

VIANNEYNEWS

SAINT JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY
SPRING 2026



**SERVING MASS
FOR POPE LEO**

RELATIONAL PRAYER IN
DISCERNMENT

FOSTER LASTING
FREEDOM

LETTER FROM THE RECTOR

Dear Friends,

Psychological services are becoming very common among younger generations, who are dealing with unprecedented levels of anxiety and depression. While psychotherapy can often offer mental health relief and support, the SJV formation team recognizes that it must never replace Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace or as our ultimate answer to the deepest questions and longings of the human heart.



Seminary formation is delicate because, while we draw on human insights from psychology, we must never therapize formation. The proper relationship between the human and spiritual aspects of formation is essential. The USCCB's Program for Priestly Formation states it this way: **human formation leads to and finds its completion in spiritual formation, which forms the heart so that it will interiorize the ways of Jesus Christ.**

In this issue, we highlight (p. 14) a recently developed program for our seminarians' Propaedeutic Stage, the initial or preparatory phase of their formation. It is a collaborative effort between our director of counseling, Dr. Chris Burke, our formation team, and The Freedom Group. The program incorporates principles from psychology and neuroscience to help shape our seminarians into strong men of character who are bridges and not obstacles for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, No. 43).

We also profile (p. 11) the Relational Prayer Silent Retreat, which takes place as our second-year seminarians transition from the Propaedeutic to the Discipleship Stage. It has provided transformational graces for many men under the thoughtful direction of Msgr. Thomas Richter, a priest of the Diocese of Bismarck, North Dakota.

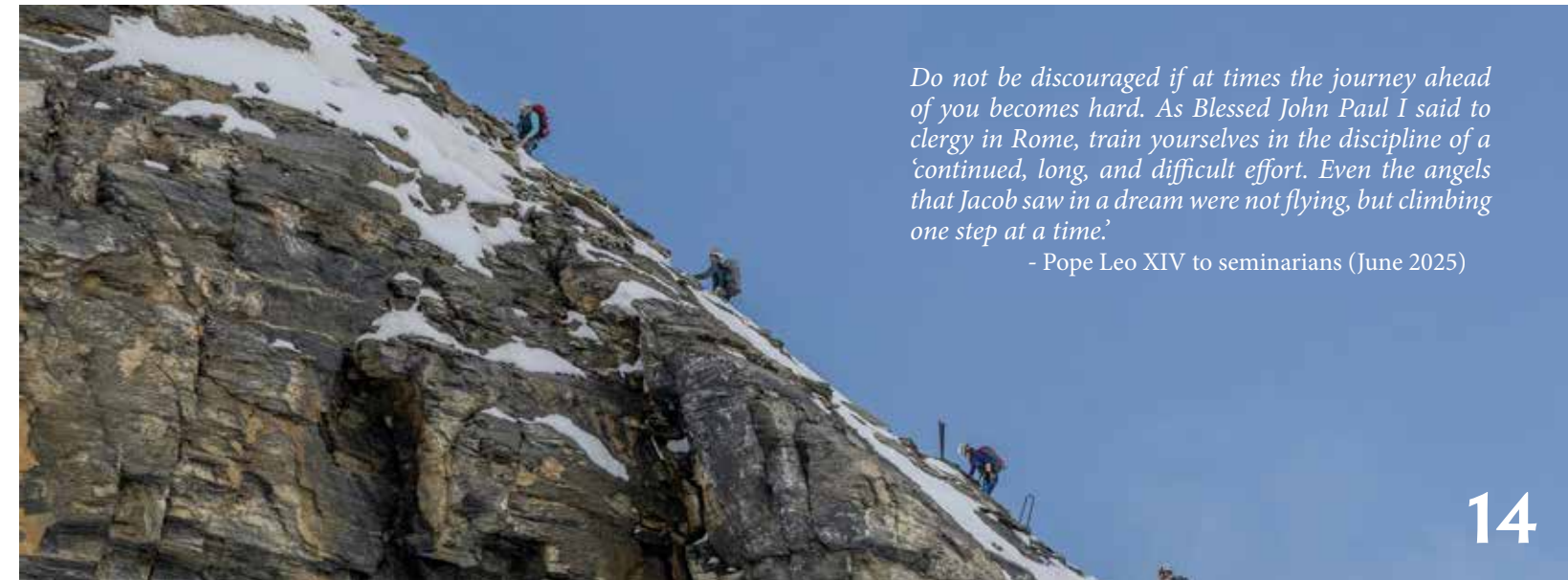
You might have noticed something special about the front cover. Those are our seminarians serving the 2025 Christmas Morning Mass at St. Peter's Basilica — a tradition not observed since 1994! Learn more about the Fall Rome Semester seminarians' experience with Pope Leo on page 7.

May God bless you with His risen peace, the peace that the world cannot give. May you be ambassadors of peace.

Coraggio,

Fr. Jonathan Kelly

Very Rev. Jonathan Kelly
Rector



Do not be discouraged if at times the journey ahead of you becomes hard. As Blessed John Paul I said to clergy in Rome, train yourselves in the discipline of a 'continued, long, and difficult effort. Even the angels that Jacob saw in a dream were not flying, but climbing one step at a time.'

- Pope Leo XIV to seminarians (June 2025)



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PHOTOGRAPHY
Front cover: Vatican Media. pp. 6: Rob Herbst/Archdiocese of Mobile. pp. 6-bottom left-7: Vatican Media. pp. 11: Public domain. pp. 14: UnSplash.



TRUST IN HIS PLAN FOR YOUR FUTURE

Father Kevin Zilverberg '03 has an impressive resume that includes proficiency in several languages and roles as a professor of Sacred Scripture at The St. Paul Seminary and of theology at Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, Spain. He graciously provided us with an update on what he has been doing since SJV and his recent health challenges.

A Conversation with Father Kevin Zilverberg '03

Please share more about what you have been doing since seminary.

I earned a Licentiate in Sacred Scripture (SSL, 2014) and a doctorate (SSD, 2022) from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. I specialized in the Old Latin Bible, which was translated from the Greek Bible around A.D. 200 in North Africa for Latin-speaking Christians. Most of my research and publications focus on the Bible and Latin, with a strong emphasis on the early Church Fathers. The principal modern languages I used in my work were English, Italian, French, German, and Spanish. The ancient languages I worked with were Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. I also studied Biblical Aramaic and Syriac while pursuing my SSL degree.

How have you observed God working through your life as a priest?

I heard God's call to begin priestly formation when I was eighteen years old. Looking back, I recognize that God sustained me throughout the long years of training, helping me gradually grow more confident that I was following the right path. Most of my priesthood has been dedicated to studying and

teaching Sacred Scripture full-time. I recognize that God has been at work to increase my own love for the Bible. Additionally, I take special satisfaction when my former students report that they have benefited from my classes and now apply that knowledge in their own priestly ministry.



Fr. Kevin Zilverberg '03 of the Diocese of Sioux Falls.

Is there anything from your time at SJV that especially prepared you for your priesthood?

Former SJV rector Fr. William Baer made a significant impact on my priesthood. He taught me about priestly fraternity and the importance of relying on and supporting one another. That formation in community at SJV became the basis for many years of seeking out and creating opportunities for priestly fraternity, whether in my home diocese, the Twin Cities, or Europe.

You were diagnosed with brain cancer last September. Could you please provide an update on your condition?

While I was living and working in Spain at the Pontifical University of Salamanca, my doctors discovered a brain tumor, so they quickly scheduled surgery to remove it. Shortly after the surgery, in early October, I was diagnosed with glioblastoma, a highly invasive and malignant brain cancer. My health crisis became the occasion to move from Spain to the USA to spend more time with my family in central South Dakota, where they could support me during radiation and chemotherapy. Unfortunately, my cancer and its damage to my vision forced me to resign from my position as professor.

The "You Will Be My Witnesses" section provides an opportunity for alumni to reflect on Acts 1:8 — to think about how their lives have testified to the truth of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Has your understanding of this verse evolved since your diagnosis?

I am confident that I can always give priestly witness to the Risen Lord in all circumstances. My health limitations have suddenly impeded my ability to witness in the classroom or in parish ministry.

A significant part of my witness now is simply to put my life in God's hands and remain hopeful that suffering with Christ leads to glory with Him.

Do you have some pastoral guidance for readers facing a similar medical crisis for themselves or a loved one?

Build on all the good spiritual habits that you or your loved one had before the crisis. **Return to beloved prayers; re-read cherished biblical passages; recall the Lord's fidelity in the past to redouble your trust in His plan for your future.**

Use the QR code to visit **Father Kevin's CaringBridge** page for health updates or to offer prayers and words of encouragement.



(Right) Father holding copies of one of his books; (Below) The Zilverberg family



NEWS BITES



We began the Fall semester with 115 seminarians and the **Spring semester** with **107 seminarians**, with five seminarians leaving after completing their Propaedeutic Stage. We are pleased to see this align with the USCCB's revised Program for Priestly Formation, which emphasizes high admissions standards and a focused period of human and spiritual formation to help them more effectively discover God's will for their lives. The Holy Spirit is at work — these young men have received the grace to more confidently choose another vocational path, and they remain in our prayers.

We have **21 men graduating this year**. Applications are strong for Fall 2026, and we expect to achieve our optimal enrollment of 110-120.

January Term Highlights

Our seminarians are blessed to gain a variety of experiences during the January Term, tailored to their stage of formation and including opportunities to practice both the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy.



First-year seminarians in Mobile, Alabama with Catholic Social Services. (Left) Archbishop Mark S. Rivituso of the Archdiocese of Mobile talking with seminarians. (Right) Michael Hornecker working on a window.

The chapel at Broom Tree Retreat and Conference Center, where the Relational Prayer Silent Retreat is held for second-year seminarians.



Second-year men during their mission trip to the West Side of Chicago.

Il Papa Americano!

It is customary for our rector, Fr. Jonathan Kelly, to join our Rome seminarians during Thanksgiving. The November 2025 trip included a special highlight: Pope Leo XIV personally speaking with our seminarians and Fr. Kelly during an audience. Father thanked him for encouraging priests and seminarians.



Christmas brought another surprise. Pope Leo XIV celebrated the 2025 Christmas morning Mass at St. Peter's Basilica, a tradition last observed in 1994, and our seminarians were invited to serve! Indeed, it was a very memorable semester for our Fall 2025 Rome seminarians.



Dan Moran, Jr. talks with first-year seminarian Adam Lokken.

Virtuous Business Leadership Highlights

We had wonderful Virtuous Business Leadership gatherings this year. St. Thomas **President Rob Vischer** shared his personal faith testimony, and **Dan Kelly, dean of the law school**, was the dinner speaker for the December event. In February, **Jim Franzen**, retired chief of police for the City of Robbinsdale, was our presenter, and **Dan Moran, Jr.** shared his faith testimony. We are grateful to the variety of professionals who dedicate their time to this program.

Movie Director Alumnus Talk, Movie Screening

In February, SJV partnered with the Center for Catholic Studies and St. Thomas Campus Ministry to host a special screening of "Triumph of the Heart," a powerful film about St. Maximilian Kolbe, written and directed by alumnus Anthony D'Ambrosio '10. Afterwards, D'Ambrosio spoke with our seminarians about his personal faith journey. He was particularly excited to see Fr. Paul Gitter still working with SJV seminarians!



Visit triumphoftheheart.com to stream the movie.



'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.' Mk 1:11

MEET THE MEN: SENIOR EDITION

Every year, graduating seniors share the **most important lesson** they have learned during their time at SJV. Here is the insight from this year's seniors.



BRENNAN CROW
ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL
& MINNEAPOLIS

Learning to live in the profound freedom of being His beloved son.



JONATHAN JENSEN
DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

Silence is not something to be avoided but embraced. It is in times of silence we meet the Lord.



AIDEN MCGAVIN
DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

A life marked by regular adoration and reception of the Holy Eucharist is the most effective means to have a deeply personal and meaningful relationship with the Holy Trinity, which then continually informs and transforms every single aspect of my life.



DANIEL KEEFE
ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

The most important thing I have learned in my time at SJV has been how to begin to see people the way that God the Father sees them.



ETHAN MENNING
ARCHDIOCESE OF OMAHA

Jesus desires abundant life for us here and now, and this happens through surrendering to Him — giving up everything to receive more than we could ever imagine.



MICHAEL ABRAHAM
ST. THOMAS SYRO-MALABAR
EPARCHY OF OF CHICAGO

SJV has taught me to be in constant dialogue with God, even in the mundane tasks.



GIOVANNI GONZALEZ
DIOCESE OF JOLIET

Always look for Jesus in every moment and trust in His providence.



CASEY LAMOTTE
ARCHDIOCESE OF OMAHA

I always saw the Priesthood as service to others, but I've learned that a priest is invited into a special intimacy with Jesus out of His infinite love for that man. Jesus wants men to be priests because He longs for *them*, not just the people they will serve.



THOMAS NELSON
DIOCESE OF LAFAYETTE-IN-INDIANA

How to be rooted amid the messiness of the world.



SAMIR BHATT
DIOCESE OF LAFAYETTE-IN-INDIANA

There is absolutely nothing more meaningful or worthwhile in life than pursuing a relationship with the Lord Jesus.



EDMUND HAVLICEK
ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL
& MINNEAPOLIS

True obedience is liberating. Freedom comes from following the Will of God and being entirely obedient to it. God knows best the plans He has for me, and I've learned to completely trust in that path God has set before me.



THOMAS LASALA
ARCHDIOCESE OF OMAHA

I have learned two sides of the same coin: comparison is the thief of joy, and true holiness is relative to God's unique plan for my life.



ANDREW NGUYEN
ARCHDIOCESE OF OKLAHOMA CITY

Be the best man God is calling you to be.

continued on next page...



MATTHEW SCHUMACHER
DIOCESE OF GREEN BAY

Do everything in relationship with the Lord; everything else is a waste of time.



ALEXANDER URBANSKI
ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

I've learned on a much deeper level that everything good about me is a result of God's gifts to me, and that I am radically dependent on Jesus Christ for everything.



DOMINIC SCOTT
DIOCESE OF LAFAYETTE-IN-INDIANA

Living for God isn't complicated. It's written into who we are, and God's calling us to give Him who we are today. That's where holiness starts, not in some grand plans.



DANIEL WILLISON
DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

No matter the struggle in life, God is still looking out for me, and I can meet Him in the midst of it.



BENJAMIN SUNDLIE
DIOCESE OF DULUTH

Through Our Blessed Mother, I have learned how to receive from the Father.



DAVID WITKOWSKI
DIOCESE OF GAYLORD

Abide in Jesus: surrender everything to God, trust in Him, and live in the freedom of being a son of God.



TREVOR THORP
ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL & MINNEAPOLIS

How to interact with new people and build relationships.



BENEDICT WOOD
DIOCESE OF GREEN BAY

The Christian life is a life lived in hopeful perseverance, our eyes cast forward to the life ahead.



Spiritual Formation

LIVING IN FRIENDSHIP WITH THE LORD

For the past eight years, Monsignor Thomas Richter, a priest of the Diocese of Bismarck and an internationally recognized expert in **vocational discernment**, has served as Retreat Master for our second-year seminarians during their eight-day January Term retreat at Broom Tree Retreat Center in Irene, South Dakota. **The retreat occurs at a pivotal point in a seminarian's formation, marking the transition from the Propaedeutic to the Discipleship Stage.** The aim is to help seminarians better understand how the Lord is calling them to go deeper, how He is inviting them to live in relationship and friendship with Him, and it yields great spiritual fruit.

Based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the retreat emphasizes **relational prayer** with silent, preached, and directed components that aim to help "stir desire in the heart of the retreatant," according to Msgr. Richter. As Retreat Master, he seeks to "direct the retreatant to be aware of the movements of the Lord in the heart so that [he] can consent and receive the grace of God," while also encouraging him "to be aware of the movements that come from the bad, what [St. Ignatius] calls bad spirit. ...And to begin to say 'no' to them."

Continued...

Giving and Receiving in Friendship

Much of a retreatant's ability to say "no" depends on his willingness to say "yes" to the Lord's invitation. Relational prayer has proven to be a powerful tool in helping seminarians recognize and respond to the Lord's movements. Msgr. Richter describes relational prayer in three steps: First, accepting that God has revealed Himself to you and that He did this through the Cross, showing His merciful, healing love. Second, understanding that God is always giving Himself to you, especially in your suffering and deepest needs. Third, discerning what the Lord desires and needs from you within this reciprocal, loving relationship, and then giving that to Him in a consistent, honest, sincere, and vulnerable way.

The more one engages in prayer and builds a relationship with the Lord, says Msgr. Richter, "The more one receives God giving Himself in that moment, the deeper the friendship with God, and the more the Scriptures come alive."

The Order of Vocational Discernment

While the Propaedeutic Stage is an essential preparatory phase, it is also crucial that the retreat occurs earlier rather than later in the seminary's formation process, because "seminary is not just a place for a man to spend time discovering his vocation," says Msgr. Richter. That may seem counterintuitive at first, but Msgr. Richter stresses the proper order of vocational discernment when speaking to the seminarians. He explains that the Lord has brought them there to have a lived experience of His closeness and friendship, and that this should be their focus.


Discovering one's vocation is more about learning how to stay in friendship with the Lord, who then reveals to the seminarian who he is in Christ. **Everything begins in relationship with the Lord. From that relationship, one comes to know one's identity. From one's identity, one comes to know one's mission.**

Developing a habit of relational prayer helps anyone, not just seminarians, recognize that while one's actions are always in response to something God is already doing, one has a very important role within that relationship. How does a person of faith do this? By acknowledging one's thoughts, feelings, and desires, and relating them to the Lord in faith, trusting that the Lord will meet a person in their need.

Msgr. Richter finds that a special grace of the retreat is helping seminarians realize that God is always giving Himself and meeting them in their need. "Much of relating is being aware of one's need, whether that's peace, whether that's hope, or whether that's freedom from something," says Msgr. Richter. "What I find both in my personal life and working with these men [is] that the obstacle to overcome is being non-relational — being stuck in one's mind and trying to figure out how to make this happen."




Monsignor
Thomas Richter

 Prime Matters

Prayer and Discernment Series

Scan the QR code to listen to Msgr. Richter's Prime Matters podcast series on prayer and discernment.



Resting on the Heart of Jesus

Having a lived experience of the mystery of God — seeing Him as a person who waits for us to bring our needs to Him and connect with Him heart-to-heart — is essential for a priest. If faith isn't entered into as this relational experience, it can be reduced to moralism or intellectual ideas. When one embraces this, Msgr. Richter says, all one's thoughts and actions lead to a deeper openness to God and foster a "deeper reaching out to God, a deeper surrender to God."

The Biblical model of deep, lasting friendship with God is St. John the Beloved, who is often depicted resting on the Heart of Jesus at the Last Supper. A retreat can provide the space and silence to bring our needs to Him and to rest within the Sacred Heart of Jesus as St. John does. **When one shifts from head to heart, one moves from non-relationality to relationship and integration, which helps lead someone into a life-giving friendship with Christ.** We pray that our seminarians, future priests — and all of us — continue to accept and embrace God's invitation to everlasting, enduring friendship.

This was Msgr. Richter's final year serving as our Retreat Master for second-year seminarians, and we are grateful for his wisdom and dedication. He has been a great blessing to SJV these past eight years, leaving a lasting impact on more than 200 seminarians who have been on the Relational Prayer Silent Retreat. He leaves us with a valuable gift: a solid foundation to build on for many years to come.

Seminarians share their experience of the Relational Prayer Silent Retreat

I was able to meet Jesus in the deepest place of my heart without any obstacles, thanks to the emptiness of silence, and He showed me that He is my best friend. I realize now that absolutely nothing and no one is more important to me than my beloved Father in Heaven, for I am truly His beloved son.

– Jacob Dillon

I went into the retreat with vocational clarity in mind, expecting some sign to seal the deal on whether I was called to the priesthood. ... I had become so fixated on discernment between priesthood or marriage that I had shifted my gaze away from Christ and onto myself. The Lord... reminded me of the universal call to holiness. To fix my gaze on Jesus and place my broken heart before his radiant, loving Sacred Heart is to pursue this call to holiness. ... I realized that by keeping my eyes on Christ, I can walk the path of discernment with freedom, peace, and joy.

– Joseph Wilberding

The intimate encounter with His love [on retreat] left me seeking Christ more intentionally, no longer grasping at false appearances of happiness but finding fulfillment solely in receiving the good gifts that flow from His love.

– Landon McHaffie

FOSTERING LASTING FREEDOM

As the humanity of the Word made flesh was the instrumentum salutis [means of salvation], so the humanity of the priest is instrumental in mediating the redemptive gifts of Christ to people today.

— *Program for Priestly Formation, USCCB, No. 182*

In his apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (No. 43), St. John Paul II articulated the tension in priestly formation between tradition and adapting to the modern era. He states that **“There is an essential aspect of the priest that does not change: the priest of tomorrow, no less than the priest of today, must resemble Christ,”** while also noting that in the formation of future priests, they will need to “[D]isplay different characteristics in comparison to those of their immediate predecessors. ... they live in a world which in many respects is new and undergoing rapid and continual evolution.”

St. John Paul II’s admonition is especially relevant in our current digital age. As any parent or grandparent knows, “screen time” has a strong hold on young people, and its effects are often harmful. The SJV formation team noticed these effects among men entering the seminary and set out to purposefully address the reality that most of today’s seminarians have never known life without a smartphone.

In **January 2023, SJV integrated the USCCB’s Program of Priestly Formation Propaedeutic Stage** (meaning a period of preparation in Greek) into its formation process. A key focus of the Propaedeutic Stage for the formation team was the use of technology. Based on their experience, moderating technology is essential for developing chaste habits, which are necessary before a man can discern a priestly commitment to celibacy. Because of this, **first-year men now participate in a 12-month “tech fast” that prohibits smartphone use, social media, and limits TV and movie viewing.**

The Propaedeutic Stage was successful in reducing harmful screen time, but the formation team recognized that more work remained. So, when Dr. Chris Burke (Director of Counseling) mentioned he was exploring a resource to help seminarians with a UST alumnus, the team took interest.

That alumnus was **Joe Masek**, who majored in Neuroscience and minored in Catholic Studies, and went on to serve as a chapter leader for Saint Paul’s Outreach and as the executive director of the Cana Family Institute. Masek is a charming, intelligent, and hardworking man, but like many men today, he found himself unable to break his technology addiction. However, unlike others, Masek developed an effective way to break his habits by combining evidence-based methods with faith practices, prayer, grit, and intelligence. This inspired Masek to create a program to help other men in the same situation. He co-founded The Freedom Group, a tailored, group-based coaching program that provides instruction and support for men seeking to break free from destructive habits. Dr. Burke recognized that The Freedom Group would be both effective for the men and a great complement to the ongoing formation at SJV.

Starting in October 2025, Masek began assisting with the Propaedeutic class and, in December, started a **Freedom Group for seminarians. His foundational 56-session curriculum, shortened for SJV’s formation purposes, is built on three pillars: relationships (through an accountability partner), education, and the development of daily habits.** The Education phase includes The Craving Free System, which strengthens behavioral change and provides a holistic transformation of identity and purpose.

Masek understands firsthand the impact a program like the Freedom Group can have. “I think most people who have a young man in their life who they care about instinctively understand the need for a program like this. We see the symptoms everywhere, especially in our families and parish communities: delayed adulthood, emotional fragility, screen dependence, and relational withdrawal,” said Masek. “We’re addressing the hidden formation crisis beneath those symptoms.”

By helping the formation team equip seminarians with tools to foster lasting freedom through healthy daily habits, emotional regulation, and personal accountability, Masek aims to support SJV in offering a renewed vision for the seminarians — one that provides the strength necessary for sound, faithful discernment and a vocation resilient enough to weather life’s storms.



Joe Masek, co-founder of The Freedom Group



For more information about The Freedom Group and their programs for Christian men, visit thefreedomgroup.co.

INTEGRATED CHASTITY AND CELIBACY LOOK LIKE:

Practicing daily habits of self-awareness

Being emotionally grounded

Understanding and maintaining clear boundaries

Having a structured rhythm of life

Being able to think clearly and process situations correctly

SEMINARY STAFF UPDATES

Dede Leininger to retire after 18 years of service

SJV's events and hospitality specialist, Dede Leininger, will retire this May after 18 years of dedicated service. "Dede leaves an indelible mark on hundreds of SJV seminarians and priests. Her friendly presence has made SJV feel like a home for many of our guests, but most of all our seminarians," said Rector Father Jonathan Kelly.



Dede Leininger with her husband John and their grandchildren.

From feeding the seminarians during J-term retreats (no small task) to organizing our cherished Vianney Cup outing, Dede navigates both big and small events with a generous heart and genuine care. One of her favorite memories was during the 2023 Chapel dedication when Archbishop Hebda consecrated the altar. Looking back, Dede recalls "the entire day being so emotional and holy."

She says she will "definitely miss the seminarians and incredible staff, but also the benefactors who so generously support our mission of guiding these young men through their faith journey, wherever it leads." Dede recognizes how special it is to witness seminarians discern their vocation. "It is such a special time when a seminarian who came through SJV returns as a priest!"

While grateful for her time at SJV, especially for making new lifelong friends and being able to pray in the beautiful new chapel whenever she wants, Dede is excited to spend more time with her adult children and grandchildren and to have some new adventures with her husband John.

We wish Dede a wonderful retirement!

New Faces at the Seminary

Director of Marketing and Communications

In January, Jessica Aleman joined the team as our director of marketing and communications. Jessica brings over 25 years of strategic marketing experience across various for-profit and Catholic non-profit sectors. She was the associate director of St. Thomas's Center for Catholic Studies from 2015 to 2021 and managed communications for the Minnesota Catholic Conference of Bishops from 2011 to 2015. She earned a Master of Arts in Catholic Studies from



Jessica Aleman

St. Thomas and undergraduate degrees from Marquette University. Jessica and her husband, Richard, live in South Saint Paul, Minnesota, where they are parishioners of Holy Trinity Church and St. Augustine Oratory.

Administrative Associate

In December 2025, **Savannah Siegler** moved from operations coordinator to executive assistant to the Rector. We took this opportunity to reorganize that role to better match our current needs, and in March, we welcomed **Suzanne Sterr** as our new administrative associate. Suzanne spent over 20 years as a neonatal ICU nurse before switching gears to managing the front office at Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Denver, Colorado. She recently relocated to the Twin Cities with her husband of 37 years, Terry, to be closer to family and enjoy the blessings of grandparenthood.



Suzanne Sterr with her husband Terry.

Their son, Jack Dingbaum, graduated from SJV in 2016, and their daughter, Emma, along with her husband, Joe Shearer, are St. Thomas alumni, Class of 2020. Suzanne brings a joyful presence to our front office, along with the gift of being a parent of a SJV alumnus.

Gift Processor and Database Coordinator

Our new part-time gift processor and database coordinator, Renae Kuettel, has always been passionate about working with nonprofits. Most recently, she served

on the board of directors for Philomena House as secretary and president. She graduated from St. Thomas in 2010 with degrees in Marketing and Spanish. Renae lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota, with her husband Matt and their five children.



Renae Kuettel with her husband Matt and their children.

She homeschools her crew and runs a Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program for other homeschooling families at Church of the Blessed Sacrament, their home parish. She takes a break from her busy Mom schedule to spend two afternoons a week at SJV and we couldn't be more grateful!

Looking Ahead

This year, we will add two more priests to SJV's existing formation team and invest in our operations team to better support ongoing and emerging opportunities within our wider SJV community. This includes hiring a full-time development database and events manager to replace and expand our events and hospitality specialist position. Check out the Development Corner in this issue for a letter from our new director of development, Derek Waldbillig.

DEVELOPMENT CORNER



BUILDING UPON SOLID GROUND

We are pleased to announce that **Derek Waldbillig** joined the SJV team as **Director of Development** in December 2025. Derek began his career in Catholic nonprofit work with Saint Paul's Outreach, first as a campus missionary and then as a donor engagement officer. He is a 2013 graduate of Bethel University, earning a degree in business finance and marketing.

Derek's personal approach and success in relational giving, along with his deep faith and discipleship, make him well-equipped to share SJV's story and support our mission during this next phase of institutional advancement. Derek lives in West Saint Paul, Minnesota, with his wife Maggie and their five boys — the newest, John Herald, born on February 25, 2026. Their lively home is quickly becoming a burgeoning little seminary! The Waldbilligs are covenant members of the Community of Christ the Redeemer and parishioners at St. Joseph Catholic Church in West Saint Paul.

A Note from Derek

Dear Benefactors, Alumni, and other supporters,

I am excited and grateful to introduce myself as the new director of development at Saint John Vianney College Seminary, and I look forward to working with you to continue this seminary's remarkable legacy.

In today's chaotic culture, there is a great need to help men find their identity in Christ and be attentive to God's call. Your personal care, prayers, and financial support are vital to building the sturdy, stable foundation our men need to become Men in Christ, Men of the Church, and Men for Others.

While we have the significant operational needs and responsibilities as the largest college seminary in the country, we are blessed with optimal enrollment and the

recent completion of an outstanding building project. I see a period of remarkable promise ahead, especially since SJV is debt-free and we have the opportunity to focus on growing our endowment. I am also eager to find more ways to support the formation our seminarians receive. The Lord has worked through SJV to transform the lives of many men, and I look forward to continuing this mission.

I am in awe of how much you, our benefactors and supporters, care about the mission of SJV. The lengths you go to support our mission have been humbling to witness. I look forward to working with all of you as we discover new ways SJV can make a transformational impact on the lives of our seminarians, nurture healthy, holy vocations, and support the broader Church.

Sincerely,

Derek Waldbillig
Director of Development



Derek with his wife Maggie and their kids in 2024.

WAYS TO MAKE YOUR GIFT

SCAN the QR code. **RETURN** the enclosed envelope. **VISIT** give.sjvseminary.com. **CALL** Derek at 651-358-3368.



Stay in Touch

Join our mailing list or update your contact information! Please scan the QR code or contact **Rena Kuetzel** (rkuettel@sjvseminary.org).



2026-27 SAVE THE DATES

Vianney Cup
Monday, September 21, 2026
Midland Hills Golf Club

Crowning of Mary and Benefactor Mass
Sunday, May 2, 2027
Saint John Vianney Chapel



**SAINT JOHN VIANNEY
COLLEGE SEMINARY**

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The first-ever Vianney Cup fund-a-need last fall was a wonderful success!

Vianney Cup 2025 participants raised enough funds to purchase not just one but two passenger vans. The vans are affectionately named "Sue" and "Phil," after retired SJV staff members Sue Quam and Phil Roeser. Their namesakes stay busy transporting seminarians to Apostolic Outreach and other activities.

