



Since I was five years old, Christ the King has been my spiritual home. Along with Marquette and Cascia Hall, these communities have formed me into the Catholic Christian I am today.

One of my earliest memories involving vocations and Christ the King is of Juanita Quinn telling me, probably around the third or fourth grade, that I should be a priest (to this day, I think she's still secretly disappointed that I'm not!). Perhaps one reason for her insistence was that she saw how, even from a young age, I loved the Mass.

My family almost always attended the Saturday evening Mass, and I was still in elementary school when I began helping my dad take up the collection. My family and the parish continued to foster in me this attitude of service to the liturgy and to the congregation, and I soon began reading at Mass as well. Once I received the sacrament of confirmation, I was commissioned to serve Communion as an extraordinary minister, and I even sang with the vigil choir when I came back from college.

I don't mean to present this "laundry list" as an impressive resume of all the "stuff" I've done at Mass. Quite the opposite: Every person who trained and mentored me in these roles—my dad, then-Father Gier, Margaret Johnson, Barb Patterson, Ed Grewe, and so many others—modeled for me an attitude of humble service to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and to the Mystical Body of Christ gathered as the worshipping community of this parish.

This is one simple yet profound thing each of us can do to promote vocations: model a sincere love of the Mass and an attitude of service to it and its people.

Another thing we can all do is equally simple but admittedly a bit less comfortable: follow Mrs. Quinn's example and encourage people to consider religious vocations. From Marquette through Cascia, people regularly asked me to listen for a call to the priesthood or the Augustinians, but most of them were priests or brothers themselves. This responsibility belongs to all of us!

So many priests, deacons, sisters, and brothers tell the story of just one person's encouragement providing the spark that set aflame the tinder of their own internal process of consideration and prayer indecision and giving them the courage they needed to take the next step in their discernment.

Don't be afraid of being pushy or nosy or offensive—be bold! Even if you can't articulate exactly why, share your gut feeling with someone you think might be called to serve the Church. Your encouragement might be the sign he or she has been praying for.

Thanks to the foundation set by my family, Marquette, Cascia, and Christ the King, I kept the possibilities of the priesthood and the Augustinians in the back of my mind as I went off to college and came back home, and those possibilities never faded completely until I realized that God's plan for my life lay along a different path—one that led me to the woman who would become my wife.

To quote a somewhat unusual source, the Reverend Mother from *The Sound of Music*, "What you must find out is how God wants you to spend your love." Of course, when you are living according to God's will for your life, "spending" your love is always accompanied by receiving even more love in return. For me, my wife, April, is a tremendous source of that love. One of the greatest manifestations of God's grace in my life is the strength of our marriage, which has kept us sane, adaptable, and happy through our pleasantly tumultuous years together.

In the spring of 2011, we saw an announcement in the weekly bulletin advertising an information session for those interested in learning more about the diaconate. I forget which of us broached the topic to the other, but it had obviously been on both of our minds, because neither April nor I was surprised to learn the other thought I should attend!

This meeting was simultaneously intriguing and daunting, for they pulled no punches about the time, effort, and energy that the process demands. The Diocese of Tulsa has one of the best deacon formation programs in the nation, and other dioceses look to ours as a model. The first year of formation is spent as an aspirant—one who aspires to the diaconate. During that year, we met once a month on Friday evening and Saturday to learn about diaconal life, ministry, and spirituality and to get an introduction to the philosophy and theology we would need to know as deacons.

After that initial year, we formally applied to the bishop and were received as candidates for holy orders. That's when the academic program kicked in to high gear: Our weekends then extended to Sunday afternoons, with reading homework to prepare each month and an exam to write for each class. We were also expected to increase our service to the Church at both the parish and diocesan levels, to deepen our prayer lives, and of course to hold down our jobs and maintain, if not improve, our relationships with family and friends.

We're taught that a deacon must learn to integrate all these areas of his life—his family, his job, and his ministry—and that each area should contribute to the other two. There are days, and sometimes even weeks and months, when it feels like all I can do is muddle through work, stay awake through a deacon weekend, and barely avoid alienating my wife and son, but, thanks be to God, those times pass. There are times when dropping out is a very attractive thought, but at those times I pray for perseverance in my formation and discernment.

Discernment is a different process for each different person. One of my classmates realized after just a few months that his family and work obligations would not allow him to pursue formation at this time, but I think he would make an excellent deacon, and I pray that God will show him a better time to pursue it in the future. Some of my classmates took several years to realize that God is not calling them to serve his Church in this public ministry, and I would be foolish to say that I am certain of this calling myself.

Discernment is a process that does not end until you make your vows, whether at your wedding, ordination, or consecration, and that is actually a comforting thought for me. I don't know that anyone is ever completely ready to be a deacon until he receives the special grace of

his ordination. I think about such people as Moses, David, Isaiah, Peter, and Paul, and I realize that God knows what He's doing, even if we don't realize it at first.

As I progress through the years of formation, I am expected to pray and reflect ever more deeply and carefully about whether God is calling me to ordained service to His Church as a deacon, but this prayer and reflection ought to consist mostly of listening. It must have been nice for the apostles to have Jesus walk right up to them and tell them so clearly what He wanted them to do with their lives, but I suspect most of us—myself included—need the time of dating and engagement or religious formation to build up the courage to answer God's call.

If you have ever thought that God might be calling you to serve His Church as a deacon, I strongly encourage you to do two things. First, talk with a deacon you know well or whose ministry you admire. Deacon John Johnson has known me for most of my life, and before I applied, I sat in his office for an hour, and we talked all about his own discernment, formation, and ministry and about how my life had unfolded toward that point. This was also a critically reassuring and strengthening moment in my decision to apply.

Second, and most importantly, pray. Pray more and pray better. I really encourage everyone, not just those considering a vocation, to learn about and begin praying the Divine Office or the Liturgy of the Hours. Other than the Mass, this is the Church's "official" public prayer, and it offers a very regular way to consecrate the day to God. Even if you begin only with morning or evening prayer just one day a week, I think you will find this a most fruitful practice and you will find yourself wanting to pray the Office more often and more regularly. There is an excellent website, [www.divineoffice.org](http://www.divineoffice.org), that posts every prayer every day for free, and they also have an excellent smartphone app.

Of course, also talk with Monsignor, one of our deacons, or me if you know someone you think should look into the diaconate. As I mentioned earlier, the responsibility to foster and promote religious vocations belongs to all of us, so look around at your fellow parishioners, your friends and colleagues, your fellow school parents, your children's teachers and coaches, your sons, grandsons, brothers, uncles and nephews, and your husbands. I'm guessing you know at least one man—however young or old—whom you think could be a good deacon, so

tell him! He just might be waiting for your encouragement to put into motion his journey down the path God wills for him. Let your voice be that of Christ's, and call him to be a fisher of men.