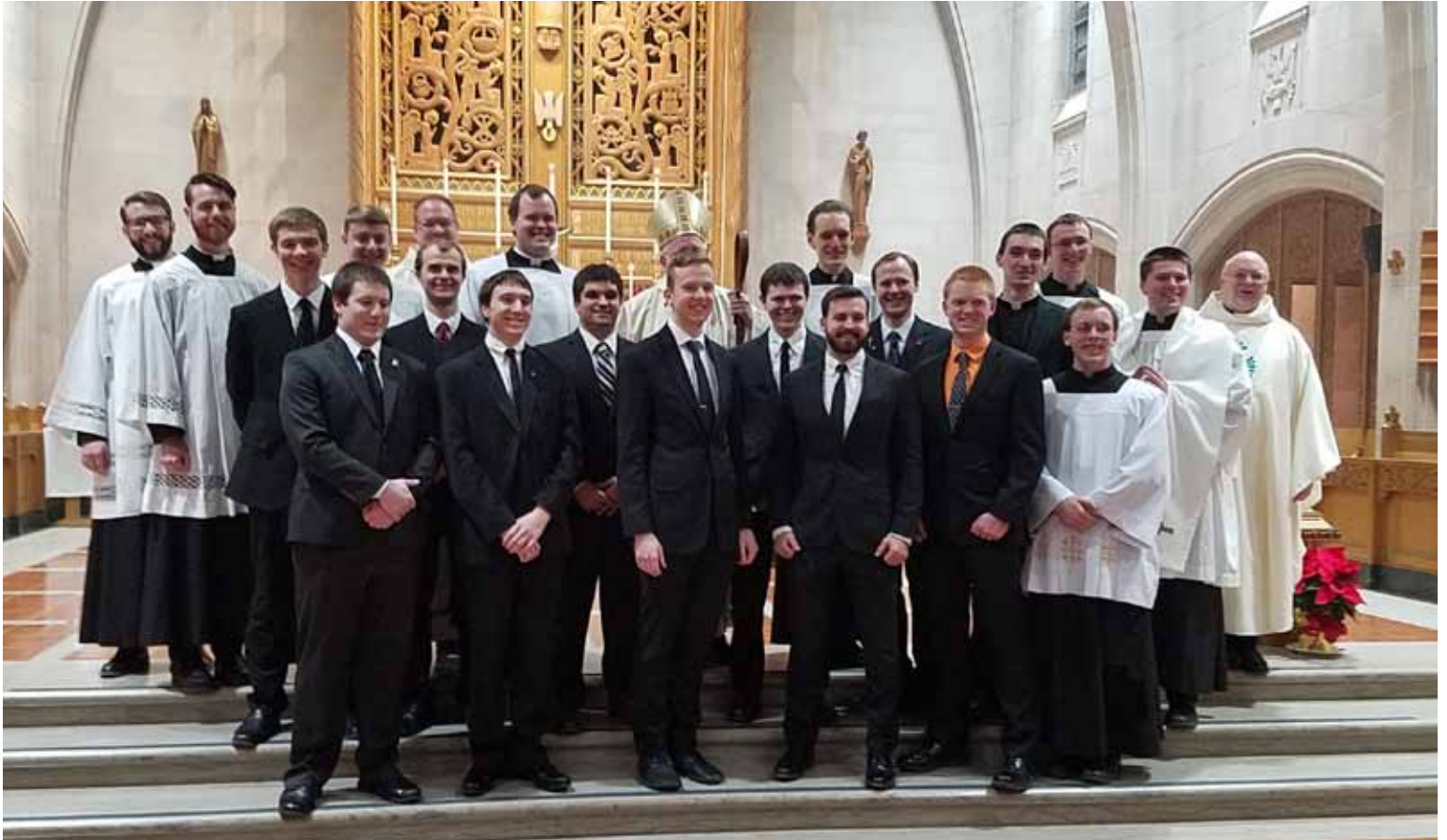




**PASTORAL YEAR**  
What are the benefits?

**REGENCY YEAR**  
What is Regency?

**SEMINARIAN GATHERINGS**  
Seminararian Reflections  
and Fellowship



*Winter Seminararian Gathering December 29, 2017*

## PASTORAL YEAR

By Rev. Alan Wierzb

Preparing men to serve as priests takes time, a lot of time; time for prayer, study, formation and service. The educational portion alone takes 6-8 years. In addition, the seminarians undergo intensive formation to become, as is said, "The best possible version of themselves." Recognizing the need and importance for proper formation, the Vatican recently issued an update of the document that outlines the future direction of seminary and diocesan formation of seminararians worldwide. The Vatican is



calling for two more years of formation, in addition to what is already being done – one year

before the start of seminary and one year as a deacon in a parish in the diocese. We anxiously await how the bishops of the United States will implement the Vatican's call for more formation and how this will look for our future seminararians.

We, too, in the Office for Vocations, see the need for

additional time to work with our seminarians outside of the normal seminary schedule. It is not that our men studying to be priests are bad men; it's much more about the disordered culture and the sinful world in which they grew up, and how that disordered culture has shaped and formed their pattern of thinking, acting and reacting. It is also about the sheer amount of training they need to minister and evangelize in this culture that so adamantly opposes a message of life and holiness. Bishop Callahan has charged us with forming the best priests for the people of the Diocese of La Crosse, and that takes time. Having a semi-

nararian spend a year working in a parish gives us the opportunity to work with the man, and gives him the experience of parish and rectory life to help him discern if priesthood truly is his calling. We have also seen the positive impact a pastoral year has on the parish community, the schools, and the pastor. One need only read the articles that follow, from priests who did pastoral years, from pastors who supervised seminararians on their pastoral years, and from parishioners and schools to see the positive impact of the pastoral year.

Enjoy the articles and thank you for your support.



## SEEING THE SEMINARIANS

By Renee' Orth

*Green Bay Packer Hall of Fame  
August 2, 2017*

I like to see seminarians in my home parish (St. Mary's in Caledonia, Minnesota). Whether they are either visiting and assisting, or spending time on a pastoral year, it has made me look at vocations in a different light. I have learned that these are "normal guys" who like "normal things". These young gentlemen are the future of our parishes. It makes me wonder how many others out there are thinking about priesthood. The more that our seminarians are out in the parishes, helping at events, etc. the more

approachable they seem and the more people keep the idea of vocations in mind. I hope others in the parish feel the same way and it may inspire them to ask a young man they know "Have you ever thought about becoming a priest?"

I enjoy the seminarian gatherings because it's fun to see the guys and get caught up on their lives and school. It's also fun to watch them interact and spend time together and get to know each other on a more personal level.

The Summer Gathering

**"It may inspire them to ask a young man they know, "Have you ever thought about becoming a priest?"**

(which is normally a full week) includes a business meeting and each seminarian has individual meetings with Father Wierzba and Bishop Callahan. We also try to plan a day trip so everyone has a chance to "let their hair down" and have fun together.

We had a generous donor last summer who funded an extra special treat, which included an overnight trip to Green Bay. They saw a couple of shrines and the GREEN BAY PACKER HALL OF FAME!

The Winter Gathering is normally not a full week long (depending on where Christmas falls). They enjoy playing cards and games, watching movies, and gym time. It's mostly a laid back time after Christmas and before heading back to school. The Winter Gathering ends with the Seminarian Family Christmas Party. This is such a fun time! All of the seminarians and I make a great team getting set up and decorated for the big party.

During each seminarian gathering one night is set aside for pizza and a movie with Bishop Callahan at his house. Bishop enjoys spending time with his "embryonic" priests and it's nice for them all to spend some casual time with him.

In the articles that follow you will hear more about seeing seminarians in parishes from different perspectives. The men will also share their thoughts on the seminarian gatherings. Enjoy!

## Father Peter Kieffer - Reflections on his Pastoral Year

"The pastoral year can be a valuable part of a seminarian's formation for the priesthood. It definitely was in my case. After my second year of theology, I took a pastoral year. The pastoral year serves as an opportunity for a man in formation to spend a year living and serving at a parish, with the hope of discerning whether or not God is calling him to parish ministry, as well as growing in any areas of improvement that may be needed.

My pastoral year took place

at the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (St. Mary's) Parish in Marathon, under the guidance of Msgr. Joseph Diermeier. Over the course

**"I'll forever be grateful for that time."**

of that year, Msgr. Diermeier provided me with a number of opportunities at the parish to serve, as well as to grow in confidence and leadership. Some of these included teaching seventh-grade religion at the parish school, assisting



with ninth-grade Confirmation preparation, serving on the RCIA team, and providing Communion to some home-bound residents of the parish.

Pastoral year was my most favorite time during seminary formation. It was a lot of fun, and I'll forever be grateful for that time. I not only grew in confidence and leadership, but I also felt very affirmed in a call to parish ministry. St. Mary's became home, and I became part of their parish family. It was a joyful experience I'll never forget."

# Lu Ann Miller on Having Seminarians in the Parish

Mary Mother of the Church Parish, La Crosse

A seminarian's presence in a parish, alone, brings with it a somewhat special addition. Whether it is through lectoring, cantoring, through administering the sacrament of Holy Communion, or perhaps even teaching parishioners a weekly series on the Excavatium beneath St. Peter's Basilica, one sees and feels how a seminarian connects to others through the liturgical ministry they are a part of within the parish. The parish priest, in my case, Father Brian Konopa, worked at making that connection even stronger, in connecting that seminarian to his entire parish in every way possible. It was simply amazing to see all that it involved.

The seminarian shows not just one person but an entire church of parishioners his love for God, his love for the Catholic faith, his love towards a parish and his want to be a part of a faith family. It is such a special blessing to have a seminarian be a part

**"We are in excellent and very caring hands."**

of not only parish life, but family life. As family helps one another through absolutely wonderful and heartwarming times, they also help through the difficulties and challenges of daily life. As members of any family grow, in age, wisdom, knowledge, and



character; so, too, is one able to see a growth in these young seminarians as their formation continues towards that of the Priesthood. That is what I have seen in having a total of four seminarians being a part of my parish family and my life.

I was also given another, yet, different opportunity to see the effects of a seminari-

an in one's parish every week, specifically on Wednesday evenings, as three seminarians turned into teachers for our 9th grade Religious Education class. I saw how they engaged with these students in helping them to understand the Catholic faith more and deeper. They passed their knowledge of their faith onto these young people and they did so with compassion and with complete devotion. I was able to see even more of a growth take place in the setting of that classroom. What a wonderful and special opportunity to be a witness to all that, as well. As I look back on those times, and in taking me forward, is the beautiful realization that with our Priests of yesterday, our Priests of today and our Priests of tomorrow, to those sitting in the pews of the Catholic churches throughout the Diocese of La Crosse, we are in excellent and very caring hands.



## Sam McCarty - Reflections on his Pastoral Year

Pastoral year for me has been a great experience. I've learned a lot about what priesthood is and what it looks like, which I think is the purpose of spending this time in the parish. In particular I've learned about the business side of parish work, how

**"A particular joy for me this year has been getting to know parishioners."**

ministry plays out on a daily basis, and how to really give of myself like a priest. Being in the parish has given me a better insight into how my identity as a beloved son is the source for my fruitful ministry. Although I do miss being at the seminary with my brothers

and miss my studies, I think this kind of insight requires a person to live in the context of priestly life.

I've been involved in all kinds of things at the parish since I've been here: helping with religious education, visiting the school, attending parish meetings, visiting the sick and homebound, helping with a Bible study, assisting at liturgies, writing bulletin articles, and more. Parish life is busy! The busyness has been good though.

A particular joy for me this year has been getting to know parishioners. The people at St. Patrick's are great, and it's been a blessing to spend time here. I'll be sad when it's time to leave! There have been lots of great relationships and interactions here, lots of good work, and I've learned a lot about priestly life: overall, a great experience.

Fr. John Potaczek and Seminarian Sam McCarty

# Daniel Williams - Reflections on his Pastoral Year

A pastoral year is more than just a year away from seminary formation in my mind. My pastoral year at Mary, Mother of the Church Parish in La Crosse was more a time to discover the characteristics of the priesthood that have begun to grow in myself. Between parish meetings, the sacramental ministry I assisted with, the parish socials, and the many people that I met, I saw Jesus Christ at work in His Church. Through the ministry of the pastor, Fr. Brian Konopa, and the deacon, Dcn. Richard Sage, Christ was being brought to the people of God in this small part of the Diocese of La Crosse.

The greatest lesson I learned during my time on pastoral year was how the life of a priest goes. From waking early in the morning to begin the day with my own personal prayer and Mass with the parishioners to ending the day with a meeting or dinner at a parishioner's home I was able to uniquely enter into the life of the people

and see how God is at work. What a gift! To be invited into people's lives and get to know them in a special way has been the enduring gift of my time at Mary, Mother of the Church.

**“This experience has also enlivened my studies.”**

Having done a pastoral year and now in my second year of Theology studies, I can say that this experience has also enlivened my studies. To have a vantage point of discerning what in my studies is necessary for ministry and how I would present tougher elements of our faith to, God willing, my future parish is also a gift not everyone has to opportunity to gain. My pastoral year also has given me a greater desire for the priesthood and serving as a humble shepherd seeking to bring Christ to others.

These elements and so many more are the graces of my pastoral year experience.



Fr. Brian Konopa and Seminarian Daniel Williams.

I am sure there will be more as I reflect on my time at Mary, Mother of the Church. Pastoral

year was a great gift and I thank God for His providence in giving me such a graced experience.

# Msgr. Joseph Diermeier on Pastoral Year

Along with several other pastors in the Diocese of La Crosse, I have had the privilege to host some of our seminarians in their pastoral year in a parish setting. I think that a pastoral year provides the seminarian with a realistic foundation of what he might expect in his future years of ministry. The pastoral academic year affords the seminarian multiple opportunities to witness first hand some of the joys and sorrows that a pastor experiences. The seminarian is able to experience some of the beautiful as well as some of the painful aspects of ordained ministry. He witnesses the joy of baptisms and other sacraments but he also sees how a pastor responds to tragedy and to grief. He gains knowledge about those things that are routine and those which are more spontaneous in parish life. He gets a taste for the mundane as well as the profound moments of priestly ministry.

I very much enjoyed the times when the seminarians would pose questions



in the course of our daily conversations. Some questions were hypothetical in nature while others touched upon practicalities that the seminarians had observed or had heard about. From the questions they asked I could sense that they were maturing and that the pastoral year was proving to be beneficial. I also found that their questions challenged some of my own ways of thinking or doing things and, therefore, benefitted me as well.

The parish community also became enriched with the presence of a seminarian during his pastoral year. They saw him in prayer, they saw him at liturgy and in a variety of social settings. The seminarian developed many acquaintances through meaningful interaction and also had the opportunity to develop some lasting friendships. Parishioners have

**“I think that a pastoral year provides the seminarian with a realistic foundation of what he might expect in his future years of ministry.”**

told me how pleased they were to become acquainted with a potential future priest of the diocese. Additionally, the presence of a seminarian reminds parishioners to pray not only for him but for all who are studying to become ordained priests in our diocese and elsewhere.

The seminarians who have spent a pastoral year with me have become good friends and I am grateful for that. I am also grateful that their desire to serve God and to build God's Kingdom has encouraged me to do the same. They have helped me to become a better priest. I trust that their pastoral year has done the same for them.



## ARTURO VIGUERAS - Reflections on his Pastoral Year

My pastoral year can be described as a process of being called to give explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord. Despite all my imperfections, He offers his closeness, his words, and his strength. He gives meaning to my life and to the lives of the parishioners I encounter every day through the many activities that I have been involved with in the parish. This process of encounter has given me a clear vision and understanding of the priesthood, which has given clarity and certainty

to the discernment of my vocation to the priesthood.

Some of the many activities that I am involved in with at Our Lady of Peace are teaching both adults and children and also spending time with parishioners, learning about their lives and being able to walk with them as they deal with their daily struggles and joys. Overall, spending time in the parish has given me the opportunity to gain a concrete example of what the rest of life is going to look like as future priest.

## Father Eric Berns on Pastoral Year

I have had the pleasure of hosting Arturo Vigueras for his pastoral year at Our Lady of Peace. I am impressed both by Arturo's abilities and by the experience a seminarian can gain from a pastoral year. Our parishioners are especially pleased with his manner of teaching various classes in adult faith formation. Just last week, someone emailed me to tell me how much she has enjoyed Arturo's biblical studies class and to suggest that he could be a wonderful teacher, God willing, as a priest. He is knowledgeable, relaxed, and just himself. People see how genuine he is, and they follow his lead, I think, because he is humble. And he has learned even more humility by experiencing some of

the conflict that comes with parish life. If Arturo ever had a rosy picture of the life of a priest, it has been tempered by experience. I think his pastoral year has already taught him—among other things—that a priest is especially called to serve out of love, and this love is proven in the way Arturo serves for the good of the Church rather than for the personal gain of accolades or approval. His pastoral gentleness also shines in his work with the young people of the church and in his care of the hospitalized and the elderly. He has even taken on a share of administrative work, and our staff loves having his cheerful assistance. I prayerfully hope that the Lord bring to fruition the good things He has begun in Arturo!

## Fr. John Potaczek on Pastoral Year



Having a pastoral year here at the parish is a new thing which breaks ground with every activity. So there is a great deal of

excitement of meeting a seminarian and finding out more about him and his journey thus far. For myself, too, there are many new things including setting up a new routine with someone living in the rectory. There is working with someone to give them as many opportunities of experiencing parish life as possible. So it brings a sense of reflection as I go about my day. Instead of just doing the daily activities of parish life it now adds that sense of invitation to another and moment to reflect on what I did as a seminarian myself. So it does help you to be more intentional in what you are doing when it is easy to get caught up in the day's events. Having a seminarian in the parish brings a sense of energy. Here could be a future pastor and you as a parishioner get to be in on the ground floor in helping them see what God has in mind for them. The school children and those in religious education love having him stop into the classroom, joining them for sports and seeing him at events. Being in the parish is another avenue of learning. So there are impacts and moments in which things from the seminary classroom become that much more real. Working with families and seeing situations that are not perfect and in need of grace can be very eye opening.



*Regency Year 2017-2018.*

## REGENCY YEAR

The Church culture in the United States requires that a priest be a man of great learning, a gentleman, an effective minister to the needs of his people, who at the same time is able to work hard and navigate the stress of parish life. Balance and boundaries regarding a priest's daily calendar, ministry, emotional and affective needs are only met by a priest who is aware of his needs and who takes the proper initiative to provide for them in a healthy and appropriate way.

There are four pillars outlined in the Program for Priestly Formation (Pastoral, Spiritual, Human, and Intellectual) upon which seminarians are to be properly formed to be healthy, holy and effective priests. While the seminary system does its best to form healthy and holy priests their time and resources are limited. Due to the emphasis on intellectual formation and the general lack of priestly personnel, areas

such as human and pastoral formation fall short for some seminarians. There is an expectation that seminarians have received appropriate human formation in the home and in college seminary, therefore human formation is often relegated to a weekend workshop, retreat, or brief program. Seminary programs often cannot meet the needs of good men dealing with things that cannot be met

in a typical seminary "lock-step program." Healing takes time and attention. A man with human formation needs is not able to freely discern, accept or fully enter into the formation given in seminary programs, or to acquire a healthy father identity that will carry him into the life of an effective pastor.

Often a man with human formation needs is placed on a pastoral year in the diocese but this does not develop the

emotional maturity and healing that is at the heart of the man's issues. Pastors do not have the time, energy and psychological knowledge to meet these sorts of needs of the seminarian. The Regency Year Program has been developed to assist these good men who are in need of extra attention to be able to properly discern and receive the formation the Church intends in a seminary program.



**By Father Billy Dodge,  
Coordinator of Vocations  
Recruitment**

A regent is a person who rules a government in place of another. Example a king who is too young to rule would need someone to rule in his place until he has reached adulthood. So a regency government is under the rule of a regent. This analogy fits for the Regency Program because it is out of the ordinary. Whereas traditionally

## MY PERSPECTIVE ON REGENCY

men have gone off to some place for their priestly formation which highly stressed the intellectual component, this program is run at the Holy Cross Diocesan Center in La Crosse, and stresses the human and spiritual formation of a man.

The traditional seminary program is a packed program trying to help a man grow academically, spirituality, pastorally, and his normal human development. That is a tall order, and when one area dominates the others have to make room. What we have found is some men need more space to grow in some other area - like the human formation - before they can thrive under the demanding academic schedule of the seminary.

Men who enter Regency are not flawed seminarians. We see

great potential, but one area may be keeping them from thriving. Regency is the opportunity to grow in that area. This is my first year assisting the Regency Program, and the program is only in its second year. I am impressed with how much growth the men have undergone so far in the program. Their growth in awareness of their personal strengths, weaknesses, and conception of themselves as beloved sons of God the Father has impressed me. We do not expect perfection. No one reaches perfection in this lifetime. The goal of the program is to offer the tools for a man to grow in a happy, healthy, and holy way as lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ. Through alternating weekly meetings with a spiritual director and counselor, twice a week meetings

with the priest formators in how to know yourself better and process events, one college course at UW - La Crosse on communication, volunteer work, a part time job, and twice a month weekend immersion experience in a parish, the men are stretched but in a way that tests and strengthens their ability to relate to other people and themselves.

The program, only in its second year, is still evolving. I think this is much needed and will bear much fruit for our seminarians. As I talk to seminary instructors and vocation directors around the nation I hear a great affirmation for what the Diocese of La Crosse is doing. In one sense we are leading the way.

# REFLECTIONS ON REGENCY YEAR

## DANIEL BUCHAL



Regency, for me, has been one of the greatest blessings of my life. In the past six months my life has been changed so much by this program. We have been able to work with the homeless in the warming center here in La Crosse.

I also worked at Place of Grace. Both places are amazing and the people who I met there are amazing. I am better for having known them and talked with them. It is hard to believe how resilient and kind they are after all they have been through. Working in different parishes around the diocese has been great. Shadowing the priests at Independence and Marshfield has taught me a lot about what being a parish priest is like. Those experiences and getting to see who I will be serving as a priest have made this year absolutely wonderful.

## MATTHEW BOWE



Before I started my Regency Year experience in September 2016, I considered myself a very kind and nice person who was willing to listen to others. I was smart, and academics came easily to me. I had many strengths. I also

had many weaknesses. Some weaknesses I did not know about, and for most of them, I had an awareness of them, but I could neither articulate them fully nor could I address the issue due to a lack of knowledge. The Regency Program helped me greatly, especially in human formation. For me, I struggled with perfectionism, uncertainty and conflict in relationships, and emotional intelligence. These weaknesses hindered me in becoming a fuller human person and in relating and serving others. With regards to perfectionism, I wanted to wait until everything was perfectly detailed with no uncertainty before acting. That rarely, if ever, happens, so I never addressed issues appropriately and promptly. Whereas I was willing to listen to others open up and be vulnerable to me, I would not. I had walls, or barriers, preventing others to know me, especially my weaknesses and imperfections. This left a desire

for meaningful, deeper, and intimate relationships since I was the person who was not willing to go deeper. This had not occurred to me, and I am thankful that I know this truth now. Finally, I struggled to identify my emotions and to interpret what those emotions meant. Before Regency, I did not want to deal with the emotions. With the help of Regency, I can better identify my emotions and interpret what they mean. This tool has greatly helped my spiritual life as I can now relate to the Father, to Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit more fully and thus receive the graces that They want to give to me. To conclude, the Regency Program is designed to help seminarians to know themselves better so that they are better able to deny themselves and pick up whatever crosses their ministry gives them that day. I am very happy and thankful to have been a Seminarian Regent. God bless you.

## ANDREW DUSHEK



Regency year allows a seminarian to step outside the rigors of the academic focus and structure of seminary to instead focus on building up the human and spiritual pillars of the formation process. Regents live in the Diocesan Center and, among other things, are

tasked with getting a part time job, attending classes at UW-LaCrosse, and working out in the community through our Apostolic works. Much of what I've taken away from my time in the Regency program so far is based in the reality that, contrary to seminary life, parish life in the priesthood is not structured and I am going to be in charge of my own schedule, finances, visitations, vacations, etc.

Although I would say that this year has been difficult and challenging, I would also add that it have been beneficial and necessary. The communications skills and interpersonal relationship queues and techniques are invaluable skills that I can carry with me into every situation that I will experience in ministry. To make an analogy, Regency is like the high school class we all wished existed where they'd teach us how to do our taxes, apply for loans and gives us tips on general life skills, but for the priesthood.

Overall, the Regency year is giving me the tools I need to be a healthy and holy person, no matter what God calls me to.



## ALEX KREN

Regency for me was a "game changer." It's a rare opportunity to spend a whole year on the human pillar of formation.

We all have a past, and mine definitely had its hardships. There were wounds that I had been carrying for years, and never was able to mend them. Regency provided me a safe environment, and the support needed to visit these wounds within myself. The wounds were like a plow that I was pulling around with me every day, which became quite exhausting after a while. Inviting Jesus into these areas that I had well protected, was not an easy path to take, but it was one that needed to be taken. Jesus did what he does best, and healed those wounds within me. I experienced His love like I've never experienced before. Regency was truly a blessing, and was exactly what I needed. I haven't felt this good in years, and I can finally move forward in my own life. True freedom, what a beautiful gift! Regency a.k.a. "the game changer!"

## DAVID REITHER



One of the ways Regency has impacted me the most is greater self-knowledge. Because of the strenuous schedule of regular seminary, it becomes hard to actually find time to sit and do self-reflections. While Regency does have plenty

to do, there is considerably more free time. While it is not always used in the wisest of manners, it does offer the opportunity to sit in silence and think about who I am and what I could change in order to become a better person. Easily, the hardest part is just sitting in the silence. Silence is the great revealer of truth and its usually a truth I don't find comfortable. Other times silence can be devastatingly empty, which is just as painful. Many times, it seems that when I want God to speak he is silent and when I want him to be silent he speaks. For better or for worse, this extra time for self-reflection has been one the greatest gifts the program has to offer.

# WHAT DO THE SEMINARIAN GATHERINGS MEAN TO YOU?



*Summer seminarian gathering 2017.*



## Matthew Bowe

The seminarian gatherings, to me, are times in which I can catch up with my fellow brother seminarians and see

how they are doing. For some, I am older or have more years as a seminarian, so I can ask them questions about their new experiences and to relate to them some of the fears and concerns that I had doing my first years. For others, I am younger or have fewer years as a seminarian. Then, this is a great opportunity for me to ask and to clarify the fears, concerns, and questions that I have as I enter into further studies, which they have done or are doing. Overall, we have fun playing games, watching movies, and eating meals together. In short, the family comes for a reunion.



## Daniel Buchal

The best part about the gatherings is the time that I get to spend with my brothers. For most

of us, the only time that we get to see our brothers from other seminaries is at these gatherings. I have heard stories about the other seminarian gatherings from members of other dioceses. For them it is unlikely that they will see each other for more than a few days, if they are lucky enough to have a gathering at all during the year. Here in our diocese we are able to meet for a week in the summer and a few days in the winter. I have gotten to know my brothers better through these gatherings and I have been blessed to see how they have grown over the years that I have known them. The gatherings have also made it possible for me to get to know our bishop. Many men I have spoken to from other dioceses say that they rarely ever see their Bishop or their Vocation Director and we get to spend a week with both. I consider it one of the greatest blessings of this diocese to have these gatherings.



## Jared Clements

Seminarian Gatherings are a time of fraternity with the brothers that we do not get to see very

often. It builds relationships among the potential priests of the diocese. These friendships are crucial to the formation of seminarians because having a group of guys that support one another allows for a deeper understanding of oneself and being a part of the Body of Christ. Without these gatherings, I would not know about 90% of the guys from La Crosse because I only would know the guys from my seminary who are part of the diocese and those I just happened to meet. These gatherings allow for a great bond to grow between men centered on Christ.

I look forward to every gathering to catch up with the guys from other seminaries. I love to hear the stories from the other guys on how life is going and how much they are growing into the men Christ has called them to be. Every man has their own struggles to deal with and I love having the opportunity to walk with my brothers in Christ. It is also a time of recreation and relaxation from the arduous studies of seminary. The constant study can really make things tough for guys, so this time is needed to just relax and be with those who one day I may share my priesthood with. I love them and I cannot wait for the next one.



## David Dachel

Seminarian Gatherings are very important to me. These gatherings are a time for us, as Seminarians, to get together and just be with each other and get to know each other better. We do not get this opportunity many times throughout the year as we are all throughout the world, even during the summers. When we are not in school, we are able to see each other, but usually not as a big group. I find this type of gathering very helpful to our formation as men, especially as men studying to be priests. It gives us the chance to get to know the brothers that we will be serving with one day if we are ordained priests, God willing. If we are able to get this bond built up, then, if we are ordained priests, we will know who we are serving with, and can lean on them and





*Adoration in the Seminarian Chapel.*



*Bishop William Patrick Callahan reflects at the Shrine of St. Joseph in Green Bay, WI.*

help each other better. With this network of support, there is less of a feeling of being alone, and more of a sense of community. This is vital in the life of a priest because without it, there is a feeling of loneliness that sets in which then prohibits the priests from being able to function to their full capacity. Therefore, I think that the various gatherings that we as seminarians have is crucial to our formation as seminarians as we study to become priests for the Diocese of La Crosse.

happen during a long break from studies. Not only that, but Fr. Wierzba and even Bishop Callahan make themselves available to us, and seeing the amount of care and compassion that the two of them have for us is awe-inspiring.

especially appreciate catching up with guys that were with me in minor seminary, but are now in major seminary. For example, this past gathering, I got to pray with and talk to a brother whom I didn't see for months, and we seemed to pick up right where we left off talking. Seeing those guys again fills me with joy, and helps keep my focus on the fraternity we have as seminarians, united as brothers in Christ. That reminder of fraternity is of great importance to me.



## John Duranso

The seminarian gatherings are always amazing experiences, filled with fun, prayer, and brotherhood, and to me they are an extension of the retreats I would always go on while in middle and high school, retreats which made a tremendous impact on my vocation. The seminarian gatherings now make such a difference in my life whenever they happen, as I'm able to see guys I haven't seen for months and still be just as familiar with them as if we had been with each other for years. Being able to talk with people who have been through what I'm going through and assuring me that it is all worth it in the end is one of the greatest things can



## Andrew Dushek

The seminarian gathering for me is a great time for fraternity. Getting the chance to catch up with so many of the guys that

I don't see most of the year allows me to build relationships with my brothers from all across the diocese. One thing I especially appreciate is the opportunity to visit with Bishop Callahan for movie night. Two years ago he put me in charge of picking the movies for both the summer and winter gatherings. Not sure why but it's a fun little niche of "responsibility".



## Brandon Guenther

The seminarian gatherings are certainly one of the things I most look forward to each year. They are a great time of brotherhood; uniting us

on our common mission as priests for the Diocese of La Crosse. Brotherhood can take form in different ways though; most obviously there is time to just hang out, play sports, watch movies, hiking, etc. This is always a lot of fun and a great opportunity to get to know the guys that, God willing, we will spend the rest of our lives with as brother priests. Furthermore, the gatherings take place outside of any academic responsibilities, which removes any pressure to get work done or distract us from this time together. Beyond this though, there is a spiritual dimension;



## Philip Grygleski

I look forward every summer and winter for our seminarian gatherings. It is a great time to reconnect with my brother

seminarians whom I don't get to see throughout the school year very often. I



*Bishop William Patrick Callahan opening Christmas gifts from the seminarians.*

being able to pray together as a group is a great opportunity to grow closer to each other by each of us growing closer to Christ. It is a great consolation to pray with such an edifying group of men, all striving for sanctity. Certainly with both of these dimensions our brotherhood of La Crosse seminarians has grown a lot during these gatherings and I'm very thankful that the Lord has called me to be a seminarian for such a wonderful diocese full of great priests and seminarians.



## Bradley Haas

The seminarian gatherings are important to me because they're great opportunity for fraternity among my brother seminarians. It is such

a great blessing to be able to discern my vocation with so many great guys. At the gatherings the great faith we share is evident and the time spent is an absolute blast. I know we are fortunate to be able to gather twice a year as a group, some of the men from other dioceses I know from school have no knowledge of anyone else who is studying for their respective dioceses. The brotherhood that these seminarian gatherings provide not only

helps in discerning my vocation but also starts building the brotherhood we may one day share as priests for the diocese.



## Ethan Hokamp

Seminarian Gatherings are times for all the seminarians of our diocese to come together to spend time with each other. In many ways it is

like a family coming together during the holidays simply to spend time together. Our fellow seminarians are our brothers and are the men we will be priests with one day, so building relationships with them now is important. I see the Seminarian Gatherings simply as times to get to know my brothers better and to grow in holiness with them. Since all of us do not attend the same seminary, we do not get to see each other very much throughout the year. So the Seminarian Gatherings become the privileged time for all of us to come together to pray, to welcome new seminarians, and simply to spend time with each other. Of course we are also blessed to spend time with Fr. Wierzba and Bishop Callahan during the Seminarian Gatherings.



## Alex Kren

The seminarian gathering is a great opportunity for all of us to build fraternity. We currently live in a time where we move from one thing to the next, and can miss this

great gift that God wants us to participate in. I'm thankful that our Diocese not only provides this for us, but makes it mandatory for those who are able to be there. If, God willing, we become priests, it is vital that we build strong, lasting friendships now, so that in the future we don't isolate ourselves but have those who we can turn to and lean on. The gathering also gives us an opportunity to get to know our brothers that are at different places doing their studies. It truly is a blessing to have our seminarian gathering!



## Deacon Kyle Laylan

I have always enjoyed the seminarian gatherings. They are a great time to build fraternity with the guys who I will

be brother priests with one day. I have many good memories of times with the

bishop and with other seminarians during these gatherings. We play sports, we play cards, we argue about whether or not the most recent Star Wars movie was good, we eat (a lot), we pray together, and we just all around have an enjoyable time. With us seminarians often attending different seminaries, these gatherings provide us the opportunity to build friendships with guys who we otherwise would not often see. It also gives us the opportunity to spend some time with our bishop, for us to get to know him, and him us. Overall it is a blessed time for growing in fraternity. I certainly am thankful for these gatherings.



## Eric Mashak

I always look forward to our seminarian gatherings. I get excited when I see these events coming up on my calendar.

There are many reasons for this eagerness. Our diocese sends its seminarians to five different seminaries. Sometimes it happens that I am only able to meet with some of my seminarian brothers (particularly those who study far away from the Diocese) a few times each year. This makes the time spent at our gatherings all the more precious. It is always a great pleasure of mine to learn how my seminarian brothers are doing and what they are learning. Our gatherings are also a great opportunity for us to welcome in the new men who are responding to God's call. I have very fond memories of my first seminarian gathering. Before that point, I had only met a few other seminarians in my life. The older seminarians did a great job of welcoming in us new men, going to great lengths to help us feel at home as a seminarian for the Diocese of La Crosse. Each seminarian gathering is a time of prayer, fellowship, and of building up the fraternity of the future priests of our diocese. It is not only the seminarians who grow closer together to one another. We are also able to spend time with our Bishop and Vocations Director. We are very blessed to have a Bishop who so generously chooses to give his time to his seminarians. During each of our gatherings, each seminarian is typically able to meet with our Vocations Director. During these meetings we are able to share



*Bishop William Patrick Callahan trying on his Green Bay Packer Jersey.*

with him our life in Christ and growth in priestly identity as we continue our path to the Priesthood. I can't wait for our next gathering.



## Samuel McCarty

The seminarian gatherings are a great opportunity to grow deeper in brotherhood with my fellow seminarians. These are the men with whom

I'll be serving the people of the diocese for years to come, and our twice yearly get togethers offer an excellent time for us to get to know each other on a deeper level and pray together as one community. In particular, being able to spend time with guys studying at different seminaries is great because there aren't as many opportunities for this during the busy school year. I remember as a new seminarian always appreciating the time

to spend with the older guys in theology, and now it's cool being able to talk to the guys about shared struggles and joys. We always have fun at the gatherings, and there are always a few euchre games and a group that plays basketball if I'm lucky. Although all these things are fairly simple, my experience has been that the Lord works through them and blesses our time together. Priestly fraternity is essential and can't be manufactured overnight: we're practicing for the future and laying the real foundation of our not-alone priesthood. The seminarian gatherings have been an excellent and joy-filled experience for me as I prepare for the priesthood.



## David Nowicki

I always enjoy seminarian gatherings. Since the seminarians of the Diocese attend five



*Movie and pizza night at Bishop William Patrick Callahan residence.*

different seminaries, it is always such a joy to spend time with all my seminarian brothers when I get the chance. I like the fraternity that the gathering builds. The fraternity lays a solid groundwork for continued fraternity among priests upon ordination. Two of us may even be assigned to the same parish in the future, so it makes our time together all the more important. Lastly, Bishop Callahan makes a point of spending time with us seminarians during the gatherings, a great blessing for which we are very grateful.



## Isaac Pecha

“Wherever two or more of you are gathered in my name, I am there with you” (Matt 18:20). Jesus is always present

when believers come together, in different ways within different assemblages. I am acutely grateful for the particular ways Jesus is present at the seminarian gatherings, especially as confidant,

teacher, and brother. At these gatherings, I experience Jesus in his role as confidant; because we are all going through a similar process, we can share our experiences with one another, and receive a thoughtful, well-meditated, and Christlike response. Similarly, Jesus acts through my fellow seminarians in their roles as teachers and mentors to me; because the older seminarians were once in my shoes, they can offer especially apropos advice. Finally, Christ is present in the jocund fraternity we enjoy at seminarian gatherings. Aquinas says, “it is requisite for the relaxation of the mind that we make use of playful deeds and jokes” (Summa Theologiæ, II-II, Q168, A2), and it is a great privilege to be able to come together to relax with stories, humor, and many games of euchre with my compatriots. As such, I always pray for all of us to be present at these gatherings, and also for the intentions of those who support us and make the gatherings possible, in order that we may together delight in Our Lord, both explicitly and through his presence in our seminarian brothers.



## Joseph Pyka

The seminarian gatherings are something I have learned to look forward to over the last year. They are a time that we seminarians for the

Diocese can get together and just be guys, which is something that we do not get to do very often as a whole because we all go to different seminaries. With all of us at different seminaries we do not have the opportunity to meet up. Also, because we are so busy at our respective seminaries, we do not have the time to have a solid conversation with each other. However, the gatherings allow us to have those great conversations and through these conversations, I have had the opportunity to get to know more of the guys on a personal level and gaining new brothers in the process.



*Seminarians praying in their Chapel.*



## David Reither

For me the seminary gatherings are vital for my formation in my continual discernment for the priesthood. They are

an occasion where I can spend time with other people who are all discerning the same thing as myself. One obvious objection to the seminarian gatherings is that they are unnecessary since I spend the entire school year with other seminarians. I would have to disagree with this objection. The huge difference with seminary gatherings is that time is spent with seminarians from my Dioceses of La Crosse. This is a huge distinction to be considered. At seminary, there are men from all over the place. North Dakota is the farthest that I know of. Eventually, these men will, God willing, become priests and return back to their home state and I will likely never see them again. In contrast,

the seminarian gathering is made up of men who, if God is willing, I will be serving with in the priesthood. It creates a special bond that will be carried into the priesthood that will only help strengthen the Church. Imagine going into intense ground combat and having no idea who your fellow squad members are. There would be no cohesiveness within the ranks and your squad would get torn to pieces by a stronger more unified unit. And in my experience Satan's armies are pretty unified in their hatred for God. Even if God calls me out of the seminary, the seminary gatherings will have allowed me to get to know many future priests, which is always a good thing.



## Timothy Reither

Even though I will miss this year's gatherings since I am studying in Rome, the seminarian

gatherings have always been a great time of diocesan fraternity for me. Since many of us study in different seminaries, it is a good time to get to know the men from the other schools better. Whether it's exploring the bell tower or playing dodge ball in the gym, to watching a movie with the Bishop, I am glad to spend this time with the men who will one day (God willing) be brother priests of our diocese. The opportunity to pray together and go to Mass also helps us to forge that identity of being true men of Christ and to support each other to that end. Not every diocese has as big a diocesan fraternity as we do in La Crosse and I thank God that I can be a part of it.



## Joseph Richards

For the last several years, seminarian gatherings have given me a chance to stay rooted in the diocese. Study-

ing outside of the diocese at a different seminary from many of the La Crosse guys means that over the course of the semester it's easy to get disconnected from the fellows I'll hopefully be a priest with in the future. Having the dedicated time to come together with these men has surprised me on several occasions by showing the character of my brothers. Without such a time to intentionally invest in these relationships, we as seminarians would not be so connected in brotherhood. With such a time we have the chance to run the same race with each other.



## Deacon Barry Saylor

For me the gatherings have been an opportunity to get to know each of the seminarians on a more personal level.

Since we are at different seminaries, I find it important to gather as one diocese. Getting to know each of the guys that I will serve with in the future is an important aspect to the priesthood, both for fraternity and in friendship/support.



## Levi Schmitt

In my seminary experience over the last seven years, I have found the seminarian gatherings of the diocese of La Crosse to be an important point

of connection. Because my brother seminarians and I study at a variety of seminaries during the majority of the year, it can be difficult to maintain a strong spirit of fraternity. The gatherings help remedy this by bringing us together for a few days to grow in community. In addition to connecting me with my brother seminarians, the gatherings are an opportunity for me to connect with the diocese that I will one day serve as a priest. At these gatherings, my brothers and I are able to meet with Bishop Callahan, work with the Vocations Director, stay at the diocesan center, tour the diocese and get to know the city of La Crosse, the heart of the diocese. All of these aspects of the seminarian gatherings have made them an important feature of my seminary formation.



*Enjoying lunch and fellowship on the way to Green Bay, WI.*



## Daniel Smyth

I am still relatively new to being a seminarian. I have only participated in two gatherings so far. Nonetheless, I see the seminarian gather-

ings as a move by our formation leaders to strengthen the diocesan mission of raising priests for tomorrow. If we think about formation as spiritual warfare, then the gatherings are akin to the strategic gathering of forces in a military campaign.

The image I think of is the mustering of

the Rohirrim in the Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. King Theoden summons his troops from the various Lords and corners of his kingdom of Rohan. They collect themselves under the leadership of the king, then they go out to battle. We, the seminarians, routinely gather in La Crosse under the leadership of our Bishop, then we go back out to "do battle" in our formation.

While out "at battle", so to speak, at Mundelein, I am proximally distant from many of my La Crosse brothers. The gatherings are strategic for recommitting myself to the brothers, bishop, and priests to whom I am united to by diocese. For this gift, I am very grateful.



## Arturo Viguerras

Seminarian gatherings for me mean being able to step away from the busyness of everyday life and reflect along with my

brother seminarians on the many graces and blessings that the Loving God has bestowed upon us as we continue to follow the road towards the priesthood.



## Steven Weller

The seminarian gathering strengthens me in virtue and encourages me. Oftentimes on long breaks away from the seminary, seminarians

do not have the frequent fellowship with their brother seminarians. I can become somewhat discouraged when I do not see those men like me who are discerning the priesthood. When we come together, however, they help me focus again on Christ and the joy he gives me.

Every time I return from a gathering, I have a stronger vigor to continue prayer and study for the priesthood. Many joyful and prayerful men lift each other up when together.



## Daniel Williams

Having been in seminary for some time now, one of the events I look forward to the most is getting together with my brother seminarians

from La Crosse. Forming this essential fraternity hopefully will feed our future ministry in the diocese. We all have come from different backgrounds to enter into a common vocation which binds us together and leads us to the Lord more profoundly. This is why these gatherings are my favorite events.



## Isaac Wolfe

The seminarian retreats are a time of great fraternity and fellowship for me. I get the opportunity to be with all of my fellow seminarians that I have

not seen in months. It is also a great time for prayer with the chapel at the diocesan center. I always have lots of fun with my brother seminarians and a lot of time to come to know them better and grow together as men studying for the priesthood and as brothers in Christ. During the summer it is also a blessing to be able to travel to other beautiful shrines and cathedrals like this summer when we went to the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Hope.



## John Zweber

Some of the biggest highlights of my year are the seminarian gatherings that happen in the fall and winter. It is

great to get together with all the other seminarians from our diocese and to hear how things are going for them. With all the things that are happening throughout the year, the gatherings give me the time to get to know all the other seminarians better through games and conversations. This really helps unite the guys in college seminary with the guys in theology studies. Often, with all the things going on throughout the year, we do not get to see much of each other apart from the seminarian gatherings. Another one of the great things about the seminarian gatherings is that we get to spend time with the Bishop Callahan and Fr. Wierzba. Bishop Callahan always invites over to his house, and we have pizza and watch a movie, and in the summer, we always take a road trip. There is also the opportunity for us to spend time in prayer together, and to talk to each other about all the joys and challenges that seminary brings. The seminarian gatherings help me to form lifelong friendships that will be there to strengthen me in my service to God and neighbor. All the food, fellowship, and fraternity are amazing, and they leave me refreshed and excited to keep studying for the priesthood.

*You are encouraged to write to our seminarians as a way of showing your support and prayers throughout the school year using the addresses provided below.*

### ST. FRANCIS DE SALES SEMINARY

3257 South Lake Drive  
St. Francis, WI 53235

### PONTIFICAL NORTH AMERICAN COLLEGE

Via del Gianicolo, 14  
Rome, Italy 00165

### MUNDELEIN SEMINARY

1000 East Maple Avenue  
Mundelein, IL 60060

### IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY SEMINARY

750 Terrace Heights  
Winona, MN 55987

### ST. JOHN VIANNEY SEMINARY

2115 Summit Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55105

## PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Heavenly Father, Bless your Church with an abundance of holy and zealous priests, deacons, brothers, and sisters. Give those you have called to the married state and those you have chosen to live as single persons in the world, the special graces that their lives require. Form us all in the likeness of Your Son, so that in Him, with Him, and through Him, we may love you more deeply and serve you more faithfully, always and everywhere. With Mary we ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



## PLANNED GIVING

Jeff Reiter, Director of Stewardship

Everything we have is a gift from God. God entrusts us to manage these gifts well to further the Kingdom here on earth. Our gifts of time, talents, and treasure are what the Church knows as Catholic Stewardship.

The way we embrace stewardship is a reflection of our gratitude for all that God has gifted us with. Our time is finite and unknown. For many of us Catholics, through the help of our parish priests and religious sisters, we were able to, and continue to, uncover and develop our talent gifts. We benefited because they dedicated their lives to serve God. We are to share our gifts of treasure to meet the significant needs of the next generation of young men and women who are discerning priesthood and religious life.

The focus of the Office for Vocations is the developing a culture of vocation. This focus, by the grace of God, will create a need that is even greater in the future. A gift today will help to fill the immediate

need. As we look ahead, it is through planned giving that we can ensure there will be funds available for our future priests and religious long after we are gone.

Planned giving is an excellent way to show stewardship of your gifts. It creates a legacy to honor those priests and religious who instilled your core values and who helped you in your life. Planned giving can be as simple as including the Office for Vocations in your Will or Living Trust, or more complicated vehicles such as a Charitable Remainder Trust. A gift today and tomorrow will bear fruit today and create a legacy of service benefiting future generations to come.

If you would like to learn more about opportunities on how you can help the Office for Vocations with a gift today or through a planned gift, please contact me at the Office for Stewardship and Development 608.791.2685 or by emailing me at [jreiter@diolc.org](mailto:jreiter@diolc.org)



### January

- 2 - Brandon Guenther
- 8 - Samuel McCarty
- 24 - Isaac Wolfe

### February

- 7 - Philip Grygleski
- 22 - John Duranso

### March

- 1 - Deacon Barry Saylor
- 13 - Eric Mashak
- 25 - Deacon Kyle Laylan

### April

- 8 - Alex Kren
- 9 - Joseph Pyka
- 11 - Joseph Richards

### May

- 3 - Steven Weller

### June

- 5 - Levi Schmitt

## Upcoming Events

**June 6** - Eau Claire Vocations Guild Dinner

**June 30** - Priestly Ordination

**July 29** - Priests For Tomorrow

**August 13** - Marshfield Vocations Guild Dinner



**DIocese of LA CROSSE**  
Office for Vocations

3710 East Avenue South | La Crosse, WI 54602-4004  
Phone: 608-791-2667 | [www.diolc.org/vocations](http://www.diolc.org/vocations)



Vocations La Crosse Diocese