

From Cross Lanes to Charleston Catholic to the Pulpit



One year out of college, Thomas Gallagher finally decided to put his apprehension aside and take a reasonable step toward pursuing a long-standing internal call to the priesthood. He filled out a seminarian application, putting in motion a desire that dated back to a young age. The outward gesture of merely filling out a series of papers was life-changing, a relief, and seemingly caught no one by surprise.

“Once I applied to our Diocese [of Wheeling-Charleston] to attend the seminary, there was peace about taking the leap,” recalled Rev. Gallagher. “Initially, there was some unfounded apprehension when I told my family and friends. I don’t remember exactly who I spoke to first, but it seemed like it had almost been an open secret to everyone except me.”

The Cross Lanes native traces his initial feelings about the priesthood to a second-grade assignment at Sacred Heart school in Charleston.

“The assignment asked us what we wanted to do when we grew up. I remember thinking of possibly being a police officer, a firefighter, or a priest. As a second grader, I am not sure I was analyzing my feelings at that point, but I did have a captivation for God and the Church,” remembers Father Gallagher. “This led me to many years of as an altar server at Sacred Heart. I also saw over the years different examples of priests. At that time Father Casey Mahone was Monsignor Edward Sadie’s zany associate. He showed me that priests could be ‘normal.’ ”

During his primary schooling years at Charleston Catholic and then Wheeling Jesuit University, Father Gallagher – currently serving as pastor at St. Joseph in Martinsburg - was thinking how his life was a vocation but not quite sure which exact direction.

“I often went back and forth on whether I was called to marriage or priesthood. There were many emotions going on while thinking about this. I certainly saw the value of family life and desired that, and yet the thoughts of priesthood never went away,” Father Gallagher said. “While in college, Father Paul Hudock encouraged me numerous times to fill out an application to the seminary. This caused much apprehension because I thought that seminary was a priest-making factory in which once you went in, you were to become a priest. I wanted to be 100 percent sure of my vocation to the priesthood before I applied. I wrestled with this periodically throughout college as I had started the application at one point and then stopped. It wasn’t until the year after I graduated from college that I decided to finally apply. And that decision came after much exasperation. It was so frustrating going back and forth.”

Father Gallagher has long cast aside those frustrations and carries on a very non-traditional “job” with an energizing outlook.

“The priesthood calls on us to be radically available to the people when convenient and also when inconvenient. I try to remind myself of some of the basic faith facts:

God loves me, knows what’s best for me, and he wants me to be full of joy.

He wouldn’t ask me to join a vocation to be miserable all my life.

Does that mean everything will be sunshine, roses, and daisies all the time?

No, but if I am faithful to him he will see me through whatever challenging moment,” he said.

“If we are honest with ourselves in thinking of marriage, priesthood, and/or consecrated religious life, every vocation is going to have great highs, but every vocation is going to have crosses and struggles. And that’s okay, we just have to turn to the Good Lord and try to be faithful to Him, and our spouse if we happen to be married.”

Father Gallagher encourages discernment and dialogue with other priests, nuns, brothers and those committed to vocations for guidance to one’s life-long journey.

“To those who might be sensing a call, I think it is important to spend time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to help and guide you along your journey. Do not be afraid of a vocation. God calls us to greatness and love, figuring out our vocation – whether it is marriage, priesthood, or consecrated life – is merely about how we are to live our greatness, live our love. Jesus desires us to not be afraid but to have peace. Consider your greatness, consider a vocation.”

If you'd like to send Fr. Gallagher a message to thank him for responding to his vocation from God you can contact him at: St. Joseph Church, 336 S. Queen St. Martinsburg, WV 25401 or tgallagher@dwc.org.