As ambassadors representing the Athenaeum in your parishes, you have a truly important role in fostering the mission of the Athenaeum to prepare people to serve the Church as priests, deacons and lay ministers.

In February, Cincinnati Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr named the Rev. Benedict O’Cinnsealaigh the 35th president/rector of The Athenaeum of Ohio and made it abundantly clear that at the top of his list of goals for the Athenaeum is to increase the number of seminarians attending Mount St. Mary’s Seminary.

On the same day, the archbishop blessed 24 newly remodeled seminarian suites bringing to 70 the number of seminarians Mount St. Mary’s can house.

Archbishop Schnurr wants them filled and that is where Athenaeum ambassadors can help.

Between now and the time the August edition of Faith in Action is posted, ambassadors are being asked to approach at least ONE person in their parish who they think would make a good and holy priest. Ambassadors are asked to plant the seed by asking this individual if he has ever considered the priesthood and make it known he has exhibited the attributes you feel qualify him to consider a life of service to God and Church.

If he expresses an immediate interest, please urge him to contact the Rev. Kyle Schnippel, archdiocesan vocation director at 513-421-3131.

The seminary division of the Athenaeum, classified as a major seminary or graduate school, presently has 36 men enrolled representing the Archdiocese of Cincinnati along with the dioceses of Toledo and Youngstown in Ohio and Kalamazoo, Mich.

Of the 36, 22 are from the local archdiocese with 11 college seminarians from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati studying in college seminaries in Indianapolis and Columbus who, if they continue their paths to the priesthood, will finish at Mount St. Mary’s.

On a national perspective, there are 27,182 diocesan priests serving in the United States today, according to CARA (the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate) at Georgetown University. In 1965, there were 35,925. Priest ordinations dropped from 994 in 1965 to 259 in 2010.

As Catholics this should alarm us all and even more so with the fact the Church in the United States is growing with 65.6 million U.S. Catholics today compared to 45.6 million in 1965.

Without a turnaround, the future bodes more closed parishes, more merged parishes and more parishes sharing a priest – not your parents’ Church.
Discerning God's Call

God has a plan in mind for each of us. He has a life in mind for us and it is up to us to discern and listen to the Spirit to figure out how we fit into His plan -- how we are called to build His kingdom. We need to know ourselves -- our strengths, gifts and shortcomings -- to answer His loving call to us and discover how we can do His will.

I'd like to address a very specific responsibility and call each of us has. That call is to work to build God's kingdom by doing what we can to support and enhance efforts to foster a specific vocation.

That vocation is the priesthood.

There are other religious vocations -- religious life, the diaconate, But today, let's focus on the priesthood.

Certainly, men with the gifts and talents to meet that call need to respond to God's call; but, what about the rest of us? What can we do?

It is not enough for us to wring our hands and fret that there aren't enough priests. We all need to be involved in getting more priests. We can't just leave it up to Archbishop Schnurr who has made this a top priority or to Father Kyle Schnippel and his staff in the vocations office in downtown Cincinnati.

We can do things to help. Certainly, we can and should all pray for vocations to the priesthood. Jesus says in Matthew 9:38 “to beg the master of the harvest to send laborers into the vineyard.” If we want more priests, we need to ask God to help. We should pray, not only in our personal private prayer, but publicly and at the dinner table in our homes. But, there is more that we can and need to do.

Here are some possibilities: We can encourage single men we know showing a strong desire to serve others to consider priesthood. This might be a friend, a coworker, a nephew, grandson, or even one of our children. Just a simple question: “have you ever considered being a priest?” can spark that guy to think about it.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website has a suggested approach: “An easy way to do this can be remembered by four letters: ICNU. ‘John, I see in you (ICNU) the qualities that would make a good priest, and I want to encourage you to pray about it.’ ” It is a big step, but it may never be taken without someone opening the door to think about it. Just think if each of us talked with one man about considering the priesthood! I’m sure some of us would spark interests that may lay dormant otherwise. From a personal perspective, I can tell you that if it hadn’t been for my pastor, I might not have considered the diaconate. He approached me after I had given a witness talk while on retreat and said, “That’s a deacon message.” That’s all he said and it caused me to dig into what he was talking about. We can do other things. We can support efforts in other ways.

We can join the SERRA club or other groups which foster vocations. SERRA is a lay organization whose members, Catholic laymen and women and permanent deacons, have joined together to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life and to further Catholicism through their own Christian vocations to service.

We can support institutions that educate priests by contributing our temporal gifts to a seminary. Educating priests takes money to have good facilities, good faculty and staff, and to provide the formation, training, and education in an excellent way. The Athenaeum certainly fits this description.

Also, we can foster an environment of prayer and God-centeredness in our lives as families. This is a big challenge in the world we live in but helps us all and makes that conversation and discernment about a priestly vocation that much more likely.

Let's all take a look at how we can increase the number of laborers for the harvest and the building of God's kingdom.

As always, we are most grateful for your dedication and commitment to the Athenaeum and we ask for your prayers for all who are involved in the Athenaeum and support its work.

God’s blessings to you,

Deacon Max Schellman
The Ambassadors’ Corner

Ambassador
Bob Bell an Active Voice at All Saints

When receiving an alumni pin at the first Athenaeum Ambassador Orientation Day, Bob Bell accepted the gift and said: “I will gladly hold on to it until I graduate and then wear it proudly.”

Bob is about a third of the way to completion of the Lay Pastoral Ministry Program degree he began in 2009 after retiring from the Internal Revenue Service. As a member of All Saints Parish in Montgomery, he serves as the parish ambassador and is looking forward to sharing his experience with his fellow parishioners. He is finding his classes gratifying and is enjoying forming relationships with his classmates.

At the Ambassador Day, Bob found the pastoral summaries not only interesting but also added to his knowledge of the different divisions and their leadership at the Athenaeum. This information will help him “spread the word” about all that goes on at the Athenaeum.

Bob, with his wife, Karen, attended the Lessons and Carols ceremony in December and, when Bob was in class last year, Karen had some friends attended with her. The Bells also enjoy Athenaeum Chorale Vespers and have encouraged others to join them. Bob hopes the seniors’ group at All Saints will tour the Athenaeum this fall and their youth group already has scheduled a tour.

Bob still is discerning where God is calling him to be but is open to God’s will. Being an ambassador is his beginning.

Life in the Seminary

by the Rev. Earl Fernandes
Dean of Mount St. Mary’s Seminary

On March 12 and 13, eight men attended the Welcome Weekend at Mount Saint Mary’s Seminary. The weekend is designed to give potential seminarians insight into what life will be like in the seminary if God is calling them to be a priest.

People see the beautiful seminary grounds and building as they drive along Beechmont Avenue. They say, “I wonder what it’s like in there.” Many people have no idea what seminary life is like, including potential seminarians. Some presume that a seminary is like a monastery. Others think of the seminary simply as a place where one goes to study to be a priest. In fact, a seminary is much more; it is a community of formation for the priesthood.

What is life like in the seminary? Typically, the day begins with Morning Prayer and Mass. Beginning with prayer focuses the seminarian on the “things of God.” While seminarians will spend much of their time in study, they do not study just to know about God but to know God. Spiritual formation, especially through prayer, is a priority. After morning liturgy, students typically have breakfast and have a chance to socialize, but then it’s time to work and study.

While prayer is the priority, the seminarian does need to study philosophy and theology. A student may have two or three classes per day and occasionally spiritual formation conferences. While the courses at the start of formation are introductions to scripture, dogma, and sacraments; the courses in the final years are more practical, training students how to celebrate the sacraments.

While students spend time learning in the classroom, they are also expected to read, study, and write papers when they are not in class. They are meant to take what they learn in class to prayer. Intellectual formation, which for some, takes the most time and effort, helps the spiritual life and vice versa.

At about 5:30 p.m., it’s time to again gather for communal prayer. Evening Prayer (Vespers) is sung. This is followed by supper. Occasionally, there is an evening class or an elective. During the second year of theology, students assist at an RCIA Program in the evening as part of their field education experience. Still, there’s a lot of time in the schedule, during which the seminarian will have to learn how to use responsibly – for prayer, for study, for mundane activities, and for fun.

All work and no play make the future priest a dull man. Seminary formation wants to help a man have a balanced and integrated life. Free time can be spent studying, praying, or recreating. Each seminarian is responsible for his own health. Some make use of the weight room; others will go for a run. Having a balanced life, which includes community life, is important. The evenings allow for students to gather for a little fun. Usually this means gathering in Bar Jonah to watch a movie or sports; to play cards; or just to chat about the day.

Wednesday evening is designated for community. Typically after evening Mass and a formal supper, there is an organized community activity such as basketball, trivia night, or ping pong. All of this shapes the human dimensions of the future priest and fosters a spirit of camaraderie.

There is a rhythm to seminary life. It is hoped that this rhythm helps the future priest integrate his human, intellectual and spiritual dimensions so that he can be pastorally effective.

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How to Spot a Vocation

By the Rev. Kyle Schnippel, Vocation Director

In my own discernment of a vocation, one thing sticks out more than every other: the insistence of a fellow parishioner that she saw in me the potential for a priestly vocation. Throughout my time in high school, every time she saw me, she would look up and say: “You’re going to be a priest some day, I’m praying for it!”

From working with men discerning the priesthood, I have since recognized my story is not unique. Frequently, the person who recognizes a potential priestly vocation is not the man being called, but those prayer-filled daily Mass attendees who have spent a lifetime of conversation with Our Lord.

While much of what they recognize in a potential vocation is a subjective matter, there can be specific things which we should look for in a young man who might have a potential vocation to the priesthood.

First, he must have an obvious love for the Church, for only with that love will come a willingness to lay down his life for his potential future bride. Secondly, he has to have some sort of developed prayer life, which will certainly be strengthened during his time in the seminary. Finally, is there a comfort being with and in front of people. The priest is the visible face of Christ to his parishioners; does he present a joyful face?

While these are only basic criteria, perhaps it is best summed in the question I often ask myself: ‘Would I feel comfortable if he were pastor of my parent’s/sibling’s parish?’

But it is not just recognizing the potential vocation, making that invitation to consider the possibility is critical. So often, it can be passed off through a joke or a quick aside, while the reality of what you are doing is acting as a very messenger of God to this young man to consider the priesthood. This is a sacred moment! Pray for guidance on how to do it, and do it well; trusting that this is a prayer that comes speedily to the ear of Our Lord.

Prayer for Vocations

O Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ the Priest, Mother of all Priests, you have a special love for priests, because they are the living images of your Only Son. Pray to our Heavenly Father to send workers to His Harvest. Pray that we always have priests who give us the sacraments, who explain the Gospel to us, and who teach us to become true children of God.

Amen.
LPMP Fall Enrollment

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati’s Lay Pastoral Ministry Program (LPMP) is now accepting applications for fall enrollment. The program includes theological education, spiritual formation and service to the community. Graduates are grounded in Catholic doctrine, formed as faithful disciples and actively engaged in the mission of the Church in the world. For more information about classes in Dayton and Cincinnati, call 513-231-1200 or 937-277-0116.

Apply for Master’s Programs Now

Now is a good time to apply for admission to one of The Athenaeum of Ohio Special Studies Division’s three Master of Arts degree programs – in biblical studies, pastoral counseling and theology. Information about the programs is available on the Athenaeum website (www.athenaeum.edu) or from the registrar’s office (513-231-2223). It is also possible to take individual courses in these areas without having been admitted to a degree program.

Priest and Deacon Ordinations

Men from the Athenaeum of Ohio’s Mount Saint Mary’s Seminary will be ordained to the diaconate on April 30 and to the priesthood on May 21 by Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr at the cathedral of St. Peter in Chains. Priesthood ordinations will be held in dioceses of Youngstown and Toledo on June 25. Please pray for all those from Mount Saint Mary’s Seminary to be ordained and encourage those who might be thinking about the priesthood to attend the ordinations.

A Different High School Option

Do you know an eighth grade student in your parish who would like to attend a Catholic High School but can’t afford it? For Cincinnati area students, the new DePaul Cristo Rey High School may be the opportunity they are looking for. DePaul’s unique work study program allows students to work one day a week to offset their education costs. DePaul Cristo Rey is hosting a Discover Day for eighth grade students from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., April 30, at its campus in Clifton near Cincinnati State. For more information, visit www.depaulcristorey.org.

Support the Formation of Priests, Deacons, Lay Ministers

During this season of Lent and Easter, when almsgiving is a common practice, we invite you to consider directing your almsgiving toward a most important mission for our parishes and local church – to prepare our priests, deacons and lay ministers. All of our parishes are impacted by the Athenaeum’s mission and we would like you to consider becoming a member of our Bishop Fenwick Society. For additional information or to join please see your parish ambassador or call Jim Jackson, Athenaeum advancement director at 513-233-6161.
Easter Blessings from The Athenaeum of Ohio

Names and Numbers
Below are the names, numbers and e-mail addresses of the people you or interested parishioners may need to call.

Parish ambassador program
Mr. Walt Schaefer, 513-233-6130
wschaefer@athenaeum.edu

Tours
Ms. Jan Hagedorn, 513-231-2223 ext 110
jhagedorn@athenaeum.edu

Eugene H. Maly Memorial Library
Ms. Tracy Koenig, director
513-231-2223 ext 136
tkoenig@athenaeum.edu

Speakers’ Bureau
Mr. Walt Schaefer, 513-233-6130
wschaefer@athenaeum.edu

Athenaeum Chorale
Mr. Anthony DiCello, music director
tdicello@athenaeum.edu

Priest vocations
Rev. Kyle Schnippel, 513-421-3131
kschnippel@catholiccincinnati.org

Diaconate formation
Barry Mersmann, 513-421-3131
deaconoffice@catholiccincinnati.org

Special Studies Division
(pastoral counseling, masters programs)
Dr. Terrance D. Callan, 513-231-2223 ext 116
tcallan@athenaeum.edu

Lay Pastoral Ministry
(certificate and masters programs)
Dr. Susan McGurgan, 513-231-1200
smcgurgan@athenaeum.edu

School Registrar
Mr. Mike Sweeney, 513-231-2223 ext 118
msweeney@athenaeum.edu

Advancement office (annual fund, giving opportunities)
Mr. Jim Jackson, director; 231-2223 ext 161
jjackson@athenaeum.edu

Communication office
Mr. Walt Schaefer, director, 513-233-6130,
wschaefer@athenaeum.edu

Faith in Action

Faith in Action is published four times a year for Athenaeum Ambassadors who represent the institution and promote ordained and lay vocations in their home parishes. For information about the program, or for comment, please contact Walt Schaefer, Athenaeum communications director, at 233-6130 or wschaefer@athenaeum.edu

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