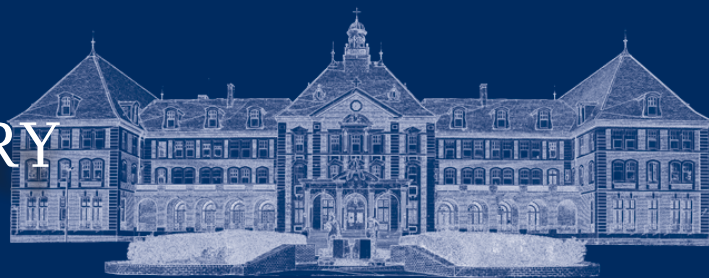


VOLUME 9, NO. 1 • SPRING 2022

NOTRE DAME SEMINARY

Graduate School of Theology



2022 GRADUATION CLASS

Inside

■ First Year Priesthood

■ Resuming Pastoral Ministry

■ Preparing for Ordination

■ 2022 Gala & Auction



Very Rev. James A. Wehner
Rector/President

With Gratitude to You

Dear Friends:

This past Spring, the world was watching the crisis in the Ukraine almost as unbelievable spectators as people were fleeing their country and others dying from the violence. Pope Francis along with the bishops of the world consecrated both Russia and the Ukraine to Our Lady as our faith in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom could bring about a lasting peace. Closer to home, the recovery from hurricanes last year and this past year continued throughout the entire gulf south from Lake Charles through Houma into New Orleans. Our seminarians are being prepared for pastoral ministry that considers the crises we see around the world and at home. It is essential that future priests have both a firm grasp on the theological understanding of suffering as well as the pastoral response that people deserve from their priests. We are providing the seminarians the best we can for effective pastoral formation that will serve their dioceses and communities well. Thank you for your prayerful support as the semester comes to a close and our men prepare for diaconate and priesthood ordinations later this Summer.

"Our seminarians
are being
prepared for
pastoral ministry
that considers
the crises we see
around the world
and at home."

2022 GRADUATION CLASS

Photo on cover.

Front Row:

Dcn. Andy Gonzalez - *Archdiocese of New Orleans*
Dcn. Stephen Castille - *Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux*
Very Rev. James A. Wehner - *Rector/President*
Dcn. Nick Ware - *Diocese of Lafayette*
Dcn. Will Cook - *Diocese of Savannah*

Middle Row:

Dcn. Charles Deering - *Diocese of Birmingham*
Dcn. Jody DiMaggio - *Archdiocese of New Orleans*
Dcn. Jeff Merritt - *Archdiocese of New Orleans*
Dcn. James Rome - *Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux*

Back Row:

Dcn. Nicholas Duncan - *Diocese of Shreveport*
Dcn. Elijah Thomson - *Diocese of Dallas*
Dcn. Joseph Odongo - *Archdiocese of Tororo*
Dcn. Andrew Bowden - *Diocese of Jackson*



BIBLE MARATHON

The seminary community held the annual Bible Marathon beginning January 31st through February 2nd. Hundreds of people gathered on the front lawn of the seminary over the three days to listen to and proclaim the Word of God.



T3 Oath of Fidelity

On Sunday, February 20th, the T3 class took the Oath of Fidelity and Profession of Faith, which is required of all candidates preparing for their diaconate ordinations and recognizes each of them as competent and ready to exercise pastoral ministry.

Lector Institution



On Tuesday, March 15th, the Most Reverend Michael J. Sis, Bishop of the Diocese of San Angelo, presided over the Mass for the Institution of Lectors. Those given the ministry of Lector are entrusted with reading the Sacred Scriptures during Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours.

Basketball Tournament



The Notre Dame Seminary "Hunchbacks" faced off in the annual basketball game against St. Joseph Seminary College ("St. Ben's") on Saturday, February 19th at Archbishop Rummel High School. The day was a witness to competition, brotherhood, and vocations to the priesthood.

FIRST YEAR OF PRIESTHOOD: *A Gift From God*

by Fr. Raney Johnson ('21), Diocese of Shreveport

During my ordination on June 5, 2021, Bishop Francis Malone assigned me to St. Mary of the Pines Parish in Shreveport. To my surprise, the Bishop also assigned me to serve at Loyola College Prep, the only Catholic high school in the city of Shreveport. I always dreamt of being a chaplain at a Catholic school but did not think it would happen in my first year of priesthood, so this surprise assignment definitely felt like a gift from God. As the parochial vicar at St. Mary of the Pines Parish, I serve at both the main church, St. Mary of the Pines, and another church attached to the parish, Sacred Heart in Shreveport. I balance my time between the two churches, along with the pastor. My time at Loyola each week involves going to the high school at least twice a week to minister to the students, and I have the privilege of working alongside Fr. Jerry Daigle, another Notre Dame Seminary alumnus, who is also a chaplain at the school.

Now that I am almost at the end of my first year as a priest, I reflect on it with a heart of gratitude. The privilege to celebrate Mass in the parish continues to be my favorite part of the priesthood. I also enjoy helping others encounter God's mercy in the sacrament of Penance. Likewise, celebrating Mass at the high school and offering the students the ability to go to Confession remain two of my favorite parts of being a chaplain at the school. My



Fr. Raney Johnson celebrates Mass at Sacred Heart Church in Shreveport.

work with the high school students at Loyola also offers me opportunities to teach and to spend time with the students both during school and after school at sporting events, such as football games. I often feel inspired whenever I encounter the deep faith of many of these students.

My first year as a priest also contained different challenges. The pandemic continued to affect my priestly ministry in a variety of ways. I could not visit parishioners in nursing homes as often as I would have liked due to restrictions put in place to protect the residents of the nursing homes. Also, restrictions were put in place due to rising Covid rates at different points this past year, and this caused some of our parish events to be canceled. However, even during the pandemic, I still had the opportunity to minister to a variety of people in many amazing ways.

To the seminarians at NDS, I offer these words of encouragement. The priesthood has far exceeded my expectations. I have the honor of living out the life I dreamt about during my time at NDS. God is preparing the seminarians at NDS for a wonderful ministry in his Church. I have learned during my first year of priesthood that the people of God want and desire more priests who will bring them closer to God.



Fr. Raney with his mom, Bonnie Johnson (left), Deacon Charles Thomas (middle), and Liz Clark (right)

Preparing for Ordination: “No One Comes to the Altar Alone”

by Deacon Andrew Bowden, Diocese of Jackson

As a transitional deacon for the Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi, I will be ordained a priest of Jesus Christ for the Diocese of Jackson on May 14th. Getting to this point of priesthood ordination has been a journey that began for me at St. Joseph's Seminary College in 2014 and at Notre Dame Seminary in 2018.

As deacons in our final year at Notre Dame Seminary, there are various steps of preparation that we take in order to prepare and commit ourselves to our vocation. In the Spring semester of a seminarian's fourth year of studying theology there are a couple of milestones that occur before ordination to the priesthood. One is “the Oath of Fidelity.” Here, at Notre Dame Seminary, this ceremony takes place during Evening Prayer. The Oath is made, more generally, by everyone who is assuming an office or order in which there will be teaching in the name of the Church, for example professors of Theology at a seminary. The Oath of Fidelity is an external sign of the desire within the Church that all those who will exercise the prophetic munus in the name of the Church will do so authentically. I made my Oath of Fidelity this spring in preparation for my priestly ordination. Personally, making the Oath of Fidelity has, in a formal way, reminded me that I should always be guided by an attempt to think, teach, and preach according to the mind of the Church especially as expressed by the Holy Father and my bishop as they represent my own tie of unity to the Magisterium.

I have also been preparing for my ordination in my “Practicum Classes,” which are classes to prepare us for the liturgical duties we will undertake in ordained ministry. It is very exciting to be able to prepare in this very practical way for what we will be doing after ordination. I think I can speak for my class in expressing appreciation for everyone who prays for us, offers words of encouragement, or provides any other form of support. As Father Wehner often says, “No one comes to the altar alone.” Thank you for accompanying us as we go to the altar.



The Theology 4 class takes their Oath of Fidelity in front of the seminary community.



Deacon Elijah Thomson practices celebrating Mass in his practicum class.



Deacon Will Cook practices celebrating Mass.



Deacon Jeff Merritt (right) and Deacon Andy Gonzalez (left) take their Oath of Fidelity.

RESUMING PASTORAL MINISTRY



Seminarians prepare to bring bags to the homeless in New Orleans.



"...the Lord never stops sending His ministers through that same Church to meet her people's needs."

by David Furka, Diocese of Lafayette

Much of our Fall Pastoral Ministry was dedicated to helping with recovery from Hurricane Ida. This Spring semester, we were excited to get back to the ministries of everyday life. We expected that returning to normal meant not dealing with too many crises.

But normal always finds a way to surprise us. The other seminarians and I, who were assigned to ministry at St. Rita School, were caught off guard when the Archdiocese of New Orleans announced plans to close St. Rita School at the end of this semester. Despite this news, our ministry largely remained the same. The school is still open for the remainder of the semester, and we are sent by the Church to minister to these children. We go into the classrooms to bring the presence of Christ to the students. Christ, who is able to help through the biggest and most troubling of circumstances with the peace found only in Him.

We can feel more of the urgency of the Kingdom in uncertain times like this because we are only able to minister to these children and their teachers in this particular way, at St. Rita School, now, and only now. There can be a temptation to do work later, but our work at St. Rita's has given us a greater reason to fight past this temptation. It has become simple: either now or never. So, this semester is actually a blessed time as it is our last opportunity to be with these kids here, and zeal is more readily found to be there for them.

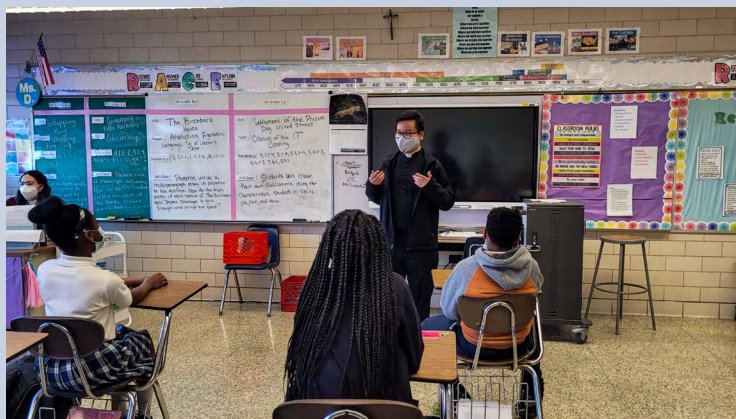
This time is a good witness that even though the Church in New Orleans may be unable to continue to provide the school of St. Rita any longer, the Lord never stops sending His ministers through that same Church to meet her people's needs.



ST. RITA'S SCHOOL MINISTRY:

"As the chaplain of the St. Rita 1st grade class, I am blessed to be able to help nourish the children's spiritual growth. Throughout the year, we have prayed the Mass together, watched a video on Our Lady of Fatima, and learned how to genuflect and do the sign of the cross! The children are always hungry to learn more about God and ask many great questions. I look forward to walking with the children as they transition to new schools and a new teacher."

– Patrick Creamer, *Archdiocese of Atlanta*



Cuong Tran addresses a classroom of students at St. Rita's Catholic School.



Joshua Page leads students back to school after Mass at St. Rita's.

HOMELESS MINISTRY:

"Notre Dame Seminary has been involved in street ministry here in New Orleans for more than 15 years. We are glad to be able to return to this ministry as Covid regulations subside by encountering people that live on the street, even rebuilding relationships with those we have ministered to before. While this ministry can be challenging on numerous levels, it provides great opportunities to pray with others and to be surprised at how the Holy Spirit is able to work in us and through us."

– Fr. Joseph Krafft, *Director of Pastoral Formation*



Davis Ahimbisibwe and Hoang Pham encounter people and build relationships during their street ministry.



Seminarians and deacons serve at Mass at St. Rita's Catholic Church.

ST. RITA'S PARISH MINISTRY:

"At the seminary, we spend all day praying, studying, and getting formed for the priesthood. Our ministry at St. Rita's Church builds on this formation, as it allows us to see the face of Jesus in the faithful, and hopefully, to extend the love of Christ into their everyday lives. Not only this, it allows us to receive their love as we discern how best to enter into Christ's Priesthood. For me personally, it has been a great source of joy, hope, and inspiration."

– Ryan Stoer, *Diocese of Jackson*

2022 Gala & Auction

Fr. Patrick Riviere ('19), Dcn. Elijah Thomson, and Fr. Michael Lamy ('21)

Having been three years since the last in-person Gala in 2019, the Notre Dame Seminary community was excited to welcome hundreds of benefactors, alumni, and friends back to campus for the annual Gala and Auction on Saturday, March 12, 2022. Notre Dame Seminary Rector/President, **Fr. Jim Wehner**, and Chancellor, **Archbishop Gregory Aymond**, as well as the seminarians welcomed guests as they arrived at the seminary to show their support and love for our future priests.

The evening began with the Patron Party where guests enjoyed beautiful music, delicious appetizers, exciting raffles, and a beautiful champagne fountain. Once the Gala

began, guests poured into the dining room to enjoy cuisine from restaurants and businesses around the city including: Drago's Seafood Restaurant, Lagniappe Luncheonette, Catholic Community Radio, Vincent's Italian Cuisine, Robert's Fresh Market, and much more! The crowd favorite of the Gala was the dessert room which was overflowing with cakes, cupcakes, and pastries from bakeries all over the city including Nothing Bundt Cakes New Orleans, La Louisiane Bakery, Haydel's Bakery, Angelo Brocato's, ETC Catering, and many more. With over 250 items on the



Cindy Nolan, Dr. RaeNell Houston, and Deborah Blancher



Archbishop Gregory Aymond, Good Shepherd Award Recipients Tim and Beverly Napier, and Fr. Jim Wehner



Seminarians Austin Thomas and Luiz Dutra assist guests in the online auction.



Seminarians Chris Orajiaka and Victor Baez sell raffle tickets for the Drago's Seafood Restaurant Dinner Raffle.



Fr. Jeffrey Montz, Jill and Scott Cables, and Fr. Michael Schneller

auction boards, guests gave back to the seminary by bidding on the silent auction all throughout the evening.

During the Gala, Fr. Wehner and Archbishop Aymond presented **Tim and Beverly Napier** with the **2022 Good Shepherd Award**, which recognizes their outstanding commitment to the mission of the Church and Notre Dame Seminary.

The seminary community is grateful to all of our 2022 Gala Sponsors, especially our Chair of Peter Event Sponsors: **The Gayle and Tom Benson Charitable Foundation**, **Mr. and Mrs. Joseph C. Canizaro**, **The Knights of Columbus Louisiana State Council**, **David and Mary Beth Mettz**, and **New Orleans Catholic Cemeteries**. We would also like to thank our dedicated Gala Committee, whose members worked countless hours and many months in preparation for the event. We continue to express our gratitude to our benefactors, friends, and volunteers for their unwavering dedication to and support of Notre Dame Seminary!



Brett and Lisa Herr



Caroline Thriffley and Fr. Ajani Gibson ('21)



David and Lisa Dawson from Catholic Community Radio serve pulled pork sliders in the dining room.



Paulette and Frank Stewart and Archbishop Gregory Aymond



Seminarian Josh Zelden, Nancy and Joe Dicharry, and Cindy and Mike Bowman

Alumni Day

On Thursday, February 24th, Notre Dame Seminary alumni gathered from all over the gulf coast to attend alumni day. Alumni Day gives an opportunity for our alumni to visit campus, celebrate Mass, reconnect with classmates, and celebrate another year of their priestly ministry.

The day began with an Alumni Association meeting, where the alumni heard from our Rector, Fr. Jim Wehner.

Following the meeting, over fifty alumni priests celebrated Mass. Archbishop Gregory Aymond, Chancellor and alumnus of NDS, was the main celebrant, and Monsignor Daniel Torres ('96) was the guest homilist. Monsignor Daniel Torres is the vicar general and pastor of Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church in the Diocese of Lake Charles, and he celebrated his 25th anniversary as a priest in May of 2021.

Alumni, faculty, and fourth-year theologians enjoyed a reception and lunch following Mass. After lunch, Fr. Jim Wehner and Archbishop Gregory Aymond presented the annual

Saint John Vianney Award for outstanding priestly ministry and commitment to the mission of the Church. This year, the Saint John Vianney Award was presented posthumously to Servant of God, Fr. Joseph Verbis Lafleur, Alumnus of NDS. Father Mark Ledoux accepted the award on behalf of Father Lafleur.

Thank you to our alumni for their service to the Church and their continued support of NDS!



Fr. Mark Ledoux ('99), Archbishop Gregory Aymond ('75), and Fr. Jim Wehner



Fr. Michael Schneller ('72), Fr. Walter Austin ('81), and Dcn. Jeff Merritt visit at the alumni reception.



Fr. Louis Sklar ('01) and Msgr. Michael Deering ('02)



Over 100 priestly alumni join in prayer before the alumni lunch.



FORMING PRIESTS AS SPIRITUAL FATHERS & MEN OF THE EUCHARIST

2021-2022 Annual Fund

What an incredible and challenging year we have faced both in the life of the Church and certainly in our ever-changing world. Yet, as Christians, we are always discerning the will of God and how the Lord uses challenging times to strengthen our faith, which is certainly reflected in the way we prepare future priests for ministry. While the priesthood is timeless, universal, and unchanging, the way in which priests serve, minister, teach, lead, and sanctify must reflect the needs of the people.

Since 1923, Notre Dame Seminary has prepared priests with a formation experience that leads seminarians on a journey into the Heart of Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd. No doubt, that throughout the past ninety-nine years of formation, our programs at Notre Dame Seminary have adapted to meet the needs of the Church and the faithful. To meet these needs of the Church, Notre Dame Seminary

aims to form priests as **Spiritual Fathers and Men of the Eucharist**.

We prepare obedient, joyful, and prayerful men, who as spiritual fathers, are called to lead us through triumphs and battles that confront our Church today. We form men whose spiritual lives are rooted in the Most Holy Eucharist so that they may nourish their people with the Sacraments and inspire their parishes and communities to follow Jesus in both the joys and challenges of life.

Your support of priestly formation enables us to prepare our seminarians for the many aspects of pastoral ministry, where **they will serve you, your families, and your parishes for many years to come**. Your gift to the **2021-2022 Annual Fund** ensures that we are able to continue to form our seminarians for ministry in today's Church as spiritual fathers and men of the Eucharist.

—Very Rev. James A. Wehner, Rector/President

ALL FUNDS RAISED DIRECTLY SUPPORT THE PROGRAMS OF PRIESTLY FORMATION AT NDS.

To make a gift to the Annual Fund, please visit www.nds.edu/donate-now or return the donation envelope enclosed in this newsletter. For more information about making any type of gift to Notre Dame Seminary, please contact Caroline Thriffiley, Director of Development, by phone at (504) 866-7426, ext. 375, or by email at cthriffiley@nds.edu.



NOTRE DAME SEMINARY
Graduate School of Theology
2901 S. Carrollton Avenue
New Orleans, Louisiana 70118

Prsrt Std
U.S. Postage
PAID
New Orleans, LA
Permit No. 33



SAVE THE DATE

2022 Christmas Luncheon for Priests

Friday, December 2, 2022

Immaculate Conception Jesuit Church & The Roosevelt Hotel

2023 Gala & Auction

Saturday, March 25, 2023

Notre Dame Seminary

100th Anniversary Celebration & Dinner

Thursday, September 14, 2023

Notre Dame Seminary

100th Anniversary Mass

Saturday, September 16, 2023

St. Louis Cathedral

*For more information about Notre Dame Seminary's events,
please contact the Development Office at (504) 866-7426, ext. 374 or 375.*