

August 2020

# INTO THE DEPTHS

Office of Priestly Vocations  
Catholic Diocese of Peoria

comeandfollowme.org • 309.671.1550 • fr\_hepner@cdop.org



## MEET NICK CONNER



**Birthday:** April 26

**Home Parish:** Holy Family Parish, Peoria

**Year Entered Seminary:** 2018  
**Ordination Class:** 2024

**Studying at:** Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, MD

**Why did you enter seminary?**  
After graduating from Peoria Notre Dame I got involved with

the Newman Center community at Illinois State University. There I discovered a universal call to holiness, no matter my vocation. I formed valuable friendships during this time enabling me to learn about struggles I had never personally encountered. I was able to walk with my friends who were going through various trials and allow them to help me with my own. My love for my friends is where my calling to the priesthood matured. I came to understand a priest not as someone who secludes himself from the world, but as a man who lives for others. I gradually began to desire "laying down my life" for my brothers and sisters.

### What did you do before entering seminary?

I graduated from Illinois State University in 2017 with a Bachelor's Degree in Finance. I then spent a year working at Pekin Insurance while actively discerning the priesthood.

### What is an interesting fact about you?

I have played ice hockey since I was 3 and would consider myself to be an expert on the history of the Detroit Red Wings.

### Which saints are you closest to and why?

St. John Paul II has been a source of inspiration from the start of my faith journey, but the lives of the saints in general play a very important role in my spiritual life, so it is very difficult to just pick one. Pope Benedict XVI describes the saints as the true interpreters of Scripture, because they allowed the Word of God to become a lived experience in their everyday lives.



## Catholic Schools Foster a Culture of Vocations

By Jerry Sanderson

Catholic schools form the whole person – mind, body, and soul. In Catholic schools, students learn about the profound mysteries of our faith, they learn how to pray, they learn to recognize their unique gifts and talents, and they discover how to put what they have learned at the service of others. In a world where a call to the priesthood or religious life can be difficult to discern, Catholic schools provide an environment where God's call can be heard and nurtured.

According to a 2014 study conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), Catholic schools are incubators for vocations. One in four students who have attended Catholic schools have considered a vocation to the priesthood, compared to just ten percent of those who have not attended a Catholic school. In addition, more than half of new priests have attended Catholic schools. The CARA study concluded that "if fewer and fewer Catholics enroll in Catholic schools, it will become ever more challenging for the Catholic Church to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life."



Catholic schools in the Diocese of Peoria offer a variety of opportunities for children to grow in their love of Jesus Christ and discern God's will for their lives. Many schools include prayers for vocations to the



priesthood and religious life in their daily intentions each morning. Prayers for vocations are also included in the general intercessions during school liturgies. Frequent opportunities are provided for Eucharistic adoration and confession. The rosary is recited on a regular basis. Children learn about the lives of the saints and the many ways they served God in their daily lives. Students are encouraged to take an active role in the liturgical life of the Church as altar servers, lectors, and musicians. Students engage in community service through nursing home visits, donating items to crisis pregnancy centers, and volunteering at local food pantries and soup kitchens.

Many of our Catholic schools have a vocations bulletin board near the front entrance to remind students of religious vocations. Posters of diocesan seminarians grace our school hallways. Each school has "adopted a seminarian" who they pray

*Continued at top of second page...*

for on a regular basis. Seminarians receive notes, greeting cards, care packages, and spiritual bouquets from Catholic school students. A number of seminarians even arrange video conferences with students to keep in touch and share what seminary life is like. Children at all grade levels participate in vocations awareness lesson plans. Guest speakers are invited into our classrooms to share how they discerned their call to the priesthood or religious life. Many of our diocesan priests have committed to visiting classrooms once a week to teach religion classes and answer students' questions about the Catholic faith. Schools plan regular pilgrimages to shrines and religious sites such as our own Cathedral and the Bishop Fulton J. Sheen Museum. Several schools have a "traveling chalice" program where a chalice travels from home to home, reminding parents and students to offer prayers for an increase of vocations to the priesthood.

St. John Paul II said that "there is a pressing need to implement an extensive plan of vocational promotion, based on personal contact and involving parishes, schools and families in the effort to foster a more attentive reflection on life's essential values" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*). Catholic schools play an important role in such vocational promotion by fostering a culture in which students can discover God's call and develop the courage to live it out.



### MSGR. GEORGE A. CARTON COLLEGE SEMINARIAN SCHOLARSHIP

Thank you to all of our generous donors who tuned into our live streamed event and/or contributed to the Msgr. Carton Scholarship Fund. We are so appreciative of your prayerful and financial support of our seminarians! If you missed the event, you can watch a video of it [here](#).

There's still time to donate! Checks made out to Catholic Diocese of Peoria with "Carton Fund" in the Memo line can be sent to:  
Office of Priestly Vocations: 419 NE Madison Ave. Peoria, IL 61603  
Online donations can be made [here](#).

### UPCOMING EVENTS

Our **Novena to St. Therese**, Patroness of Vocations in our diocese, begins September 22nd. Find the novena prayers [here](#) and join us as we pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life in the Diocese of Peoria.

**Priesthood Sunday** is September 27th. Mark your calendars and join us in celebrating our priests that day!

## A Reflection from St. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*

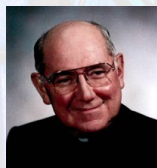
Without priests the Church would not be able to live that fundamental obedience which is at the very heart of her existence and her mission in history, an obedience in response to the command of Christ: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" and "Do this in remembrance of me", i.e.; an obedience to the command to announce the Gospel and to renew daily the sacrifice of the giving of his body and the shedding of his blood for the life of the world.

By faith we know that the Lord's promise cannot fail...Everyone is called upon to share complete trust in the unbroken fulfillment of God's promise...The action of the Father, who raises up vocations, will nonetheless always be at work in the Church."(1)

The first answer which the Church gives to the vocations crisis lies in a total act of faith in the Holy Spirit. We are deeply convinced that this trusting abandonment will not disappoint if we remain faithful to the graces we have received.

## CAN YOU SUPPORT OUR SEMINARIANS?

We know times are hard for everyone right now, and we greatly appreciate any support you can give our seminarians.



The **Msgr. George A. Carton College Seminarian Scholarship Fund** helps fund our college-level seminarians by providing money for their tuition, room and board. To donate to the Msgr. Carton Fund, [click here](#).



The **St. Therese Fund** pays for the tuition, room and board for theologians; salaries; office costs; and marketing expenses that help keep our seminarian program afloat. To donate to the St. Therese Fund, [click here](#).



The **Seminarian Aid Fund** helps our seminarians pay for expenses regarding medical emergencies, or travel home for a death or other family emergency. To donate to the Seminarian Aid Fund, [click here](#).