

# CHOICES

FROM THE CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS OFFICE OF VOCATIONS

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## **IN THIS ISSUE:**

Ordinations 2011

## It is amazing...



Holy Cross vocation directors, Fr. Jim Gallagher, C.S.C., and Fr. Drew Gawrych, C.S.C., on recent pilgrimage to St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal, Canada.

...what can happen when we place our trust in the Lord.

Blessed Basil Moreau, the founder of Holy Cross, entrusted his fledgling community from LeMan, France, to the guidance of Divine Providence. Within his lifetime this group of priests, brothers, and sisters, united in service to the Gospel, had spread to three continents and was doing more good than Blessed Moreau could have ever anticipated or orchestrated on his own. Today, Holy Cross continues to live out the vision of its founder through educational, parish, and missionary work in 15 countries across the world.

The individual lives of Holy Cross priests and brothers also display the power of Divine Providence at work. As three newly ordained Holy Cross priests, Father Paul Ybarra, C.S.C., Father John Britto Anthony, C.S.C., and Father Alfredo Ledezma, C.S.C., can attest, God has drawn them into something greater than anything they could have imagined for themselves. Each took a different path to the priesthood, yet along the way all three placed their trust in God's call and they have found the joy and fulfillment that comes from doing so. In this issue of CHOICES we invite you to learn about how these men came to hear and answer God's call.

There is nothing greater that any of us can ask for or imagine than what God has in store for us. Yet hearing and answering His call is not always easy. This is why the Office of Vocations regularly offers opportunities for young men to take some time away from their busy lives to listen more closely to how God is calling them. These retreat weekends are featured in the final pages of this issue. We encourage anyone who may be considering a call to the religious life or priesthood to join us on the retreat that is right for them.

Turning one's life over to the will of God is intimidating, yet nothing can bring us greater joy. Contact us to find out how we can help you put your trust in God's call.

In Holy Cross,  
Rev. James T. Gallagher, C.S.C.  
Director, Office of Vocations

## Religious Calling a Gift to Be Cherished

*John Britto Anthony, C.S.C.*



Born into a family of devout Catholics in a traditionally Christian village in South India, John Britto grew up knowing religious life was his calling. "I always had the desire to be a priest from a young age. My mom and I would attend the

Holy Eucharist every day at 6:00 a.m. without fail," Father John recalls. Although his mother is now gone, he credits both his parents for his vocation. "My father today, at 94, attends the daily Eucharist."

Staying true to his early calling, Father John enrolled in the Juniorate program of Holy Cross at 13, after his eighth grade year in school. "The Brothers of Holy Cross have a large school near my village, and one of my uncles who worked in the school brought me news of the new program called Juniorate that was just then initiated in 1977 and meant to help young men enter Holy Cross."

Father John's decision to join the Brothers of Holy Cross in 1984 delighted his parents, who had hoped that a few of their five children would be called to serve through religious life. "Becoming a brother or a priest was a foregone

### *At a glance ...*

**JOHN BRITTO ANTHONY, C.S.C.**

**Born:** 1963 Agraharam, Salem, India

**College:** Annamalai University,  
Chidambaram, India

**Graduate Study:** M.A. English, Loyola College,  
Madras University, Chennai, India;  
Diploma in Philosophy and B. Th.,  
Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, India;  
B. Ed. and M. Ed., Annamalai University;  
M. Phil, Periyar University, Salem, India

**Entered Holy Cross:** June 1984

**First Vows:** May 30, 1985

**Final Vows:** December 8, 1990

**Date of Ordination:** April 30, 2011

conclusion of my parents and the pastor of our parish. My family, as it were, dedicated me to become a priest/religious, along with my sister, who is a religious sister," Father John says. "Everything turned out to be conducive to fostering such a thought in my mind, especially family, school, and parish community."

Since joining Holy Cross, Father John has found the sense of brotherhood fostered by the Congregation to be unlike that of many other religious organizations. "Having experienced brotherhood in Holy Cross at various levels, both national and international, I believe more and more that we are men who love to belong, to witness, to celebrate, and to toil for the Kingdom," he says. "The most distinctive stamp of the Congregation of Holy Cross is that brothers and priests live together as equal members."

During his time as a brother of Holy Cross, Father John served in a variety of leadership positions. His most recent roles included serving as principal of Holy Cross Higher Secondary School in Salem, India, from 2000 to 2005 and as vicariate superior of the Brothers of Holy Cross in South India from 2005 to 2009.

"During my ministry as leader I was instrumental in founding two schools in India and a hostel for students of our school, along with many other projects," Father John recalls. "The excellent teamwork and collaborative efforts of the brothers and the staff were duly rewarded when our school was adjudged the Best School in Salem District and the Third Best School in the State of Tamil Nadu in a statewide survey conducted by Neilson and Sun TV."

Now, over 25 years after joining Holy Cross, Father John continues to be inspired by the Congregation's mission to serve others and spread the Word of God throughout the world. "Driven by the motto, 'The Cross, Our Only Hope,' I have witnessed zealous missionaries who, without minding their hardship, extend their horizon, crossing boundaries and barriers of various sorts to proclaim the Good News."

Father John finds the mission of Holy Cross to be of especially great importance in a time where hope can be hard to find. "In this world which has desperately lost any semblance of hope, being called to be men of hope is a tremendous calling," Father John says. "We strive to make God better known, loved, and served by living lives of commitment."

For Father John, this life of commitment meant entering the priesthood after more than two decades as a brother. "Blessed Basil Moreau, the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross,



**"We hold  
this treasure  
in earthen  
vessels that the  
surpassing power  
may be of God  
and not from us."**

2 Corinthians 4:7



Father John interacting with the children of Sacred Heart-St. Francis De Sales Grade School during his deacon year.

has always urged members of the Congregation to have zeal for the apostolate," he says. "After 25 years of religious life, I have felt a special call within a call to serve the Lord as a religious and as a priest in the sacraments. I cherish my religious life as an immense gift from the Lord and will always be grateful to Him for his steadfast love."

Father John emphasizes that he is thankful for his calling to the priesthood and for the ways that it will allow him to serve God's people. "I am ever grateful to God for this privilege of serving as his priest. What attracts me to priesthood is the opportunity to reach out and touch the faith lives of people through the sacramental activities," he says. "As a priest you have the dual privilege of bringing God to people and bringing people to God."

### ***In his own words...***

*Father John speaks of the importance of taking time to listen for God's call and to follow it wherever it leads.*

The gift of vocation is special to each of us. We are only asked to listen with the *leb somea*—the listening heart—of Solomon to know of God's unique plan for us. In the dizzyingly hurried pace of today, the youth are sucked into this whirlpool in which most of us have not aligned our soul's pace with God's pace. God is yearning for more hands to reach out to those longing for God. Can we stand still a moment to hear the earnest appeal God makes to each of us to make room for Him in our hearts? As St. Augustine said, God is more close to you than you are to yourself. We only need to open our hearts to find him within.

## Heeding the Call: Serving God, Serving Community

*Alfredo Olvera Ledezma, C.S.C.*



From an early age Father Alfredo Olvera Ledezma, C.S.C., heard the call to the priesthood. So instead of following the path of his older siblings who left their native Mexican village to work in Monterrey or Houston, he followed

the path paved by two Holy Cross missionaries. The first was Rev. Frederico Schmidt, C.S.C., who gave many years of his life in mission to the rural area of Mexico where Father Alfredo grew up. Although baptized as an infant by Father Schmidt, Father Alfredo only came to know of this tireless missionary after entering Holy Cross. "People talked about him a lot, and I began to appreciate his influence in my life, although I was unaware of it at the time." The second Holy Cross priest to mark Father Alfredo's life was Rev. Dan Panchot, C.S.C., who regularly came to preach and celebrate the sacraments in San Luis Potosí. It was Father Panchot who invited Father Alfredo to enter the Holy Cross seminary in Monterrey, Mexico.

Once having entered seminary formation, Father Alfredo continued to learn about and encounter the Holy Cross community through different cultural experiences in formation—in Peru and the United States for example. "Meeting so many different members of the community has been the experience that is most enriching for me. Listening to different points of view about ministry, the Church, our life in Holy Cross, and offering some of my own perspectives to the conversation, have been the occasion for much personal growth," he says.

Father Alfredo's theology studies and seminary formation also equipped him intellectually and emotionally for ministry. "I believe that the study of theology with the emphasis on pastoral theology is what has prepared me most for ministry as a priest," he says. "I return to this theological education almost every day



**"Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity."**

1 Timothy 4:12



Father Alfredo celebrating the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick with women from La Luz Parish in Guadalupe, Mexico.

in my life and ministry as a priest. At the same time, I would also say that human formation experiences were very important and helpful. To know myself as a person, to have had good formation experiences in sexuality, in the emotional life, in what it means to be fully human as a man called by God—this was an important part of my formation for ministry and complements the experience of studying theology."

As he anticipated his ordination in the fall of 2010, Father Alfredo felt a mix of deep emotions. He remembers, "As my ordination to the priesthood was approaching, I felt a powerful feeling of joy and happiness that after all the years of preparation the moment of ordination was about to be a reality for me. There was also a sense of fear in my heart, but not fear in the sense of being afraid. The fear came from my sense of being unworthy of this action of God in my life and an awareness of my own limitations in the face of this great calling. Finally, there was also a feeling of complete

### *At a glance ...*

#### **ALFREDO OLVERA LEDEZMA, C.S.C.**

**Born:** 1982, Soledad de Zaragoza, Xilitla, San Luis Potosí, Mexico

**Philosophy:** Seminario Mayor de la Arquidiócesis de Monterrey

**Theology:** Instituto Franciscano de Teología, Monterrey

**Entered Holy Cross:** August 1998

**First Vows:** January 6, 2002

**Final Vows:** September 6, 2008

**Date of Ordination:** September 18, 2010

trust in God because this was His action and I surrendered my life into His hands.”

The community life of the parish has been a fertile field of ministry for Father Alfredo. In particular, he has been energized by the role the priest plays in building up this community of faith through the celebration of the sacraments. “What means more to me than anything else is my experience of ministry in the parish, serving the people, drawing close to them and their feeling close to me. As a priest, the celebration of the sacraments falls into this experience of being close to the people, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation,” he says. “Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation is such an intimate moment for a priest; for me, you are an intermediary between this person who opens his heart and soul to you on the one hand and our God who loves this person and forgives.”

Father Alfredo feels blessed “to be present in the lives of people during the most important moments: the birth of child, a wedding, anointing someone who is very sick, commending the soul of a dying person to the Lord, standing by a grieving family. To be with people at these moments in their life, just as Christ would be, is most attractive to me.”

To those young men considering a vocation, Father Alfredo offers two words of advice: “First, listen to God’s voice that comes from within you. Second, recognize that your vocation is a call to serve others in the world.”

### ***In his own words...***

*Looking to the future of the Church and Holy Cross, Father Alfredo shares a few of his dreams:*

My hope is that the Church will be open and responsive to the needs of today’s people, the real needs of our time. My hope is that as a Church we can gather together and identify, for example, those factors in our culture that undermine family life or the future for our youth. In addition to identifying the needs, it is my hope that we can develop a plan of action in response to them. Then, as the Church we will be doing God’s will by supporting these people in their call to holiness. My hope for Holy Cross is the same because we are part of the Church. For us, our charism as *educators in the faith*, as *men with hope to bring*—especially for the poor and marginalized—becomes the lens through which we discern the signs of our times and respond to them.



**“We know that all things work for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose.”**

Romans 8:28

## **An Instrument of God’s Grace in the World**

*Paul M. Ybarra, C.S.C.*



Inspired by dynamic priests of the Congregation of Holy Cross throughout his years as an undergraduate at the University of Notre Dame as well as during his time in the Alliance for Catholic Education program, Paul Ybarra found that working in edu-

cation was the final step in discerning God’s call.

“Dedication and joy in serving the people of St. John Vianney Parish and School (in Good-year, Ariz.) made the decision clear for me: If priesthood was the path I was going to take in life, then it would be through the Congregation of Holy Cross,” Father Paul says.

Father Paul’s experience in and enthusiasm for education made Holy Cross a good fit for him. As a member of Holy Cross, he continuously finds his talents being put to great use. “Time and time again, I found that my previous experiences in life, as well as the gifts that God has given me, were being utilized by the Congregation to further the faith of the people we serve as well as cement my vocational path toward priesthood,” Father Paul recalls. “There was a synergy, a blending together of my gifts with the goals of the order. I felt then and have continued to feel a profound trust in my superiors in Holy Cross, that they will send me to serve in places that will utilize my God-given gifts and enthusiasm to live Christ’s good news in word and sacrament.”

In fact, Father Paul’s trust was further bolstered when he was sent to serve as a deacon at St. Ignatius Martyr Parish in Austin, Texas. As a vibrant bilingual parish with a school, it was an assignment that fully engaged Father Paul’s diverse interests and energy for ministry.

While Father Paul now considers Holy Cross his family, he initially had trouble deciding to join the priesthood because he had always wanted a family of his own. “I had it in my mind while I was in college that I would eventually

move back to California, close to my immediate family, that I would marry and start my own family. Priesthood was always in the back of my mind throughout my time at Notre Dame, but the idea of family and returning home was more dominant,” Father Paul recalls. “It was during my time teaching in the ACE program at St. John Vianney Parish and School that I thought seriously about abandoning the dream of a family of my own and following another dream by joining the family of Holy Cross.”

Father Paul was encouraged by the realization that the men of Holy Cross who worked with him at St. John Vianney all lived far from their own families but led meaningful, purpose-driven lives of service through their everyday ministry. “In their tireless work and example, I found myself wanting a life like theirs. My own service to that school and parish community also opened me up to the possibilities of religious life,” Father Paul remembers. “I spent my day teaching other people’s children, sometimes spending more time with them than their own parents. I realized that raising children requires a community of people, one that would ensure the formation of good, loving Christians.”

The community and family of Holy Cross offer Father Paul a strong support system that he has come to rely on for fellowship and guidance. He has gained both brothers and sisters in Christ through the Holy Cross communities he is privileged to be a part of, as well as from the many families they serve. “I am supported in my vows by men who have experienced the trials and tribulations of ministry and have bore it well. They have instilled in me a great hope that I too may be an image of the Cross, and that I may pass on this legacy to others who will come after me.”

While the Holy Cross community provides Father Paul with a caring, familial atmosphere, he also makes sure to find quiet time for prayer



**“Forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling in Christ Jesus.”**

Philippians 3:13-4



Father Paul sharing the faith with the youth of St. Ignatius Martyr Parish.

and devotion. “I pray the Liturgy of the Hours and the Rosary. I hope that in my moments of prayer throughout the day, whether it be a simple ‘Come Holy Spirit’ as Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., so strongly recommends, or the simple blessing before meals that are all too often done with haste, that I might have God’s graces flow through me, that I might be a man who is good and loving to others,” Father Paul says. “I wish to be as our founder implored us all to be: an instrument of God’s grace in the world.”

### ***In his own words...***

*Father Paul speaks about what he considers his most formative experience, ministering to chemotherapy and radiation patients as a chaplain at Penrose Hospital in Colorado Springs, Colo.*

I sat with men and women, and simply listened to their hopes and disappointments as they battled cancer. Sadly, some would die sooner than others; some would live a longer life, survivors who truly embodied the resurrection, people who battled death and won but for a while to stay—more time to see their children and grandchildren—to die maybe in peace, free from the ravages of this disease. From them I learned how to bear the cross well—to be generous with your time, to be loving and caring to the doctors and nurses that you meet, even as they inject toxic chemicals into your veins, bombard you with radiation, all in the hopes of killing the cancer before it kills your body.

Ultimately, life mattered so much as I sat and talked with these men and women who stood on the precipice of death. I learned from them that it is *how* you live that matters, *for we all die*, but we have not all lived with such grace and joy as I witnessed in those patients.

### ***At a glance ...***

**PAUL M. YBARRA, C.S.C.**

**Born:** 1980 in Los Angeles, Calif.

**College:** University of Notre Dame

**Graduate Study:** M. Ed. 2002-2004,

M. Div. 2004-2010, University of Notre Dame

**Entered Holy Cross:** August 2004

**First Vows:** July 29, 2006

**Final Vows:** August 28, 2010

**Date of Ordination:** April 30, 2011

# If God is calling, how will you know?

Oftentimes, in the noise of modern life, the call to religious life and the priesthood is drowned out. Sometimes God's call comes in the form of a whisper, an ever-present thought in your mind, a desire for deeper meaning and relationship. Is God calling you? How do you know with certainty? If you are called, what is the next step in making the priesthood a reality? Consider a retreat with us.

Holy Cross offers carefully planned retreats for three distinct audiences who are considering a call to the religious life and priesthood. One of these retreats may be helpful in choosing your life's direction.

- ▶ **High school juniors and seniors** are invited to experience a weekend at Old College (the undergraduate seminary program) at the University of Notre Dame for a **Come and See Weekend**. Over the weekend, guests meet current seminarians, see their daily routines, and hear about their formation firsthand. Parents are welcome for the weekend events, too. High school juniors come for a weekend designated for them in the spring semester. High school seniors are invited to campus on **September 22-24, 2011**.
- ▶ **College sophomores, juniors, and seniors** considering the religious life are encouraged to consider the **College Discernment Retreat**. The weekend provides students with instruction on prayer and discernment as well as time for reflection on God's call through personal prayer, Eucharistic Adoration, Liturgy of the Hours, and daily Mass. This year's retreat will be held **November 11-13, 2011**.
- ▶ **College graduates** interested in the religious life and priesthood are invited to the **Graduate Discernment Retreat** at Moreau Seminary on the Notre Dame campus, **June 24-26, 2011**. Weekend topics will include prayer, discernment, seminary life, priesthood, and ministry, as well as the Holy Cross mission and charism.

All three retreats allow for private prayer and reflection as well as time for conversation with priests, seminarians, and members of the vocations team.

*For more information or to request a registration form, please contact us, the Office of Vocations at (574) 631-6385 or [vocation.1@nd.edu](mailto:vocation.1@nd.edu), or visit [holycrossvocations.org](http://holycrossvocations.org).*

*"Come, follow me."*

MATTHEW 4:19





*I will give you shepherds  
after my own heart.*

JEREMIAH 3:15



CONGREGATION OF  
**HOLY CROSS**  
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If you have ever had the feeling that God may be calling you  
to the religious life or the priesthood, please visit us at

[holycrossvocations.org](http://holycrossvocations.org)