



The Evangelist

WINTER | JANUARY 2024



The Propaedeutic Center of Formation

ST. JOHN'S SEMINARY | CAMARILLO, CA



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RECTOR'S MESSAGE

Dear friends of St. John's Seminary,

I take this opportunity to wish you a wonderful new year in 2024 and to thank you for your tremendous support to the Seminary. Also, I would like to present an update regarding the new programs of priestly and theological formation that St. John's offers.

This academic year, St. John's implemented several changes put forth by the new program of priestly formation required by the USCCB. The first of these changes was the establishment of the new Propaedeutic stage of formation which began in August with nine men. They intend to build a solid foundation in human and spiritual formation, including more intensive vocational discernment before they begin philosophical studies. Given that this stage of formation requires that it be organized with a degree of separateness and with distinct goals and outcomes, its development involved physical modifications in the facilities of the Seminary. Thus, the building that holds the philosophy library has been renovated to be the Propaedeutic Center where liturgical, intellectual, and human formation take place.

In addition, St. John's celebrated, blessed, and wished the best to nineteen men who were ordained deacons during the past summer. They concluded their seminary theological studies and have now moved to parishes in the dioceses of their incardination. We hope and pray that during this Pastoral Synthesis stage, the transitional deacons experience a life of self-giving in a pastoral setting, as they begin the transition to full-time ministry.

Furthermore, the Seminary launched an online M.A. in Pastoral Ministry degree for the laity and permanent deacons. This program will help students deepen their knowledge of the Catholic intellectual tradition and improve their ministerial skills for the life of the Church. Students are prepared to work in different areas of ministry and make a professional and personal network with others of the same mind and spirit.

Please pray for the success of these programs, so that the Church may respond effectively in the evangelization of our society in Southern California.

On behalf of all the faculty, staff, and students, I thank all those who have worked throughout this year for their effort to make St. John's Seminary a vital priority of priestly vocations. Please keep praying for the successful implementation of our formation programs so that the men discerning ministerial priesthood and lay people in ministry may continue the path of living out an example of holy life.

Sincerely,

Very Rev. Marco A. Durazo
Rector and President

The Beauty and Excellence of the Immaculate Conception

By Rev. Gustavo Castillo, S.T.D.

Recently I visited a seminary for a conference, and the word ARETE was displayed prominently on a wall in one of their hallways. I was intrigued by the word because in Spanish it simply means “earring,” so I knew it did not refer to that since it was at a seminary. After I saw the word a second time on a cross in the room where I was staying, I decided to decipher the mystery. It turns out that areté is the Greek word for “excellence.” Now, that made sense! The sign was intended to inspire the young people there to always give the best of themselves, to pursue the highest ideals in their studies and preparation as future Church ministers.

As we celebrate the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, the patroness of our country, we can see how our Blessed Mother can also be a model for all of us in seminary formation and for the Church in general. Is there a more excellent creature who ever existed on the face of the earth? The solemnity itself suggests otherwise. In the documents of Vatican II, we read that she “shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues” (Lumen Gentium, 65).

For priests and seminarians, the Greek word kalos also has a special meaning. It is used to describe the Good Shepherd because kalos means “good, noble, beautiful.” The Good Shepherd is the best model for us future ministers to follow, and yet we can see how kalos can also be applied to the Virgin Mary. Her beauty has captivated many artists who have painted her image over the centuries in so many different representations. Whether we see her holding Baby Jesus or by herself, we always find in her a loving and maternal gaze that reminds us that she is there to welcome us and intercede for us.

As we celebrate the solemnity of this most noble lady, may we never tire of giving praise to God for giving us so wonderful a mother and image to emulate. Although she is the only one who has ever conceived immaculately, through the sacraments we also have the grace of transforming our souls in a beautiful and excellent way so that we can love God and neighbor and always give the best of ourselves.

In the Divine Praises that we recite when we adore our Lord in the Eucharist, there are several invocations for our Blessed Mother. We do praise God for Mary’s “holy and immaculate conception.” As we spend time with our Eucharistic Savior, may we also thank Him for giving us the opportunity to reflect that same radiance through our lives and our Christian vocation. Areté!





Christ Makes All Things New: The Launch of St. John's Propaedeutic Program

By Rev. Jonathon Meyer, S.T.L.

Alongside the activity of the general seminary community lies a new and distinct group of nine seminarians, often referred to as the "Propae-dudes." The newly launched Propaedeutic, or introductory, program at St. John's highlights the need to "Lay a foundation for a new way of life," a life centered in Jesus and directed by the Holy Spirit, which our culture today falls short in establishing. Therefore, it aims to develop "A life of prayer, study, fraternity, and appropriate docility to formation" in the hopes that the seminarian, oriented more toward the heart of Christ, will follow him undividedly wherever he leads (Program of Priestly Formation, 6th Ed., §120).

This new year stresses the gratuitous and receptive nature of God's grace that fosters ongoing conversion. Periods of retreat and daily celebrations of mass, holy hours, and rosaries together create a small community of disciples with Christ as the head. Daily communal meals and chores or campus projects further promote camaraderie, discipline, teamwork, and encourage an environment of accountability. In addition, they are encouraged to invest in hobbies and sports that bring them life, accompanied by workshops in human formation that touch upon themes like

maturity, chastity, and perfectionism. Fr. Larry Herrera, SJ, the director of the program, and myself, serve as advisors in the external forum and meet with the men more regularly than other stages of formation. They also engage in regular spiritual direction and have the availability of psychological counseling to ensure effective integration of the dimensions of formation. While some courses may be credited toward the pending B.A. in Philosophy (namely, Introduction to the Catechism and Latin), the men participate in modules that teach them to pray (especially with Scripture), appreciate sacred art, and introduce them to priestly identity and spirituality. In these ways, the new seminarians are challenged to put out into deep waters to bring Jesus into the gifts, weaknesses, divisions, and chaos of their life so that they can be transformed by his redemptive love. While the program envisions the Propaedeutic seminarians as their own community, there exist regular moments of contact with other seminarians and faculty. Our presence at special events, days of recollection, sports, and a few weekly meals provide balance and integration to avoid an unhealthy sense of isolation. We follow the schedule of vacations and the faculty take turns joining us for mass and lunch, recognizing the

importance of familiarity for future years in formation.

Finally, the Propaedeutic program is designed to help the men understand the history and current climate of the local Church, so they become familiar with the dioceses they are discerning and begin the groundwork for effective evangelization. In October, we visited two California Missions to tangibly learn the roots of the Church's history. Then, throughout the year we will visit various parishes on Sundays, so the men know the pastors and diversity of communities that shape the context for priestly ministry. They also have a weekly pastoral assignment geared toward the poor and marginalized and will end the year with a longer retreat and pastoral experience.

While vocational discernment is included in the fabric of the Propaedeutic program, I would say the stress lies more in forming the virtues that make a good Christian man. We have already been blessed by these nine men who are serious about praying and learning, and, though diverse, have sown good seeds for building solid fraternity. Please pray for them and for continual guidance of the program that it may set the seminarians on a trajectory toward being made a new creation in Christ Jesus.



St. John's Seminary Online M.A. in Pastoral Ministry



Watch a brief
video about
the program.



UPDATE ON MAPM PROGRAM FOR THE EVANGELIST FALL 2023

After several years of hard work and through the generosity of a Lilly Endowment Inc. grant, St. John's Seminary is excited to announce that this semester we launched our initial cohort for the online M.A. in Pastoral Ministry program (MAPM) for the laity and permanent deacons!

This inaugural cohort includes sixteen students—which exceeded our enrollment expectations by 33 percent—from a variety of backgrounds. We are also expecting at least two new students to join us in the January term. We have a balance of men and women, Millennials, Gen Xers, and Boomers, professional ministers and those with a heart for the People of God, different ethnic groups, four former seminarians, one permanent deacon, and one religious sister.

This semester, we are offering two courses: Church History and Moral Theology. Students are engaging with texts in these classes such as St. Augustine's Confessions, the Rule of St. Benedict, Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, and St. John Paul II's Veritatis Splendor.

Next semester, we will offer Old Testament, Dogmatic Theology, and Introduction to Pastoral Ministry. Students will engage with texts such as Vatican II's Verbum Dei, the Council of Chalcedon's Definition of Faith, and the USCCB's Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord.

We hosted our first optional "Saturday Gathering" at the end of October. Students came to campus to celebrate Mass, break bread, engage in dialogue about the unique ways to minister to the Vietnamese and Hispanic communities, and adored the Blessed Sacrament.

Together with the Office of Development, the MAPM

program has started raising funds to support the lay ministry students of St. John's Seminary. In November, we launched our first "Giving Tuesday" campaign and were humbled by the generosity of our alumni, benefactors, and friends.

Our first marketing campaign of advertising in Catholic magazines such as The Angelus was successful, and we are now working on optimizing our website to make it easier for prospective students to find our program through Google. The program was also advertised at the "Priests Vs. Seminarians" basketball game, the Diocese of Orange's "I AM" Eucharistic Congress, and the Tepeyac Leadership Institute's "The Hour of the Laity" conference.

We are also honored to be invited by the University of Notre Dame and Boston College to be part of a group called Hacienda Caminos that offers eleven full-tuition fellowships for young Hispanic men and women born or raised in the U.S. who are dedicated to a life of lay ministry. Applications are currently being accepted for these fellowships to start in the January and August 2024 semesters.

For more information on the online MAPM Program, the Hacienda Caminos full-tuition fellowships, or to donate generously to support our lay ministry students, stop by our booth at the 2024 RE Congress, or contact us at mapm@stjohnsem.edu

Stuart Squires, Ph.D.

Director of the Online M.A. in Pastoral Ministry Program

Summer Experiences



My CPE Experience and Being Present for Those Who Suffer

Jessie Valdovinos
Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Theology 2

During the past summer, I had the privilege of experiencing hospital ministry at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles, CA, through the Clinical Pastoral Experience (CPE) program. This program offered ample opportunities for seminarians to explore various religions, cultures, and beliefs while enabling us to minister to the Catholic population. Through my interactions and visits with patients, I encountered profound sources of knowledge and wisdom. Their experiences became a testament to how they carried their own sufferings, providing insights into how one can help bear the burden akin to how Jesus carried His Cross.

Pope Benedict XVI taught that the answer to the predicament of suffering lies within the Cross of Jesus, where strength, confidence, and hope are found. A notable disparity I observed among patients of different faiths was that, for Catholics, suffering and death hold meaningful significance. We can turn to Jesus on the Cross and find the strength to align our sufferings with His. Conversely, for patients of other faiths, suffering and death aren't inherently redemptive because they lack a personal God who endured suffering and death for them. This doesn't diminish the patient's suffering but provides a distinct perspective that illuminates their tribulations through the light of Christ.

Contemplating how the patients' suffering aligns with the suffering of Jesus compelled me to visit and offer presence to these individuals. In doing so, I felt I was also consoling Jesus, present in the suffering patient, much like He was in Gethsemane two millennia ago. The opportunity to minister to the sick brought me immense joy and provided a platform to practice my future role. I could listen to the sick, offer my presence, pray with them, and facilitate an environment where they could sense God's presence during my visit.

This hospital experience significantly contributed to my discernment process. I eagerly anticipate utilizing the skills I acquired during this summer in my future ministry as a priest.



My Spanish Immersion Experience in Guatemala

Juan Pablo Chavez
Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Theology 2

In the summer of 2023, I had the opportunity to take a missionary trip to Guatemala, a new location and a new way of living that changed my life. I had never been to Guatemala, nor do I have family members from there, so many things were surprises. Based on past visits to Guadalajara, my first expectation was that all families would have access to clean, filtered water. The second was that the weather would get humid. Based on warnings from friends and family, the last expectation was that it was dangerous.

When I arrived, I did not know the priest I would stay with, but before leaving, I heard that I would be staying with another seminarian, a local of Guatemala. When I arrived at the airport, I saw a person speaking my name in a questioning tone. I identified myself, and he introduced himself in broken English. When I responded in Spanish, he laughed in relief and began speaking with me in Spanish. They told me they bought a dictionary to study English and joked about downloading Google Translate on their phones. Later that day, they took me to the rectory where I would be staying, which had no power due to a power outage. My second expectation was wholly fulfilled. It was very humid.

Although I always felt safe, I was aware that there was drug crime that made people suffer. One area in San Luis Jilotepeque, where our rectory was located, had places I avoided. The rest of the time, I felt safe walking around and meeting the people. Though poor, they have faith and are generous, bringing the gifts of bread and wine and food offerings to the altar. In turn, the priests shepherd the people constantly, praying and helping them outside the church at different chapels.

I was there between mid-July and mid-August, the time of rain for them, but through July, there was no rain. The people rely on the rain for the crops they live on, so I could see their stress. I will not forget our great responsibility as a church to care for God's poor everywhere.

CELEBRATING GROWTH AND GRATITUDE

Dear Friends of the Seminary,

Your prayers and kindness are greatly appreciated in our mission at St. John's Seminary as we celebrate another 17 graduates ordained to the priesthood this past summer. There is much to be thankful for as we experienced many exciting events this year, primarily the appointment of four new auxiliary bishops in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Bishop Albert M. Bahhuth and Bishop Brian A. Nunes are both graduates of St. John's Seminary (1996 and 2008 respectively) and Bishop Slawomir Szkredka has served as a professor and formator at the seminary since 2015.

We have also implemented two major changes to our academic program based on guidance set forth by The Program for Priestly Formation, 6th Edition. The first change is the addition of one more year of study known as the Propaedeutic Year (please see page 5 to learn more). The second

change is that the final semester of study will be spent in the parishes as our seminarians, who are now Deacons, will enter into an internship and support a priest, becoming fully immersed in parish life.

It is reassuring to see our seminary grow and improve, ensuring we equip our seminarians with an excellent education preparing them for the priesthood. We thank you for your continued support, without which we wouldn't be able to continue the mission of St. John's Seminary.

Sincerely,
The Office of Development



Scan today and make a gift to sustain the formation of our priests in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.



LEAVING A LASTING LEGACY

Have you considered these options in your planned giving?

Bequest: With the help of an attorney, you can include language in your will or trust specifying a gift to be made to St. John's Seminary.

Beneficiary Designation Gifts: You can designate St. John's Seminary as a beneficiary of a retirement, investment, or bank account or your life insurance.

IRA Rollover: If you are 70 1/2 or older, an IRA charitable rollover is a way you can help continue our work and benefit this year.

Gifts of Stock: It can be advantageous to donate stock, as the full value is often tax-deductible with no capital gains taxes to pay.

Donor Advised Fund:

Contributions to this investment account support an individual's charitable giving over time, may be eligible for an immediate tax deduction, and can be invested for tax-free growth.

If you are interested in learning about ways you can support St. John's Seminary and other ways to give, please contact:

Office of Development
(805) 482-2755 x 1006
www.stjohnsem.edu/ways-to-give

A special thank you to The Dan Murphy Foundation and our generous donors who supported our window renovations!



2022-2023 YEAR-END FUNDRAISING RESULTS

\$1,663,052

\$173,045
GENERAL
DONATIONS

\$608,430
2022 GALA

\$543,234
GRANTS AND
RESTRICTED GIFTS

\$88,168
CHRISTMAS
APPEAL

\$16,118
EASTER
APPEAL

\$14,210
ST. JOHN'S
FEAST DAY

\$8,055
THE EVANGELIST
NEWSMAGAZINE

\$4,560
STOCK
DONATIONS

GOAL: \$1.5M

PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Father, in every generation you provide ministers of Christ and the Church.

We come before you now, asking that you call forth more priests to serve our Church. Give us priests who will lead and guide your holy people gathered by Word and Sacrament.

Bless us with priestly vocations so that we can continue to be a truly Eucharistic Church, strengthened in our discipleship of Jesus Christ, your only Son.

Raise up, we pray, priests who are generous in their service, willing to offer their lives and all their gifts for your greater glory and the good of your people.

We make our prayer in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

SEMINARIAN STATS

- 48** Seminarians on campus
- 20** Transitional Deacons serving in our parishes
- 8** Seminarians on Pastoral Year Experience
- 10** Diocese served by our Seminary



A special congratulations to our deacons as they go forth to serve our parishes.

St. John's Seminary

2023 Annual Gala

**We thank all who supported
and attended our Annual
Gala, filling this year with
wonderful memories of joy
and kindness.**



**Watch our 2023
Honoree Acceptance
Speeches today**

As we gathered together on the plaza of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angeles on September 16, 2023, we were fortunate to have such a wonderful turnout, with nearly 1000 guests in attendance! Your generosity was boundless as together we raised a record breaking \$750,000 in support of the mission of St. John's Seminary.

That evening we honored Reverend Monsignor John Moretta, who celebrates fifty-five years since his ordination and graduation from St. John's Seminary; Reverend Rodel Balagtas, a graduate of the class of 1991, also serving as an adjunct professor then Director of Pastoral Formation and Vice Rector from 2012 to 2019; and Most Reverend Timothy E. Freyer, ordained a priest in 1989 and elevated to Auxiliary Bishop in the Diocese of Orange in 2017.

We also presented the Evangelii Gaudium Award (Joy of the Gospel) to Kathy Anderson, President and Executive Director of the Catholic Community Foundation of Los Angeles (CCF-LA), for her deep-rooted commitment to generously investing her own time, talents, and treasure in Catholic school education, which dovetails into religious formation. We thank you all for making this year's Annual Gala an incredible success and hope you can join us next year to celebrate the 85th Anniversary of St. John's Seminary!



FALL HIGHLIGHTS



Admission to Candidacy

The Admission to Candidacy rite offers the candidates for ordination the opportunity to publicly express their intention to receive ordination as a Deacon and perhaps later as a Priest. The aspirant composes beforehand and then signs and dates before the start of the rite in the presence of the Bishop a declaration in one's own hand stating his conscious intention to serve others in the Spirit of Compassionate Presence as an ordained cleric and is making this intention freely on his own accord. The Bishop also signs and dates this declaration attesting acknowledgement of receipt thereof in the name of the Church.



Institution of the Ministry of Reader

The reader is responsible for the reading of the Scriptures (except for the Gospel) during liturgical assembly. The reader may also direct the singing and present the general intercessions when a deacon or cantor is absent. The reader may also prepare another member of the faithful to read the Scriptures on a temporary basis.



Dia de los Muertos Altar of Repose

Our annual altar of repose held the images of seminarians' loved ones who had passed away. The seminarians could pray for them and for the faithful departed during quiet moments throughout their day.



Mass for the Newly Ordained

Every year our newly ordained priests are welcomed back to the seminary for a mass and dinner, concluding with each returning priest sharing anecdotes and advice about their first months in the parishes.

2023 *Jubilate Deo* Winner

Dr. Paul F. Ford



Dr. Paul F. Ford Receives The Jubilate Deo Award: A Distinguished Journey in Pastoral Liturgy and Scholarship

St. John's Seminary would like to congratulate Dr. Paul F. Ford for receiving The Jubilate Deo Award in recognition of his substantial contributions to the development of pastoral liturgy in the United States.

Paul F. Ford is a nationally recognized musician, teacher, author, composer, pastoral liturgist, and speaker. Born in Ludlow, Massachusetts, he grew up in Ridgecrest, California and finished minor seminary in 1967 in Fresno, California, where he sang under the direction of Dimitri Kostiw and studied organ with Esther Frankian. He then finished major seminary in 1973 at Saint John's Seminary in Camarillo, California. Rather than being ordained, he became a Benedictine monk at St. Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo which sent him to be the first Roman Catholic doctoral student in the school of theology at Fuller Seminary. Dr. Ford left monastic life and began teaching at Fuller where, for ten years, he was the teaching assistant to the dean of the school of theology and lecturer in New Testament spirituality. Ford returned to Saint John's Seminary in 1988 to teach spiritual theology, ecclesiology, sacramental theology, and liturgical music. He is the author of six books and seventy-two articles.

With the success of his English version of the Graduale Simplex, *By Flowing Waters: Chant for the Liturgy* (two books and three CDs), the Liturgical Press asked him to

edit the successor to The Collegeville Hymnal. Instead, he persuaded the Press to move in the direction of Give Us This Day, a monthly publication of daily prayer, and Psallite, a collection of more than three hundred antiphons and psalms for Sundays, solemnities, feasts, weddings, and funerals. With the Collegeville Composers Group, he is the coauthor of eight music books and seven CDs.

Dr. Ford has assisted individual bishops in writing pastoral letters and in analyzing Roman documents, and in the editing of the music portions of the U.S. editions of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. The opportunity of his seminary's jubilee, a new parish church, and a new cathedral led Ford to write about the Rite of Dedication. Similarly, the new translation of the missal caused him to assemble and distribute a Companion to the Roman Missal at the dozens of workshops he gave in the west. He has done extensive work on the Chrism Mass, Candidacy, and the Mass for Ministers of the Church.

In addition to these accomplishments, Ford is an internationally known scholar of the writings of C. S. Lewis and is the author of the award-winning book, Companion to Narnia, of Pocket Companion to Narnia, of Yours, Jack: Spiritual Direction from C. S. Lewis, and of Words to Live By: A Dictionary for the Mere Christian. His wife, Dr. Janice Daurio, is a philosopher at colleges, universities, and seminaries for forty years.

He is dedicating his retirement to preparing permanent deacons at St. John's Seminary and helping parishes renew their experience of Sunday Mass.

SEMINARIAN SPOTLIGHTS



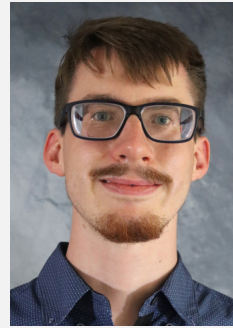
Matthew Casillas
Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Propaedeutic

My spiritual walk began 3 years ago during a time I practiced new age spirituality and was gradually coming to know God. Though I never abandoned my belief in God, I was never a devout Catholic or knew Him personally. New age

appealed to me because of the powers you could access such as “manifesting” where I could “manifest” all my egotistical desires such as, money, success, fame, etc. I figured both can coexist and thus live in blissful ignorance. However, a question of “can I pray to both God and the universe” arose a couple of times but I never bothered to answer it. I discarded this question, but God didn’t.

Around March of 2020, to cope with my anxiety and to learn a bit more about God, I began to read the Bible, attend Mass almost every Sunday, and pray often. Life was fine up until late August of 2020 when He answered the question I had discarded. I had a sort of “Illumination of Conscience” in which He revealed to me through a YouTube video the reality of new age spirituality after weeks of ignoring the video. As I watched it, I felt the veil of lies of the new age being removed from my eyes as well as feeling the weight of my sins being stacked up on me. Even though the truth had been revealed to me, I no longer knew who I was or where I was headed. All I knew was that there is only one God and that He truly exists.

For the next year, I formed an active relationship with God, listened to Christian apologists to help strengthen my faith, and asked Him to show me what my true calling in life is. And for the first time in my life, I began to feel a consistent peace I never felt before. After nearly leaving the Catholic faith, I sought spiritual direction to figure out my next steps in my life and career. I emerged, however, with more questions as I was now presented with a path to discern the priesthood. But I was open to the idea given the gratitude I felt for what Christ did on the cross for me and humanity. After months of prayer and continued “yes’s” to his invitations, I was accepted and entered the seminary in August of this year. If I am called to be a priest, my desire is to help bring people out of the lies of this world I had fallen to, proclaim God’s eternal truth and good news and help guide them into heaven. Coming to Christ was not easy nor is life as a Catholic, but I have been blessed beyond reason with the new life I’ve been given, so I wouldn’t want it any other way.



Joshua Haering
Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Propaedeutic

My name is Joshua Haering. I am 22 years old and was born and raised in a Catholic family, growing up in Lancaster, CA. After my Baptism, I started to learn about my faith through my family. This continued when I went to Catholic

school. I attended Sacred Heart School and Paraclete High School in Lancaster. In those formative years, I followed what my family did for the Catholic faith. I went with them to Mass on Sunday and prayed sometimes. But my priorities were doing well in school, developing my passion for math and science, and forming good friendships. This was not all bad, but without having faith being the focus of my life it caused me to become selfish and start to go down a dark path.

Then, during a youth group meeting in October 2016, we had Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. I experienced the True Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist by simply seeing a face of a suffering Man appear to me in the open tabernacle. I saw Jesus as a true and real Person who always loves me and wants to get to know me. By this encounter, I started to take my faith seriously and began to discern my vocation, deciding between marriage and priesthood.

After I graduated from Paraclete High School in 2019, I went to UCLA to study for a bachelor’s degree in Astrophysics. I got involved in the Catholic Center on campus and found a great community that supported my spiritual growth and helped me to continue to discern priesthood. In addition, learning Astrophysics at UCLA helped me to better appreciate God’s creation and intelligence. It reinforced my Catholic faith. Through this time, though, I realized that pursuing a career in astronomy was not fulfilling my desire to help people and serve the Church. So, in October 2022, I decided to apply to St. John’s Seminary. I graduated from UCLA in June 2023 and now I am at St. John’s Seminary. I still have struggles in many aspects of my life, but I am continuing to grow closer to God and following His Will through prayer and seminary formation.

SEMINARIAN SPOTLIGHTS



Deacon Eduardo Pruneda
Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Theology 4

I come from a Catholic family and am the third of four brothers. I was born and raised in a small town north of the city of San Luis Potosi, Mexico, which has deep Catholic roots. Although my family never talked about the priesthood,

my mother's side of the family was always close to the parish priest. Through this closeness, I was able to see the priest's life, his ministry, and his pastoral work in the community, as well as his human side during family gatherings where he used to play the guitar and sang with my uncles.

I don't remember the exact moment I felt the calling, but as far back as I can remember, I felt that the priesthood was meant for me. At the age of 16, I entered the High School Seminary in San Luis Potosi, where I discovered that vocation is like walking without a map, always trusting in God's plan even when we don't have all the answers.

After three years of formation, I entered the Hispanic Seminary in Mexico City, where I went through a major vocational crisis that led me to leave the formation for a year. During that time, I was invited to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Despite having many doubts, I trusted that it was God who was guiding me. Here in Los Angeles, I realized that I was in the place where God wanted me to be. Although I left my family behind, I felt at home here.

During my last five years at St. John's, I have grown and strengthened my calling through my formation, understanding that it's not about what kind of priest I want to be, but rather what kind of priest the people of God need. Since I was a child, I knew that through the priesthood, I could spread the Kingdom of God so that people may know and love Jesus. Now, as I approach my ordination, I can say from the depths of my heart that I want to be the instrument through which men and women encounter God.



Marko Rudela
Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Theology 4

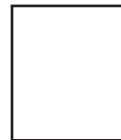
Looking back on my six-and-a-half years of seminary formation, I can see how our Lord has been preparing me for priestly ministry, especially through Eucharistic adoration.

The seminary's insistence on the practice of a daily holy hour has helped me see adoration as a school of discernment and purification. In times of struggle, or when questioning whether to continue formation, I have learned that the right response is to remain faithful to my time with Jesus in the tabernacle. I would often come seeking consolation and answers, and I must admit that I seldom received either. Rather, the one thing I felt Our Lord insist on was perseverance. In moments when I felt the grass would be greener elsewhere, He told me to stay. When I felt unfit to serve the church in Los Angeles, again He told me to hang on.

Looking back, I believe Our Lord was not only helping me advance towards ordination but was also purifying me. Before the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus has a special way of revealing our shortcomings; not to embarrass us, but to show us the areas where we can grow to love Him more. Even recently Our Lord has brought to light areas that He wants me to work on as I transition to full-time ministry. I know that this is all part of Our Lord's plan to conform me to Himself as a loving and merciful priest. Every day of perseverance is another day of purification, becoming more and more the disciple that Christ has called me to be. I know that He will remain faithful to me, and I ask the prayers of all the faithful for my classmates and myself that we may remain faithful to Him.



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Congratulations to the 2023 Newly Ordained Priests

Archdiocese of Los Angeles

Rev. Michael DiPietro
Rev. Cesar Galan
Rev. Rene Harpaintner
Rev. Hieu Nguyen
Rev. Luis Pena
Rev. Enrique Piceno
Rev. Emmanuel Sanchez

Diocese of Fresno

Rev. Jorge Cruz Paez
Diocese of Monterey
Rev. Francisco Garcia
Rev. Luis Rodriguez
Rev. Carlos Warfield

Diocese of Orange

Rev. David Moreno
Rev. Benjamin Nguyen

Diocese of San Bernardino

Rev. Maurice Quindoy

Diocese of Tucson

Rev. Abundio Colazo
Rev. Luis Ochoa
Rev. Roberto Villablanca