vocation. Reading about Fr. Brett's experiences as a priest made me want to better serve Jesus, to do the best job as a wife and mother, to best build the Church in the way God has called me."

Fr. Brannen began to write the book in 2008. He recalls, "When Pope Benedict declared the Year for Priests, it was confirmation to me that the Holy Spirit wanted me to finish it," he said. "I always wanted a single resource I could hand to a man—something that answered all his questions about priesthood. I hope this book will help these men overcome their fears and respond to God's call."

"The purpose of a priest is to bring people to Jesus and Jesus to people. I cannot imagine a more fulfilling life in this world!" said Fr. Brannen.

Key Findings from Diocesan Study

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demographic.

The study, which was completed in December, concluded by recommending a goal of ordaining three men annually, which can be accomplished by continuing to accept five new seminarians for study each fall. (About 57% of men who begin study are ordained).

This rate of ordination would allow more of our growing parishes to be staffed by more than one priest. This is important because by 2020, six additional parishes are expected to reach 800 registered households. Currently there are 13 parishes over 800 households.

The Diocese of Savannah has been greatly blessed by an abundance of priestly vocations. In this Year for Priests, be sure to show your support and appreciation for the priests in your parish.

Vocation Prayer Apostolate

Following the lead of Pope Benedict, this spring the Vocation Office will be renewing its program that asks the sick and homebound to offer their prayers for priestly and religious vocations. Brochures and information will be distributed throughout the diocese via Eucharistic Ministers to the Sick.

Statistical Highlights

1. At the current rate of growth, the Diocese of Savannah will reach 100,000 registered Catholics in 2020.
2. A sharp rise in ordinations earlier this decade offset a relatively large number of priest retirements, largely averting the priest shortage that had been projected to occur early in the new millennium.
3. For a ten-year span from 2007 to 2017, the diocese will have a net gain of 11 diocesan priests.
4. The current ratio of diocesan priests to people is 1:1,338. To maintain this ratio through 2030, four new seminarians would need to be accepted annually, to achieve an average of 2.25 ordinations per year. Since 1996, the average number of ordinations has in fact been 2.25 per year.
5. Three ordinations per year would improve the ratio of diocesan priests to people to slightly better than 1:200.
6. An average of about five new seminarians have been accepted annually over the past ten years. If this trend persists, the ordination rate will improve the ratio of priests to people to better than 1:1,200.

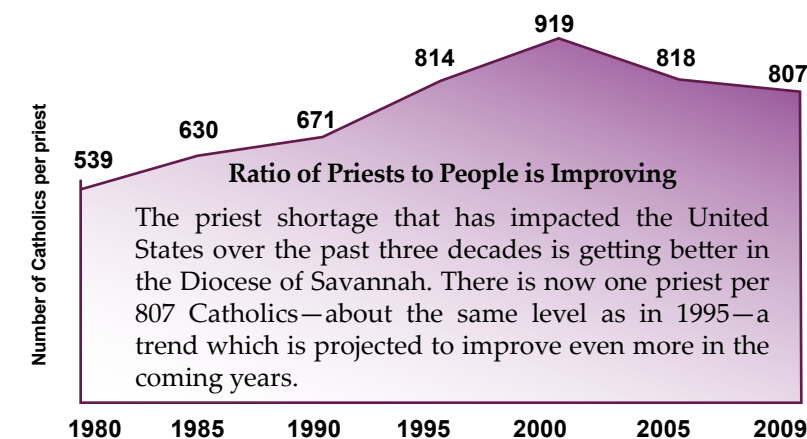
Read more at SavannahPriest.com

Vocations

Bulletin of the Savannah Diocese Vocation Office



Study Shows Promising Trends



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New Book by Savannah Priest

YEAR for PRIESTS



2009-2010

A new study has concluded that the Savannah Diocese's current rate of ordination—about 2.25 priests per year—is sufficient to provide pastoral care for the people of our diocese.

This success is a testament to the consistent prayers of faithful Catholics and the hard work of our vocation directors.

A great deal of work and planning began in the late nineties, when the diocese recognized the looming priest shortage and took steps to promote vocations in a more robust way. As a consequence, the number of seminarians increased dramatically. Then, in 2007, Savannah gained national attention for ordaining five men in one year, an extremely high number for a diocese of only 75,000 Catholics.

A key area addressed by the study was ministry to Hispanic Catholics. Approximately one-third of priests active in the diocese are able to celebrate Mass in Spanish, and about 18% can speak conversational Spanish. In total, 47 Spanish Masses are celebrated each weekend by 33 priests. While more improvement in this area is needed, Bishop Boland's policy that seminarians learn Spanish has increased the number of priests who are able to work within this key

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Savannah Diocese Vocation Office



Savannah Diocese Vocation Office

221 John Paul Avenue, Statesboro, GA 30458, (912) 681-6726

Fr. Tim McKeown, Vocation Director: vocations@diosav.org

Language Skills Expand Priest's Ministry

Communication goes beyond speaking a language; it involves understanding a culture

It's one thing to learn a second language; it's quite another to minister to someone in that language.

For Fr. Matthew Ericksen, spending time learning the Spanish language and culture has been a tremendous part of his priestly ministry, one that has fulfilled a lifelong desire.

"There is a great need in Georgia – there is a huge Spanish speaking population in need of pastors," said Fr. Ericksen, who serves the Spanish-speaking population of the Augusta area. "The people go searching for that if you don't have a pastor that will help them in their own language."

Fr. Ericksen, who will celebrate his first anniversary as a priest this June, said when there are not priests who can speak Spanish and minister to the Spanish-speaking community, the Church loses Catholics.

"The young men fall away and everyone else ends up looking for a Protestant preacher or going to the Protestant church," he said. "They

lose part of their own culture as well as the gift of the sacraments."

Knowing the language well is an important first step. "One of the ways the people make their first impression of you is how well you speak Spanish."

But it takes more than just learning the language to serve the people. "With a rudimentary level of Spanish you can provide the sacraments," said Fr. Ericksen, "But it takes more than that to get the people's confidence. That requires something with your attitude."

Offering the people what they need takes a deeper understanding of the language and culture, he added. "To be able to understand what's said in confession or in spiritual direction and have the capacity to speak back is important," he said, "just to advise, console and encourage someone."

Although Fr. Ericksen had studied Spanish, it wasn't until he actually moved to Mexico that he finally became fluent in the language and the culture. "I took Spanish in high school," explained Fr. Ericksen, "and I did well in class but learned nothing I could use – I wasn't able to speak it. I took it in college, and it was the same case."

His time in Mexico – being fully immersed in the language and the people – gave him the skills he long sought. Soon after, he began to realize that serving others was only a part of the puzzle, and he began to pray about how best to serve God.

"The idea of becoming a priest had been in my mind off and on for a long time," Fr. Ericksen said. "Then I realized I was trying to write my own vocation story. Instead of asking myself 'what do I enjoy doing?' I needed to ask God how could I be of service to him instead."



First Months of Priesthood

"Every day is different," says new priest Fr. Pablo Migone

Of all the aspects of an ordination, says Fr. Pablo Migone, the most surprising is how suddenly the priesthood comes.

Despite the years of study and preparation, the journey towards the priesthood is ultimately about walking into the cathedral a seminarian and coming out a priest.

"You go from being in the seminary, in a seminarian mind-set, and literally in the two hours of ordination, you become a full-fledged priest," said Fr. Pablo. "It's very awe-inspiring and humbling. All of the sudden you are 'Father,' the priest. You kind of have to get used to it."

Fr. Pablo was ordained this past June at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Savannah.

He has spent his first ten months as a priest at Sacred Heart in Warner Robins. The experience so far has been eye-opening, a wonderful challenge and most of all, humbling.

"One of the things that has impacted me is the great trust and respect people have for the priest—that it's a trust and respect for the priesthood itself," explained Fr. Pablo. "Going to the hospital, or wherever you go as the priest—people recognize and respect that."

The day-to-day life of a priest has been especially rewarding. Even though Fr. Pablo had often heard of the demands of priestly ministry, he is amazed at all there is to do—and how quickly his calendar becomes full.

"Every day is different, which is something



Dawid Kwiatkowski



Chris Ortega

Ordination to the Transitional Deaconate

June 5th 2010 at 10:00 a.m.
Cathedral of St. John the Baptist

This summer Dawid Kwiatkowski and Chris Ortega will be ordained to the transitional deaconate. All Catholics in the diocese are invited to attend this powerful and inspiring liturgy. Please pray for these men as they prepare for their final year of study and their ministry within our diocese.



they tell you in seminary," said Fr. Pablo. "Some mornings you just have Mass on your schedule but the day fills up quickly with appointments."

While he enjoys the challenge and recognizes a busy schedule as part of his vocation, Fr. Pablo also sees the wisdom in a healthy pace.

"I've noticed that it's important that in the same way I dive in and give myself, that I pull back and rest and pray and recharge."

One of his favorite aspects of the priesthood is hearing confession. "Reconciliation is a very concrete way you see the Lord at work, healing and forgiving," he said.

Being a brand-new priest involves what is sometimes called on-the-job training. "Seminary prepares you with knowledge and academics, and it also helps you develop good spiritual

habits," said Fr. Pablo. "It gives you a lot of the tools, but nothing can really prepare you for the challenge and privilege of actually being a priest."

Fr. Pablo especially appreciates the help of Msgr. Fred Nijem, his mentor at Sacred Heart. "It's good to have another priest with a lot of experience to answer questions, give advice and guide me through it," he said.

Mostly, he said, it's about being patient with himself, and being grateful for the incredible gift of the priesthood.

"It's a quick change," he said, "and it's taken a while for it to sink in. You realize it's something you are given, that you receive. You as a person get inserted into the priesthood and you are now part of something much greater than you could ever be alone."