

VIANNEY NEWS

SAINT JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY
SPRING 2023



FOCUS ON HUMAN FORMATION

How SJV is preparing men for
the rest of their lives.

Story on page 4

BECAUSE GOD STILL CALLS ...

I recently watched a very popular TED Talk about leadership. The presenter suggested the best leaders motivate by talking about the *why* rather than the *what* or the *how*.

I began to think about the *why* of SJV and concluded... because God still calls.

The *Word took flesh and dwelt among us*. Jesus reconciled us to the Father and established a Church. He gives us graces through the Sacraments to remain grafted onto the vine of His family. He called men to be *stewards of these mysteries* of the Divine life. Guided by the Holy Spirit, these faithful disciples have led the Church through the last 2,000 years to this very moment.



Even today, God still calls men to follow in the footsteps of the original disciples. He is still calling men to be stewards of His mysteries for the salvation of souls, reconciling all nations to His family, the Church. At Saint John Vianney, young men who believe they might be called to follow Jesus as the Eternal High Priest are able to listen, discern and hear the Father's voice.

We are committed to building and preserving a vibrant and healthy formative environment where the seeds of a priestly vocation grow. We equip our men to respond to this call in faith with courage, conviction and zeal.

Saint John Paul II called the formation of future priests "one of the most demanding and challenging tasks for the evangelization of humanity." Fulfilling this task is our mission, and we thank you for supporting it and in some way making it your own... because God still calls.

God bless you.

Corragio,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Jonathan Kelly".

Fr. Jonathan Kelly
Rector, Saint John Vianney College Seminary

Dr. Chris Burke



Katie Anderson



Sr. Miriam James
Heidland, SOLT



News bites

Saint John Vianney College Seminary welcomed a **pair of new team members** this spring in two newly created positions. Dr. Chris Burke begins as the seminary’s director of counseling services and assistant human formation coordinator, and Katie Anderson joined the team as its manager of marketing and communications.

Nearly 90 men from around the Upper Midwest attended SJV’s **spring semester Vianney Visit** in February. Vianney Visits give prospective seminarians a chance to experience campus, learn more about discernment and pray together with the seminary community.

While some seminarians spent the 2023 January term abroad (see pages 6-7), others spent valuable, **formative time here in the United States**. The first-year men had a conference with Sr. Miriam James Heidland,

SOLT (pictured above with seminarian Kyle Rohan from the Diocese of Green Bay) and went on a mission trip to Mobile, Alabama. The second-year seminarians had a six-day silent retreat led by Msgr. Tom Richter of the Diocese of Bismarck at Broom Tree Retreat Center in South Dakota. Third-year seminarians took part in a directed and preached silent retreat at Joseph and Mary Retreat Center in Mundelein, Illinois, led by Fr. Joseph Kuharski, and Fr. Jeff Norfolk led a preached silent retreat for the seniors in Hanceville, Alabama at the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

Longtime SJV friend **Mike ‘Sal’ Salvatore entered eternal rest** on March 4; that evening, SJV seminarians continued a longstanding tradition fostered by Mike of serving at Saint Bonaventure’s Knights of Columbus. *Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.*



PUT ON THE NEW MAN

IMPLEMENTING THE
NEW 'PROPAEDEUTIC
STAGE' AT SJV

“Sturdiness of character and relational prayer are the building blocks for them to move forward with confidence in God’s call.”

– Fr. Jonathan Kelly, Rector

Dining with fraternal groups. Trading in smart devices for the most basic of flip phones. Playing Frisbee with diocesan fraternities. Beginning each day with a 6:30 a.m. Holy Hour. Attending spiritual conferences and retreats to take the interior life to new depths. Checking in with the trainers assigned to support first-year seminarians. Pursuing an undergraduate degree in philosophy while participating in apostolic outreach.

The life of a seminarian at SJV is markedly different from most of his 18-22-year-old contemporaries. How does the seminary help him acclimate to the nuances of university and seminary life while laying the groundwork to support his vocational discernment?

Enter the propaedeutic stage.

Taken from the Greek “pro” (before) + “paideuein” (to teach), propaedeutic (prō-pi-'dü-tik) refers to an introductory period of preparation. Implementation of a 1-2-year propaedeutic stage preceding priestly formation is integral in the latest guidance from the *Program of Priestly Formation in the United States of America* (PPF, 6th edition) and the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (“The Gift of Priestly Vocation,” newly published by the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy in 2016).

The Propaedeutic Stage aims at nurturing excellence of character and growth in self-knowledge. This is where SJV’s robust fraternal life of deep friendship and authentic masculinity comes into play. The men challenge each other to not live on the surface of noise, distraction and games but to develop a deep life of interiority and faithfulness to God’s presence. Men who attain this self-knowledge learn to distinguish the voices vying for attention in their minds and hearts. The goal of this propaedeutic stage is not heightened attention on self but rather deeper focus on and communion with God.

The Propaedeutic Stage, according to Archbishop Patrón Wong who led the publication of the *Ratio*, supports men as they work to:

- Establish solid foundations in the spiritual life.
- Foster a greater self-awareness.
- Receive an initial and concise introduction to Christian doctrine.
- Gain a deeper understanding of the priesthood.
- Make an initial vocational discernment.

What does this look like practically? Each seminary must discern how to integrate and implement the PPF6 propaedeutic stage into its formation, effective August 2023.

Rector Fr. Jonathan Kelly and SJV’s priest formators have enthusiastically welcomed these directives, finding them to be harmonious with the formation men have come to trust in at SJV.

“We’re starting to see the fruits of the propaedeutic year in its seed form,” Kelly said. “And our bishops are noticing it too.” After the annual evaluations for his seminarians from the Diocese of Joliet, Bishop Ronald Hicks commented, “The new propaedeutic stage at SJV has been a gift for my men. I can tell they already have deeper self-awareness and are showing impressive growth in their first year.”

Thirty-six “new men” comprise SJV’s opening propaedeutic stage class, which commenced fall 2022. This stage is anticipated to encompass the first three semesters of formation, though the heart of this formative period will take place from January of the first year through January of the second year. The men partake in classes, human and spiritual conferences, and retreats in addition to several outings and pilgrimages. While integrating many aspects of formation alongside older seminarians,

continued...

men in the propaedeutic stage form a distinct community of their own, sharing meals, prayer apart from the larger group and group processing facilitated by Dr. Christopher Burke each week.

Burke, director of counseling services and assistant human formation coordinator, sees his role at SJV as helping Kelly implement the Church's vision of forming solid, self-aware and confident men who are firmly grounded in the love of the Lord and can share it with people who are thirsty for a vibrant and living faith. He realizes the goal envisioned in the 1970s of developing a "professional, pastorally-present priest" has shifted now to a "healed-mystic-teacher priest" model as outlined in *Ratio Fundamentalis* and the PPF6.

"It used to be that Catholic culture would provide seminaries with men who were well-rounded in a Catholic anthropology; the primary role of the seminary was to make sure priests were well-schooled in theology," Burke explained. "With our present culture encouraging a technology-induced isolation and lessened support for religious faith, Fr. Kelly desires our propaedeutic stage to help the men grow spiritually and in self-awareness without becoming overly self-involved like many of today's youth."

Referencing Deacon James Keating from a recent conference sponsored by the Institute for Priestly Formation, Burke realizes the transformation from pagan culture to Christian culture primarily occurs on an individual basis. His work at SJV impacts this transformation in a direct and profound way.

"I am excited to have the opportunity to work with Fr. Kelly and his staff in the human formation of these men by developing solidarity among the men and encouraging greater emotional awareness – the characteristics of likeable and admirable men that embody God's love," Burke said. "I am humbled by the honesty, clarity and courage of the men in the propaedeutic stage, and I consider it a blessing

to be able to share my experience, strength and hope with these men in their quest for a priestly vocation."

Samuel Ross, a first-year seminarian from the Diocese of Lansing, shared his gratitude for the opportunity to deepen his relationship with the Lord over the past semester. He sees the propaedeutic year as a two-fold growth in love of God and in fraternity with the men he'll spend the next years of formation with at SJV.



Ross expressed appreciation for these "deep foundational friendships based in Christ, the best base there is for anything. You can't get any better than that."

Another seminary newcomer, Samir Bhatt from the Diocese of Lafayette, echoed his thanks for the deep fraternal bonds developed during the propaedeutic year: "I'm treating this time as a big retreat and focusing on building relationships with God and my seminary brothers that will be valuable for the rest of my life."

Fr. Matthew Alexander serves as SJV's dedicated priest coordinator for the propaedeutic stage. He views this as a time to get good at the basics before engaging in deeper discernment while in their second year at SJV.

The new men are given intentional space and unscheduled time to integrate all they are learning about the basics of human and spiritual formation, including friendship, relational prayer, virtue, recreation, emotional integration and time management. This supports the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations recommendation “that the academic work does not interfere with the overall tenor of this stage’s objectives, which is intensive vocational discernment, growth in relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church, and growth in self-knowledge.”

Father Kelly compares intensive vocational discernment to looking at the stars at night. What seems clear in peripheral vision becomes fuzzy when focused on intensely, much like the unhelpfulness of a “try harder” mentality in discernment. Focusing on Christ and becoming His disciple is the best context for discernment to become clear. The propaedeutic stage allows men at the “front end” of seminary formation not to spend time “trying harder” but learning to live more with God in their life and allowing Him to bring His plans for their life into focus and clarity.

SJV’s propaedeutic stage continues to harmonize with the existing program, allowing seminarians to graduate in four years with a philosophy degree (and usually double major in Catholic Studies). A lighter class load during the propaedeutic stage allows participants to partake in numerous spiritual conferences, human formation (including group processing sessions with Dr. Burke) and three retreats. The heart of the propaedeutic stage commences in January at a healing retreat with Sr. Miriam James, SOLT from the John Paul II Healing Center. An 8-day directed silent retreat is the culminating event of the propaedeutic stage; second-year men for nearly twenty years have noted this retreat as a significant turning point in their vocational discernment while at SJV.

Alexander sees these experiences as opportunities to “grow in fraternity, love of each other and love of the Lord together as

a class,” he said. Watching the men become humanly and spiritually free has been one of his highlights this year.

“To see the amount of growth that’s happened since they first walked through the doors is amazing,” Alexander said. “Everything we’re doing is trying to achieve that end in one way or another, but it really just happens organically. Because of these different things that we do in community, it just naturally happens for the man who engages seriously in his own formation and prayer. The man who’s in love is open to conversion.”

“That’s where beautiful stuff happens.”

After the men complete their second year and close the propaedeutic stage of formation, they will either begin to articulate evidence of God’s call... or not. If they do, they enter the discipleship stage as upperclassmen with renewed commitment to seminary formation. In not, SJV blesses them and encourages them to be faithful Catholic men who pursue God’s will by another path. PPF6’s new propaedeutic stage requirements allow seminaries to put another checkpoint in their 4-year programs. Men are not moved along a conveyor belt from entering seminary to ordination; a propaedeutic stage allows the men opportunities to evidence the Lord’s invitation for them to take the next step.

Kelly shared his excitement for fully implementing the propaedeutic stage.

“Having a set-apart year to grow in prayer and fraternity is invaluable,” the rector said. “We hope our men will enter the discipleship stage ready for leadership roles as they take the next step in seminary formation. Sturdiness of character and relational prayer are the building blocks for them to move forward with confidence in God’s call.”

A drop in the ocean

Reflections from mission in Kolkata

“We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop” –Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta, (1910-1997)

Seven seminarians, accompanied by Rector Fr. Jonathan Kelly and priest formator Fr. Jeffrey Norfolk, experienced this firsthand when visiting St. Teresa of Calcutta’s Missionaries of Charity in January. The routine J-term break from classes afforded the crew from Saint John Vianney College Seminary a valuable, formative opportunity to spend sixteen days serving the poorest of the poor in Kolkata, India.

Language barriers and cultural differences offered valuable spiritual growth for the men.

Reflecting on this experience, Peter Davis, a second-year seminarian from the Diocese of Joliet, said, “There’s very little I’m able to give, but that actually means there’s so much more God is able to do through me.”

A glance at the men’s daily schedule in India reveals the mission’s humble dependence on prayer and the sacraments.

The seminarians started each day at 6 a.m with Mass with the Missionaries of Charity and other volunteers from around the world. After a light breakfast — usually bread and bananas — the group dispersed to volunteer sites. Some seminarians served at Kalighat Home for the Dying while others assisted at Prem Dan, the home for physically and mentally handicapped. Lunch and recreation time followed these hours of service. Seminarians could return to volunteer sites or spend time in prayer at Mother Teresa’s tomb before sharing an evening Holy Hour and dinner together.

A deepened experience of the universal Church was one fruit from the trip. Our seminarians found themselves amid a sea of brightly colored saris while traditional Indian instruments supported the prayers of Holy Mass.

“[Seeing this was such a great reminder that] there’s only one heavenly liturgy, and every Mass on earth is a reflection of the wedding feast in heaven,” Davis explained.

The intimate reality of the universal Church was evident during a home visit with fellow Missionaries of Charity volunteers. The host family enjoyed watching Holy Masses from different parts of the world on YouTube.

They were especially endeared to a bishop on the “See-Ox Falls” channel. After further conversations about this bishop and his rural roots, the SJV group realized “See-Ox Falls” was the “Sioux Falls” of Bishop Donald DeGroot, a 1987 graduate of SJV and former SJV priest formator.

Second-year seminarian Brady Martinez related his joy at being able to tell their new friends, “That’s my home diocese. That’s where I’m from!”

DeGroot himself was able to extend his greetings to this family during their visit after Fr. Kelly sent him a photo of the group.

The seminarians also renewed their appreciation for silence, hospitality and the gift of attentiveness to others through their mission to India. They noticed a palpable joy and freedom within those who embraced the poverty of having less.



“Simplicity is a choice you make every moment of the day,” one of the Missionaries of Charity sisters told the men.

This humble virtue was especially manifested by the religious and clergy serving in Kolkata. Martinez noted the ministry roles particular to their priesthood which only Kelly and Norfolk could offer to the poor.

Martinez said he gained a deepened appreciation of and desire for the priesthood watching them serve in these special capacities.

“It’s given me a strong witness of what it looks like to give fully of myself, which is the point of vocation, whether you’re a married man or a priest in the way Christ pours Himself out for His Church,” Davis said.





'Blessed are you poor'

The joy of encounter in Mexico City

This past J-term, eight University of St. Thomas Church and Culture study abroad students experienced profound joy in a surprising place: the poverty of Mexico's Neza Dump. Encounter with the blessed poor was one of many highlights for the six Saint John Vianney College seminarians who participated alongside SJV priest formator Fr. Joseph Kuharski.

Led by Dr. Michael Naughton, Director of the Center for Catholic Studies and Ms. Nancy Sannerud, Program Manager of the Center, this integrated humanities course encompassed an immersive study of the cultural, spiritual, social and historical interactions between the West and Indigenous cultures. A rigorous week of on-campus preparations included studies of Christopher Columbus, Our Lady of Guadalupe and papal addresses to bishops of the Americas. The class joined Fr. Paul Haverstock for Mass,

discussion and Hispanic ministry at St. Gabriel the Archangel in Hopkins before flying to Mexico City and experiencing the apostolate firsthand.

Over seven days, students observed remnants of a pre-Christian world at Teotihuacan Pyramids, paid homage to Our Lady of Guadalupe at her shrine, visited the museum of the zealous Cristero Blessed Miguel Pro, served at Mother Enez's orphanage and ministered to the people living at Neza Dump.

A profound joy pervaded the encounters SJV seminarians shared with the poor, even those living in and eating garbage as a means of survival. Riveting discussions about development strategies and future prospects for community improvement were held at the Institute for Christian Social Thought.

These conversations continued back in St. Paul during post-trip reflections with Dr. Naughton and Jason Adkins, ESQ, Minnesota Catholic Conference executive director.

The men found a powerful witness of priestly joy in Fr. Manuel Rojas Aguila, who served the Zumpango village outside of Mexico City.

Jack Massmann, a second-year seminarian from the Diocese of St. Cloud, noted the priest's attentiveness to his people's needs, both physical and spiritual.

"His fatherhood pertained to everything about them," Massmann said.

Serving in dire and dangerous conditions, this spiritual father exhibited great humility through

his priesthood. "It's ultimately the work of God," Massmann observed.

Appreciation for the priesthood was a pervasive theme on the trip. One evening, priest formator and trip chaplain Fr. Joseph Kuharski remained behind at a parish and rejoined the group only after hearing dozens of confessions from faithful souls grateful for his priestly ministry.

"The people of Mexico love priests," explained Matthew Wilson, a second-year seminarian from the Diocese of Lansing. His own desire to be a fatherly figure, especially in Hispanic ministry settings, was sparked anew by this encounter in Mexico City. "It made me desire to be the person they're coming to—that they see Christ in me and want to encounter Christ through me."





NEW ST. THOMAS PRESIDENT:

SJV presence on campus crucial to university's mission

Every Sunday, new University of St. Thomas president Rob Vischer emails a personal reflection to University of St. Thomas faculty, staff, students and partners.

The Catholic convert, who was moved from interim to permanent president earlier this school year, pens them all on his own. Some dive into Scripture. Others take a look at current events.

All, Saint John Vianney College Seminary Rector Fr. Jonathan Kelly said, “show a spiritual depth and desire to lead the university from a prayerful discernment, which is inspiring and hopeful for me.”

A unique partnership exists between SJV and St. Thomas, which is “on a journey from being a small, Catholic, liberal arts college to being a comprehensive, nationally known Catholic university,” Vischer says. SJV is a collaborative seminary: a separately incorporated entity that partners with a university to provide a degree.

SJV seminarians can get a degree from St. Thomas in Philosophy and Catholic Studies. Both university departments are crucial elements in the intellectual dimension of SJV’s formation endeavors.

The seminary retains its own priests and staff, but all its seminarians are full-time St. Thomas students who partake in many university activities.

It's a symbiotic relationship, according to Vischer.

"It is a wonderful and powerful privilege for a Catholic university to encompass seminary education," Vischer said. "I believe that the intellectual resources and diverse opportunities for social engagement that the university offers can be a key component of the SJV experience, and I believe that the SJV culture can be a significant influence on the broader university community. SJV students demonstrate that fulfillment lies in their relationship with God and their connection with, through and for others. Seminarians commit their lives to bringing others into relationship. I can't think of a better model for our students and our entire campus."

Many of Vischer's reflections center on building what he calls a "culture of encounter" – a notion he attributes to Pope Francis that "asks us to be present for others, to bring our authentic selves to our day-to-day interactions," the president said. "Can we work to ensure that each person who interacts with us feels seen, known and valued? Can we take time to affirm, to notice, to encourage? This is not just a nice 'add-on' to our quality of life; it is central to the formation of our students and the lifetime flourishing of our graduates. And it will be a central ingredient to our future success as a university."

Vischer has noted the central role SJV plays in creating this culture, highlighting the men's witness to the Joy of the Gospel through their participation in university life when befitting to seminarian formation.

"SJV can help us demonstrate the culture of encounter in action," he said. "Whether it's leading the cheers at football games, lending their aid to student service projects or offering a heartfelt greeting to classmates and campus visitors, our seminarians are important contributors to our culture-building work.

"Our Catholic identity has never been more important because it has never been more

needed by the world. Even before COVID, surveys showed that young adults are the loneliest age cohort in America. They do not need a transactional approach to education based only on economic gain. They need to be invited into a set of formative relationships that prepare them for lifelong flourishing."



"Seminarians commit their lives to bringing others into relationship. I can't think of a better model for our students and our entire campus."

– President Rob Vischer

New Chapel Dedicated at SJV

Thursday, April 20, marked a momentous occasion in Saint John Vianney College Seminary's 55-year history: the official dedication of the seminary's new chapel.

Archbishop Bernard Hebda celebrated the unique liturgy, which featured rites such as representatives involved in the building project handing over the architectural plans to Hebda, depositing a first-class relic of St. John Vianney in the supporting structure of the altar and anointing the walls with chrism.

The chapel is the keystone of SJV's 20,000-square-foot addition, which has been made possible by the seminary's generous benefactors. Over \$10 million was raised to fund the project.

A special thank you to Susan Steadman for her invaluable contributions to the seminary building project. Her artistic insights and interior design expertise were critical in our completion of the facility renovations.



Above left: When a church is constructed as a building destined solely and permanently for gathering the People of God and for carrying out sacred functions, it is fitting that it be dedicated to the Lord with a solemn rite, in accordance with the ancient custom of the Church. – From The Order of the Dedication of a Church and an Altar, "The Nature and Dignity of Churches"

Above right: Susan Steadman

Opposite:

Center circle - Archbishop Hebda and Fr. Kelly sharing a joyful moment after the Dedication with altar servers from the senior class.

Bottom left - Leading artists and craftsmen represent more than 125,000 hours of labor toward building of the chapel.

Bottom right - Scott Wiestling, architect of record from Finn Daniels, offers physical plans of the building to Archbishop Hebda during the solemn entrance.





Bringing beauty to life

Local artist illuminates SJV's new chapel with Beuronese imagery

Sunlight streamed into Nicholas Markell's cheerful studio at ArtReach St. Croix.

His bright-eyed and capable assistant, Gabrielle Trom, led a tour through the workspace and showcased piece after piece ready for installation in Saint John Vianney's newly-renovated chapel. Every work crafted by Markell affirms St. John Paul II's admonition that "the Church needs art. Art must make perceptible, and as far as possible attractive, the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God. It must therefore translate into meaningful terms that which is in itself ineffable" (*Letter to Artists*, 4 April 1999).

A University of St. Thomas graduate and seasoned artist, Markell shared how his work is helping the college seminary form young men discerning a priestly vocation.

"About a year and a half ago, I was contacted by Studio io [the designer in charge of SJV's chapel construction] to discuss the possibility of working with them, Fr. Kelly and the staff of SJV to create much of the interior art for the new SJV chapel," he said. "The scope included a full set of 14 Stations of the Cross, large murals of the Transfiguration and the Baptism of the Lord for the sanctuary, a lunette image of the Annunciation, inspirational images of St. John Vianney and St. Paul and other devotional works of reverence."

Markell believes liturgy and worship are among the most important of the Church's works, and that revival of iconic images is meant to lead

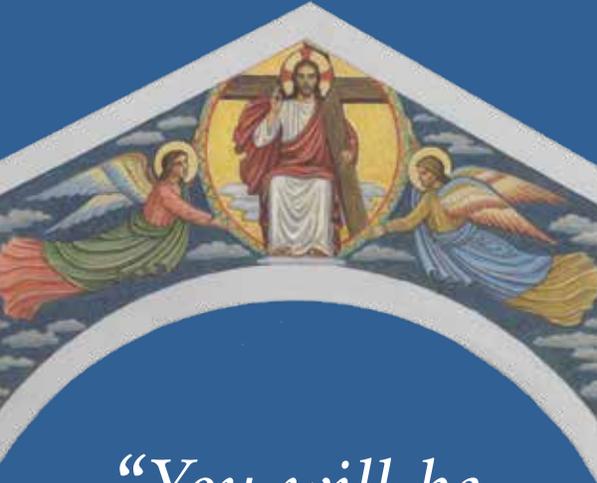
to the renewal of lives. He says his studio is dedicated to designing and creating iconic images focused on the three principles of beauty, mystery and meaning.

The Catholic artistic community regards Markell as a master iconographer in the Byzantine and Romanesque traditions. SJV's new chapel features an artistic approach which had been of interest to Markell for quite some time.

"It was decided that the form of the art was to be Beuronese, a particular liturgical art movement which began with Benedictine monks in Germany in the 19th century," Markell explained. "The form is more naturalistic in appearance than traditional Byzantine iconography, but more formal, symbolic and sublime than much of the overly sentimental art being created for churches at the time. It was developed in order to communicate both the human and divine dimensions of faith. It has been called liminal art, for it is meant to bridge to space between the created world and spiritual realms."

Markell speaks humbly of his artistic focus over the past 35 years: "To 'revive the iconic' in the life of the Church, creating images celebrating the unity of Christ Jesus' humanity and divinity. I hope the work of this new chapel will serve to form young men in their formation and priestly discernment and to more fully absorb the truth of God becoming human so we may, as St. Peter states, become 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4)."





*“You will be
my witnesses.”*

The line from the Acts of the Apostles ingrained in the archway entrance of Saint John Vianney College Seminary’s new chapel sends a clear message: we are called to be saints – witnesses to the love of Christ.

One of those witnesses is SJV alumnus Fr. Luke Meyer, who graduated in 2002. The Pastor of Sts. Anne and Joachim in Fargo, Meyer has learned how to connect with people of all ages and backgrounds. Prior to serving as pastor, he was the head of campus ministry at the University of North Dakota. His “fireside chats” became a popular moment where Meyer would present on a hot topic of the day and then allow ample space for questions. He described the discussions as “tremendous.”

His presence and witness is now experienced by the parishioners of Sts. Anne and Joachim. One aspect of the parish is a culture of frequent confession which has become one of Meyer’s favorite parts of his ministry. “It’s such a gift to be a voice of encouragement in gazing upon the mercy of God with many souls, to share that hope with them.”

Q: When did you attend SJV?

A: 2000-2002

Q: You started off at the University of St. Thomas studying engineering and business fields? What made you switch to SJV?

A: I lived in Brady Hall my freshman and sophomore years, and after experiencing regular confession with Fr. Bill O’Neil, I started regular spiritual direction with him. He really taught me to pray and abide in the Lord in new ways. I was also involved with the Center for Catholic Studies, attending many events where priestly life was presented as a dynamic and joyful way of life. I also enjoyed coming to Thursday adoration with a spirit of reverence and silence during the day at SJV. These things came together and crystalized into a desire to discern well in the community at St. John Vianney College Seminary.

Q: What are you most grateful for during your time at SJV?

A: I really enjoyed all of the different priests, their homilies, conferences and fatherly presence. I am also grateful for all the opportunities for prayer and Holy Hours we had, with a good structure and order to our day.

Q: How long have you been an ordained priest and where are you serving right now?

A: I’ve been ordained 17 years this summer and currently serve as pastor of Sts. Anne and Joachim in Fargo.

Q: From 2015 to 2022, you served at the St. Thomas Aquinas Newman Center on campus at the University of North Dakota. Can you tell us about your time there?

A: I enjoyed the curious minds and questions from the students. One of my favorite events was the monthly Thursday night “fireside chats” where I would present for a while on a hot topic of the day and then allow ample space for questions. The discussions we had were tremendous.

Q: What brings you the most joy in being a priest during the day-to-day life?

A: I think hearing confessions is what lifts my heart the most. Sure, you are encountering people in their struggles and

weaknesses, but more importantly, they are exercising hope in God's mighty power to set them free. We have such a good culture of frequent confession at the parish, and it's such a gift to be a voice of encouragement in gazing upon the mercy of God with many souls, to share that hope with them.

Q: Do you see any aspects of SJV's formation that have remained with you today?

A: I would say the importance of sharing life together with people as a spiritual father. I remember our formators being free to share life with us in many ways outside of official meetings and gatherings, and that presence was such a gift. In an age where there can be less priests to serve, it can seem like priority in one's schedule can be dominated by celebrating sacraments, which is important of course. However, the relational gift of spiritual fatherhood in sharing ordinary moments with the faithful can be so impactful, and I try to give significant attention to those encounters in home visits, activities and social time with parishioners.

Q: As an alumnus, what do you think of seeing SJV's new chapel being built?

A: I believe the new chapel is a sign of growth and a priority put on prayer. While I have great memories of Masses, Holy Hours and talks in the chapel, I was thrilled to see the new design and the focus on the identity of the Beloved Son, such an important theme in the college years and beyond.





A Q&A with SJV alum Mitch Milless

Husband of Annemarie. Father of (soon-to-be) five. Senior vice president of retirement services for MMA Securities. Chair of Saint John Vianney College Seminary's alumni ambassadors.

Vianney News was thrilled to catch up with Mitchel Milless and hear how SJV helped prepare him to transform the culture through his marriage, family life and career.

“To be able to give back now to SJV and the next generation of the Church is really motivating to me.”

– Mitch Milless

Q: What are some highlights from your time at SJV?

A: There were a couple of memorable spring break trips where 12 of us took the Vianney Van to the great Smoky Mountains. I joined SJV midway through my first semester and left after completion of my junior year. My brother, Fr. Marcus Milless, overlapped with me the semester I studied in Rome. He was ordained [in 2014], and then my wife's brother was ordained one year behind him. I was recruiting Fr. James [Stiles] (just knowing him as 'James'), and I knew Annemarie as just Annemarie but didn't know they were siblings until one of the first family functions.

Q: What have you been up to since your time at SJV?

A: After finishing my philosophy and Catholic studies degrees, I was seriously dating my wife-to-be and had to figure out how to pay for student loans. I started doing individual financial planning and met for five years with mentor Tim Fleming who had been a speaker with Pastores 21, now SJV's Virtuous Business Leaders group. I have now worked with Tim for the last 10 years. My philosophy degree and time at SJV suited me really well for all of the ethics, trainings and legal things I handle now in my work with corporate retirement plans and pensions. Most college students aren't engaging with priests, bishops and vocations directors or public speaking and leading in the same way we were at SJV. I wasn't even fazed when I started working with leaders of companies and boards because I was so used to this from SJV.

Q: Talk to me about SJV's building project and your role as an ambassador. Why is it important for you to give back to SJV?

A: As much as I have nostalgia for my time at SJV, it was always a dream for the people of our time to have a better chapel. We also used to cook and try to cater different events from a small kitchen there. To see all the space for human formation, dining, cooking, working out, and hosting bishops, vocations directors and prospective seminarians gives me a lot of joy. I have three boys and one on the way, and, God-willing, I hope some of them come here where some of the best years of my life were spent. To be able to give back now to SJV and the next generation of the Church is really motivating to me.

As a lead ambassador, I'm excited to bring back some of the alumni and engage them in a serious way. It's neat to see [Rector]

Fr. [Jonathan] Kelly and [Director of Development] Phil Roeser make this a priority. By building these relationships after we've left SJV, our alumni are able to support this formation and help build the Church. We gain so much from what we give.

Q: Have you stayed connected with any brother seminarians?

A: I was in Oklahoma last year on a Holy Day of Obligation. Looking up Mass times close to the hotel where I was staying, I realized one of my classmates — Father Michael Pratt — was the pastor there. He was the one guy from the Tulsa Diocese and now happens to be the vocations director! [Pratt is scheduled to become vice rector at the Pontifical North American College this summer.] After Mass, we went out for dinner, and it was like time had never passed. This has happened in multiple states I've been covering for my job. Part of the magic of SJV is that we draw from such a big group. Some of my best friends were from dioceses outside of Minnesota. I probably haven't seen some of them in 10 or 15 years, but we would pick up right where we left off.

Q: What do you miss this most from your time at SJV?

A: The intentional prayer. Like "Hey, we're going spend an hour in silence, pray Liturgy of the Hours, do morning prayer and evening prayer together." That's burned in my memory. Even now on Sunday evenings, I'll sometimes pray evening prayer with my boys or sing "Ave Maria" to put my 2½-year-old daughter to sleep. The only reason I know it is from singing it every day at SJV. As a husband and father, you don't have that much [time] to pray. These are daily reminders of gratitude for my spiritual formation at SJV.



Fr. Kelly shows artwork for SJV's new chapel to Milless.



Levi Meyer

Home Diocese:
Saint Paul and
Minneapolis

Favorite thing about SJV: Daily Mass and holy hours.

Favorite saint: St. Thomas Aquinas

Favorite Bible verse: "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." – James 1:2-4

Fun fact: Meyer knows all the books of the Bible in order.



Thomas Nelson

Home Diocese:
Lafayette-in-
Indiana

Favorite thing about SJV: "The fraternity, specifically the shenanigans that happen."

Favorite Bible verse: "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." – 2 Corinthians 12:9

Fun fact: Nelson's favorite Pop-Tart flavor is brown sugar cinnamon.



Kyle Rohan

Home Diocese:
Green Bay

Favorite thing about SJV: "The opportunity to grow in fraternity with so many men from all over the Midwest."

Favorite saint: St. Maria Goretti

Fun fact: Rohan has gone skydiving - twice.



Sam Ross

Home Diocese:
Lansing

Favorite Bible verse: "And he replied: Go and say to this people: listen carefully, but do not understand! Look intently, but do not perceive!" – Isaiah 6:9

Favorite saint: Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati

Favorite hobbies: Hunting and fishing.

Dear friends of SJV,



“The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing — to reach the Mountain, to find the place where all the beauty came from. ... Do you think it all meant nothing, all the longing? The longing for home?

For indeed it now feels not like going, but like going back.”

— C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*

Some call it “the college seminary.” For others, it’s just part of the University of St. Thomas’ North Campus. But those who know Saint John Vianney College Seminary best love it as dearly as Home.

During a recent alumni outreach phone-a-thon, our seminarians spent two nights calling hundreds of men who have studied at SJV. Incredible conversations took place during those hours. A former SJV mom tearfully shared gratitude for her son’s formation here. An alumna now serving as a diocesan vocations director gladly conversed with a current seminarian for over 30 minutes. Why so much excitement over a Tuesday evening phone call from SJV? Because family, fraternity and community run deep in this home.

For four of the most formative years of their lives, these bands of brothers have worked, prayed, studied and played together. They have seen the Mountain and pushed each other to rise in wholeness and holiness. Formed by a strong community of authentic masculinity, SJV alumni have become an army rooted in vocations to fatherhood. Fr. Bill Baer, late and beloved former rector, once told me “SJV forms men to be holy, virtuous and faithful fathers; God-willing, many of them will become priests.”

A man formed at SJV never forgets his home or his brothers. We are thrilled to be launching new efforts to engage and connect with alumni, especially at our upcoming Aug. 4 celebration — the Feast of Saint John Vianney and 100th anniversary of our predecessor seminary, Nazareth Hall. With your continued support, SJV will continue nurturing the seeds of priestly vocations to form dynamically Catholic men who transform the culture in their parishes, dioceses, families, workplaces and communities.

We couldn’t form Men in Christ, Men of the Church, Men for Others without you. Thank you for moving us up the Mountain and—as blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati would say, “Verso L’alto”—to the heights!

God Bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phil Roeser', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Phil Roeser
Director of Development



SAINT JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY

2115 SUMMIT AVENUE
ST. PAUL, MN 55105-1048

sjvseminary.org

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FRIDAY SORROW. EASTER JOY.

Holy week and the Triduum celebration can be pretty quiet on the campus of the University of St. Thomas. Students – including most Saint John Vianney College Seminary seminarians – go home for Easter break. But SJV's 36 propaedeutic-stage seminarians stayed on campus for Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, allowing these special days and the liturgies that highlight them to be celebrated inside the seminary community.

