

Vocations

Jesus Christ: Yesterday, Today, and Forever ~



Last Monday, one of our parishioners, Brother Townsen Poissant, became Brother Jonah (see picture). Br. Jonah took simple (temporary) vows as a monk at Mt. Angel, where he has been for

the last year and half. If all goes well, he'll take Solemn (permanent) vows three years from now. This occasion gives me an opportunity to reflect on religious vocations and help you to promote them, and if you still can, possibly even explore one.

As many of you know, Columbia River Catholic has been blessed with vocations to the priesthood and religious life. There is a board up in Holy Redeemer's narthex with most of our parishioners who have left for the seminary or religious communities over the years. We hope to add more.

Last June at our annual gathering, the priests of the Archdiocese of Seattle were treated to what was the best presentation we have ever had. Rhonda Gruenwald, a laywoman from Texas, spoke to us about priestly vocations and how we can raise up more. Rhonda started a national program in 2011 called simply enough, vocation ministry, see the website here <https://www.vocationministry.com>. Since 2011, it has been the catalyst for countless religious vocations. The Serra Club, a local group that meets monthly to support religious vocations, is going to do a deep dive with me this year to explore what we can do to exponentially increase religious vocations at Columbia River Catholic and beyond. If you have a heart for raising up more religious vocations, you can join us by emailing Shawn Madison at shawnemadison@comcast.net. In the meantime, here is a pastor's column that is meant to be a self-guide for those who are open to the possibility of a priestly or religious vocation for men and women.

This is really helpful. If anyone is thinking about priesthood or religious life, please call the office and make an appointment to see me. I will neither bite, nor will you be committed at that moment to becoming a priest or religious. I'll just try to help you with things in this pastor's column. Vocational journeys are many years long, not all at once things. With that said, experience has taught me that people tend to speak about a religious vocation to a priest who knows them, only after they have been discerning and trying to put things together for themselves for quite some time. So let me help you do that.

Let's begin by clarifying the difference the priesthood and religious life, as if they are two related but different things. Why not just say "religious life?" For men, the possibility exists of either the office of priesthood and/or consecrated religious life. When a man is ordained a priest for a diocese such as Seattle or Portland,

he is not being consecrated into a religious order (Franciscans, Jesuits, Benedictines, etc.). Rather, he is occupying an office within the sacrament of Holy Orders for that diocese. Due to this distinction between the office of priesthood and those vowed to consecrated religious life, we make the distinction for men between priesthood and/or religious life.

When exploring an invitation to priesthood and religious life there are a few things that need to be considered. The first is who the invitation goes out to. The answer is anyone who can. The Lord is generous in extending the invitation to leave all and follow Him. As long as someone is a practicing Catholic, believes in the Truth of our faith, is not too old, is single without responsibility to care for another (child, parent, etc.), and does not have mental, physical, or social impediments; the Lord is inviting them to discern joining Him in the priesthood or religious life. What I just said means that a majority of Catholic 18-year-olds can discern a religious vocation. That percentage drops precipitously over the years.

The next matter for the discernor is exploring where and how they can do the most good for God. This requires discerning one's aptitudes vs. ineptitude, and virtues vs. vices. Examples of aptitudes include: if one has good people skills or not, talent with administration or not, leadership skills or not, can work independently or not, in the case of priesthood, could graduate from college, etc. Examples of virtues would include living a pious life, ability to live with and put up with challenging people, to love others, sensitivity toward others, courage, one's ability to suffer, to preserve, etc.

Here are a few rules for those discerning joining a religious order.

1. The order must be orthodox, meaning they don't tolerate members who disagree with any of the Church's perennial teachings.
2. All the members must wear habits, or in the case of priests, a clerical suit.
3. They are viable in terms of age. There needs to be enough relatively young members to point toward a future. Most religious communities that have come into the existence in the last two thousand years have died out. Many religious communities today are in the process of dying out. No point in getting on a sinking ship.

Religious orders are divided into two categories: active and contemplative.

1. Active orders are out in the world teaching in Catholic schools, putting on missions or workshops, feeding the poor, etc.
2. Contemplative orders are monastic, living in community in one place, removed from the world, living a life of community, prayer, and expiation.

Vocations

Let's start with women.

Here is a list of **contemplative** religious orders for women <https://cloisteredlife.com/directory>. This website has a comprehensive list of contemplative orders across the country, two of which are in Washington. The one on Shaw Island might be dying out, while the one in Shoreline might not be healthy spiritually. I know the one in Post Falls Idaho is excellent, but they are traditional, so Latin Mass, etc. Because contemplative communities are not in the public eye, they are not as easy to figure out in terms of orthodoxy and viability. Anyone discerning a contemplative community will need to look them up on the internet, and if an interest is still there, arrange a visit.

Here is a list of **active** religious orders for women that operate in the Northwest.

- [Salesian Sisters of St. John Bosco](https://salesiansisterswest.org) – <https://salesiansisterswest.org>
- The Nashville Dominicans – <https://www.nashvilledominican.org>
- Society of Mary – <https://socmaria.org>. This one operates in Oregon, but the sisters have to go through formation in Argentina for years. You'd have to learn Spanish and receive your instructions in it.

Here are a couple of active orders that are not in the Northwest but are really good.

- Sisters of Mary – <https://www.sistersofmary.org>
- Sisters of Life – <https://sistersoflife.org>

Now to the men.

First parish priesthood then religious orders.

The Church needs vocations of all kinds. Again, in discerning a vocation, one must consider where and how they can do the most good for God. For 90% of Catholics, their only exposure to the Catholic faith is through the Mass. For most Catholics, the only exposure they have of the faith, its teachings, and sacraments is through the priest at the Masses they attend. Therefore, the direct impact that parish priests have on the faithful is usually far greater than it is for priests who belong to religious orders. If a man has the aptitude and virtues to be a parish priest, and our discernment is about doing the most good for God, then it would be very important to explore the possibility of parish priesthood in considering the most good for God. A lot goes into discernment and there must be a great deal of humility and courage in that discernment. That discernment may lead a young man to discern parish priesthood or another religious vocation that may or may not include priesthood.

If one is considering parish priesthood, then they would discern joining a diocese under a bishop. These are called diocesan

priests. Here are the websites for the vocation offices of the Archdiocese of Seattle and Portland. While Columbia River Catholic is part of the Archdiocese of Seattle, I list Portland as well because those open to exploring a vocation to parish priesthood, might not have any connection to Seattle but might be open toward Portland just across the river. Both need good priests.

Archdiocese of Seattle – <https://archseattle.org/office-ministry/vocations>

Archdiocese of Portland – <https://archdpdxvocations.org>

If discernment about doing the most good for God in religious life leads one to consider religious orders, then these are some good local ones as well as a few beyond the Northwest.

Local **active** religious orders for men.

- Dominicans – Portland – <https://opwest.org>. Teaching order.
- Fathers of Mercy – Bowling Green, KY – <https://fathersofmercy.com>. Conduct parish missions.
- Marians of the Immaculate Conception – Stockbridge, MA – <https://marian.org>. Different ministries.
- Society of St. John – Portland, OR – https://socsj.org/en_us/formation/. This is a religious order from Argentina. If one joins this order, they will have to go to Argentina for years of seminary formation – all in Spanish.
- Traditional – Latin Mass only – <https://www.fssp.org/en/our-seminaries/denton/>. Restoration of Traditional Catholicism.

Some **contemplative** orders for men

- Mt. Angel Abbey – Mt. Angel, OR – <https://www.mountangelabbey.org/monastery/vocations/>
- St. Martin's Abbey – Lacey WA – <https://stmartinsabbey.org/become-a-monk/how-does-one-become-a-monk/>
- Westminster Abbey – Mission, BC. Canada – <https://westminsterabbey.ca/vocations/>
- White Stone Monastery – Sprague, WA – <https://www.whitestonemonks.org>. Traditional – Latin Mass & prayers.
- Carmelite Monks of Wyoming – <https://www.carmelitemonks.org>. Traditional – Latin Mass & prayers.
- Clear Creek Abbey – Diocese of Tulsa, Oklahoma – <https://clearcreekmonks.org>. Traditional – Latin Mass & prayers.

I hope and pray that this pastor's column will be helpful in raising up vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

May Almighty God Bless You,



Fr. Thomas Nathe