

Ring Ring...it's Jesus Calling!!!....Matt Body, 1st College Philadelphia Seminarian

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Mary, Mother of the Redeemer Parish, North Wales, PA

If it is still unknown to any parishioners, I decided to enter St. Charles Seminary to follow a calling to the Diocesan Priesthood. As I am fairly certain that this will be my last article for the "No Name Newsletter," I am glad that I can end my three or four year career as a "contributing teen author" on this wonderful high note. I would like to briefly explain how a public schooled teen such as me could somehow find a way to consider a vocation to the priesthood.

This is not the story of my every religious experience that magically made me want to be a priest, but a clarification of what it means to be "called." Remember that I don't have any formal theology under my belt; therefore this is my personal experience, not Church doctrine.

To begin, it is important to realize that a calling does not begin with a polyphonic ring tone of the "Hallelujah Chorus" with Jesus on the line telling you to go be a priest. I wish it were that straight forward, but wireless signals do not reach as far a heaven as of yet. So if Jesus isn't autodialing through the Catholic directory looking for people to call to a life of service, how does it happen? Well, I don't know; but I find myself to be no less flawed and sinful as any other person on earth so why was I chosen? I can

offer no clear clue. What I do know however, is that I WAS chosen and I DID respond to the call. Now that we've established that the choosing of who is called is quite mysterious we can move to what is more concrete (but much softer).

My experience to the ministry was simply a subtle push closer to the Church. Without even knowing, I began the path in middle school by joining the youth group and every year brought me deeper into the parish life and the Catholic Faith. Church became both a place of worship and a social scene where I found both comfort and friends. My integration into the Church community was the first step of the calling.

After visiting the seminary for the first time in 9th grade, I still wasn't thinking about becoming a priest, although I learned a lot from the visit. "Just for kicks," I considered what life as a priest would be like and realized it could be good; but I didn't think I wanted to give up having a family. It was setting aside this idea that I later perceived the presence of a calling.

Trying to ignore a calling is like trying to convince Billy Mays (the infomercial guy) that screaming the name of a cleaning product 500 times in less than a minute

does not make people any more likely to buy the product! This really is the best analogy I have. It is truly hard to make this decision and I was not accepting the signs in my life, so God tried confrontation through others.

After beginning to lector, people complimented me after mass that I read so well. I thought they were just being nice because they found it cute that a 14-year old young man whose voice hadn't completely dropped yet was reading Bible passages. After a year or two, someone asked if I ever thought about being a priest. It was easy to shrug off once, but then this happened more and more often. Ignoring the call was becoming difficult.

Parishioners were not the only ones to notice the change in me that I didn't; Msgr. Ricco noticed and encouraged me to keep the possibility open as I prepared to leave for my year in Germany. I agreed to pray for guidance to decide if there was any possibility of a vocation in my future. To save you all from being redundant, I won't delve into a lengthy description of my visit to Aalen, Germany, through the exchange program. An important realization was that I became immersed in a new Church and realized that being away from our Church left what I

have heard referred to as a “hole in the soul” (could this be from Father Bill??). I needed to be in Church to satisfy a need as real as a hunger or a thirst. I never felt that way before, and although a terrible thing, I never lamented over missing mass on Sunday before I left. I recognized a change and began to quickly accept that I couldn’t ignore what was right in front of my face.

I came home knowing that my life needed to involve the Church in a larger than normal way. After a weekend at the seminary many of my misconceptions dissolved as I saw how warm and friendly the seminarians were. I felt comfortable in the prayerful atmosphere and could visualize myself being part of it at some point. Shortly after, I decided for sure that I would enter the seminary after a four-year college program. With this new acceptance of my calling, I became more involved in parish activities; joining the Parish Council and serving as “assistant master of ceremonies” at important liturgies. Becoming more involved brought me in contact with more and more people who noticed that I might have a calling.

We all learn at some point that our paths in life are constantly changing; I learned this as I questioned why I wanted to go to a “normal” college before entering St. Charles, which is an accredited school that offers bachelors and masters degrees. So

why did need to “experience” anything else? I thought that there was a chance that in four years I could change my mind and decide not to enter. While I did accept that I need time to grow, I figured that eight years was a long time and what I did not need was time to decide against a life as a priest.

I applied to St. Charles and followed the many steps involved in the process until finally I was finished. I was accepted in mid-March and took my time to review my other college acceptances before making the decision around Easter. I decided to write this article to share my experiences up to the point I made my decision to follow my calling.

Now, I am very excited to begin this new part of my life and I know that I will find happiness in a life of service to the Church. I must thank everyone who supported me in the process (which continues even today) and even those who didn’t support me, who showed me the possible troubles of a decision that affects one’s entire life. I also want to thank those people who I no longer remember that were the first to ask if I ever considered being a priest. It also goes without saying that our priests, Monsignors, and all deacons, both permanent and transitional, have influenced me so strongly that I hope to one day be as wise and Holy as they.

I know that 18 is a young age to decide the course of my whole

life, but in the eight years I will spend in the seminary, I know that I will mature physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. I ask for your prayers as I begin the seminary in late August as I will keep all of you in mine. I will never forget where the roots of my calling began and I hope to represent everything I have learned in this parish in the best way possible.

If you take nothing more out of this rather lengthy narrative, remember that the call won’t be text to your cell or Twittered to your Face book or blue toothed to your tough phone, but will come gradually through feelings, friends, and strangers. I am proud to be answering the call and I am quite happy that I DID have to take the long emotional journey that I did. A calling is not only to the Priesthood, but also to be married and have a family, or be a single adult. That said, don’t ignore even the smallest possibility of having a calling to religious life. Explore the options...it’s the least you can do. As the wise Jim Mendel said, “We need more young people to be counter-cultural.” I can’t sum it up any better. I know that I am ready to take the next step and God willing, my path will end at my ordination in eight years.