

Seminarians of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg Newsletter

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Introduction to the Seminarians



Oliver Omega
Theology 2
Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology

Looking back, there were many events in my life that led me to where I am now. One traumatic event led me to Our Blessed Mother that I became part of the Legion of Mary. Another was when after having received Holy Communion and upon returning to my pew, I looked up at the painting of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Mother, and I had this interior feeling that I had offended God which made me cry uncontrollably. At the time, I did not know what it meant. I did a pilgrimage to Rome after which I knew, that something had changed in me. I had a deep, deep desire to be with Christ. Then one day, after telling Fr. Dominic of St. Anthony of Padua my story, he suggested that I discern in the seminary.



Christopher Pugh
Theology 2
St. Joseph Seminary

I had been contemplating a call to the priesthood for a number of years before entering the seminary. After high school, I followed a path into the sciences at university and kept following that path for 11 years because it seemed to be the easiest route for me to follow. In the back of my mind throughout my entire university career though, there was something poking me. This poke continued to grow stronger and stronger until at last I could not ignore it any further. One year into my Doctorate degree in physics, I decided that after I was finished, I would enter the seminary. This choice did not change for the next 4 years, and finally when I finished and after a year as

It has been a long journey since that turning point from a traumatic event that led me to have a deeper relationship with God. By God's grace, at this time in my life and after two full years of being here, it feels like I am where the Good Lord wants me to be at this time: in a seminary and being a seminarian; discerning, drawing closer to Him in prayer, in study, in work, learning about myself and at the same time giving it all up. That is my vocation right now. Please pray for me that I may grow more to love, serve and persevere for His Church and for His glory. Indeed as Pope St. John Paul II once wrote: "*Life finds its purpose and its meaning when it is given up*".

a professor at Brandon University, I entered into the seminary.

I have now been studying for the priesthood at St. Joseph Seminary in Edmonton, Alberta, for two and a half years, and God willing, have three and a half left. Although I was slow to answer the call, things sure are moving fast now. Next year I hope to be on my internship in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg and look forward to that experience. I ask for your prayers along this journey and be assured that I hold the people in the Archdiocese in mine.



Vince Diestro
Propaedeutic Year
St. Joseph Seminary

My name is Jonathan Vincera Diestro, commonly known as my nickname Vince and I am in my first year in seminary formation in the Propaedeutic year at St. Joseph's Seminary. I am the youngest in a family of five which consists of my Dad, Mom, older brother, and older sister. As of writing this, I am currently 23 years old. I was born in the Philippines before moving to Los Angeles at age 7, and finally moving to Winnipeg at the age of 12. My family's home parish is Our Lady of Victory Memorial Parish. I enjoy playing basketball in my free time and watching the NBA, my family and I are the biggest Los Angeles Lakers fans ever. Since entering the seminary, I have been on a media fast as a part of the Propaedeutic year and so I've enjoyed reading a variety of books such as lives of the saints, the church, and various works of the saints. My favourite saint is St. Faustina Kowalska and in relation to her, my favourite devotion is praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy.

After my reversion to the faith in late 2017 I had suddenly started to think about the priesthood for the first time. As these thoughts grew more persistent throughout my studies it eventually led to my decision to take time off post secondary studies in June 2018 to focus more on my vocational discernment. In March 2019 I

attended my first come and see weekend retreat at St. Joseph's Seminary. I remember after attending that event that I felt even more drawn to the priesthood. Unfortunately, I had allowed my fears to get the best of me in taking that huge step towards finding out whether this was where God was calling me to. I was afraid of the possibility of being called during that weekend. After a few weeks had passed since the retreat, I prematurely concluded that the priesthood wasn't for me and I returned to the norms of working a part time job in the hopes to return to post secondary studies. Towards to end of 2019, the thoughts about the priesthood had returned and certain circumstances that played out left me puzzled. These thoughts grew more persistent than the first time and in God's providence led me to attend a second come and see weekend at St. Joseph's seminary in February 2020. This time it was a completely different experience. I had felt at peace and perceived a sense of belonging throughout the weekend and my anxieties and fears from my first retreat had disappeared. Fast forward a year later I am now in my first year as a seminarian at St. Joseph's seminary for the Archdiocese of Winnipeg.

Reflection from Oliver Omega

What does it mean to be Catholic nowadays? How do we practice our faith in our times with the ongoing pandemic and the restrictions that the government has imposed on its citizens? We hear of people feeling isolated, having anxiety attacks, some are stressed from restricted activity; we hear reports of increased suicide rates and even death from health complications other than from the virus itself. In my patristics class, we studied the early church fathers and how they struggled during their own time in practicing their faith and for simply being Christians. What is significant it seems for our reflection is in the manner of how they faced them. Where their heart lay, was what kept them strong and what gave them the courage to face their struggles and perseverance to the end.

Persecutions came and went in cycles depending on who the emperor was, where in the empire it happened, and what situation brought about it (Wilken 2012 65). Since Christians did not believe in pagan gods and goddesses, Roman citizens called them atheists! They would be arrested and brought to trial in the stadium to confess publicly that Caesar is Lord (OP #4, 155). While some Christians gave up the faith out of fear, some kept the faith up to their death from the wild beasts.

But how do the lives of the early Christians still enflame us today? Their stories tell us my friends that in Our Lord Jesus Christ, we receive the gifts of faith hope, and love through the Holy Spirit; that through love, we gain perfection and through perfection, we become one with God.

Our human state has been weakened by the effect of original sin; a sin of disobedience. Hence, there is tension in us because our bodies want material things, bodily pleasures, and comforts. After all, it thinks that these will make it whole. But our souls want another, it longs for spiritual things because it

is spirit. It too longs for what also makes it whole and complete. But we cannot remain in that tension. What makes it difficult and hence continues to hold us captive in that state of tension, is what lies in our hearts. Our hearts cannot remain divided.

For St. Augustine, the path to holiness is by way of God's grace (OP#21, 230); and it is through grace that we become free from our heart's desire for sinful ways. He says that it is in love, that we can become perfect (OP#27, 270). If we have the love of Christ in our hearts, that love will lighten that burden that we carry; it will lighten the law (the 10 commandments), the struggles, the difficulties, the trials, and obstacles, because "love alone is the burden that is light" (OP#27, 269). St. Augustine further adds that if we turn our whole heart and our whole soul in love to God, everything becomes easy, the law, the burdens, everything!

So in these times of inactivity because of the restrictions, let's turn it into the activity of growing in love of Christ. We can read sacred scriptures; have a moment of prayer for God, throughout the day, or in our tasks, and in our struggles. We can say a prayer to his Mother who will guide us to him. Instead of being focused on questions from uncertainty like: how can I do this? What's going to happen? When is this going to end? Let us chose to become witnesses of Christ instead, to live his words and commandments by remaining faithful to them; to persevere, to have hope, and faith that through all these trials, bearing them with love and for the love of Christ we may continue to strive to become perfect and be with God in Heaven.

Reference List:

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Reflection from Christopher Pugh

Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)

These words from Isaiah are of great value to me, especially during these pandemic times. After an extended summer break due to COVID-19, the seminary made the decision that, even under the circumstances, in house formation was an important aspect of priestly formation and called the seminarians back to the seminary in September. I have to admit that I did have some fears about returning to live in community with the case numbers rising in both Manitoba and Alberta, indeed everywhere. This is when the words from Isaiah above really spoke to me. *Do not fear, for I am with you.* We often say that we should be giving our entire lives to Christ, we should be trusting him with everything, but was I willing to trust him and return to the seminary? The answer was indeed yes. *I will strengthen you, I will help you.* After much prayer, I could feel the presence of the Lord upon me, and I could feel my fears being lifted from my shoulders.

Upon returning to the seminary in September, there were new protocols in place in order to prevent the spread of the virus in the seminary, and hopefully to prevent it from even entering. The seminarians are all so generous in their response to these minor inconveniences to help keep everyone in the house safe. To this day, we still have had zero cases of COVID-19 in the seminary, and our priestly formation is ongoing, and bearing much fruit. I am so happy that I returned this fall and look forward to continuing to answer God's call.

These words from Isaiah should not only bring us strength with major things, but we should be applying them to every aspect of our lives. If there is anyone who desires whole-heartedly for your well-being and loves you unconditionally, it is God. It is Him who is always with us, it is Him who is our

God. It is Him who will help us and will uphold us with His victorious right hand. I challenge each of us today to look deep inside, take a few moments and bring some aspect of our life which causes us fear to the Lord.

Now, he is always with us, but that does not mean it is always going to be easy. We will experience challenges; we will experience setbacks. But perseverance is the key. Continue trusting in the Lord, continue letting him remove your fears and we will be victorious over the challenges.

One last word I wish to share. At the beginning of the pandemic, we were urged to implement social distancing. I am pleased with the shift we have experienced in language around this to physical distancing. We are social creatures, and it is often God placing people in our lives that helps us to get through our darkest hours. Reflect on those times when you felt lonely and you received a kind word from a friend or family member. Take this opportunity during this time of physical distancing to contact someone and let them know you are thinking of them. Let them know you care. Together let us continue to be lights in each other's lives and to help each other be not afraid!



Reflection from Vince Diestro

Leading up to entering the seminary, I often pondered about what my first year of formation was going to look like. Having attended two come and see weekends (March 2019 and February 2020) at the seminary prior to entering, I already had some expectation of the lifestyle I would have to adjust to. As we find ourselves in a global pandemic, my discernment in entering the seminary was not an easy one. Leaving my family behind to attend the seminary this past August was the hardest part of this entire process. It was the first time I was going to be away from my family and friends for a long time. Deep down I was still at peace with this decision to further discern whether or not the priesthood is ultimately where God is calling me to.

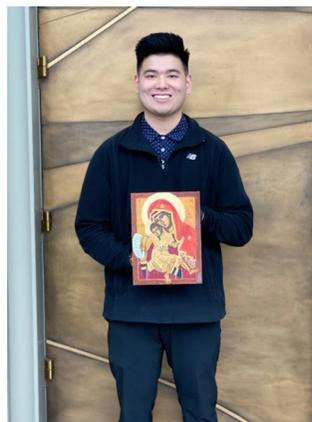
Even though formation at the seminary feels different, there are still many things to be grateful for during these strange times. The first thing that comes to mind is waking up early in the morning to start the day with Adoration as a community. Praying before the Blessed Sacrament to start the day during the week has definitely been my favourite part of formation by far. It definitely helps set the tone for the rest of the day to come. The silence within the seminary has also provided a great stillness and quietness in my life that I had been longing for and has since helped me in a lot in my discernment. I have also grown appreciative of the communal life here in the seminary: praying together, celebrating feast days and solemnities together, eating meals together, playing sports, watching movies, playing games and a lot more!

I have also learned to take it one day at a time. I have definitely fallen into the temptation of looking too far ahead in the future—trying to figure out whether I'm being called to the priesthood or not—instead of living in the present. The priests in the formation team here have helped me a lot in recognizing that it'll take time and to trust in the Lord through it all and to not put too much pressure on myself in figuring it out.

Being here in the seminary has certainly gotten me to appreciate my family a lot more, now that they're far away.

Being surrounded with like minded brothers wanting to pursue Christ has humbled me a lot and has challenged me to pursue an even deeper relationship with Christ. Interacting with and learning from the priests in the formation team here has been one of my more humbling experiences. In my interactions with them I have been able to see firsthand how much they dedicate their lives completely to God and has inspired me to live a life selflessly for the Lord. Every time I look at the priests here, I am always reminded: "That's a life worth living; a life dedicated to Christ."

My experience at the seminary these past couple of months has definitely been fruitful and is something I will never take for granted. Even though I am still uncertain of whether God is ultimately calling me to the priesthood, I have learned that I need to trust the Lord in all that I do and to live a life in Christ. I am excited to see what else the Lord has in store for me in the future. As we find ourselves in times of uncertainty, let us remind ourselves to trust God all the more and to ask for the strength and the graces we need to live a life dedicated to Him!



Prepared by the seminarians of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg

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