



The Serra Club of Johnson County
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Serran Sphere

THE VESTING OF A (FUTURE) PRIEST

Michael G Skoch MD

Over the Christmas holiday, I had one of those once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Our son, Timothy, currently completing Theology III studies at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver, CO, invited me to accompany him to an appointment with the Benedictine Sisters of Mary, Queen of Apostles, in Gower, MO.

Tim anticipates ordination to the transitional diaconate on 21 May 2022 and, as he has wanted to be a priest for more years than his time in the seminary, he looks forward to the occasion, God-willing, of his priestly ordination (along with his seminary brothers) in May 2023. Before the Christmas break, Tim had talked about having the Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles make a vestment for him for the occasion of his awaited priestly ordination. Being the planner that I am (my wife, children, and anyone who knows me are exhibiting various eye-rolls as they read this . . .), I checked into the Sisters' website and saw photos of their needlework (which is beautiful!) and their opening disclaimer: **We regret that we are very heavily booked with vestment orders. Please note that any order submitted at this time will be completed in May of 2023.**



When home for Christmas, Tim again mentioned a trip to Gower, MO, and I asked him if he had checked the Sisters' website. He had not. I suggested he do so and pay special attention to the anticipated completion date of any vestment he might want to order. He promptly sent an email request for a consultation.

Sister Misericordia would see him at 0900 the next morning. Tim asked if I would accompany. We would be able to take in daily Mass in the monastery chapel at 11:00 AM, after the appointment to discuss vestment-making. I didn't think twice. Of course, I would accompany. I mean, is the Pope Catholic? I emptied my work calendar until 2:00 PM for that Thursday before Christmas.

See Vesting p. 3



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MEETING/EVENT DATES:

- 4/7/2022—General Membership meeting, 6:30 PM, **Curé of Ars**
- 4/25/2022—Runnin' with the Revs, 7:00 PM, **Hayden High School**, Topeka, KS.
- 4/26/2022—JOCO Serra Board Meeting , 7 PM, **Cornerstone Companies**
- 5/5/2022—General Monthly Membership Meeting, 6:30 PM, **Cure of Ars**
- 5/7/2022—Blisters for Sisters, 9:00 AM, **St. Thomas More Church**, KCMO



Alex Rickert
College IV

MEET ALEX RICKERT

For the first few years of my life, I grew up immersed in the community of my small Protestant church in northern Virginia, which was a part of a denomination known as the Charismatic Episcopal Church. When I was seven years old, the church split apart and eventually all my family (immediate and close extended) converted to the Catholic faith. The following years were filled with much grace, as my family and I explored our Catholic faith. The possibility of priesthood became increasingly more real to me, especially after my maternal grandfather, Randy Sly, was ordained a Catholic priest through the Anglican Ordinariate.

My family eventually landed in Overland Park, KS, with Church of the Ascension as our home parish. There, I encountered several men, all very different, joyfully living out their call to the priesthood. These men included Msgr. Tom Tank, Fr. Alessandro Boraccia, Fr. Nathan Haverland, as well as Fr. Joel Haug and Fr. Nicholas Ashmore, who were seminarians at the time. High school years were spent at St. James Academy in Lenexa, KS. I graduated in 2018. By God's grace, and despite my many failings, I grew in love for Our Lord each year. After a lot of thought, prayer, and mentorship from a couple teachers I respected, including Fr. Luke Doyle, I learned that Jesus was inviting me to enter college seminary immediately after I graduated high school.

"Regardless your vocational call, continue to pursue a deep friendship with Jesus. Being best friends with Jesus is not something just reserved for priests and religious!" ~Alex Rickert

SEMINARIAN BIRTHDAYS

April/May

Colm Larkin -April 20

Daniel Schmidt -April 25

Timothy Skoch -April 30

John Donart -May 2

Dan Mauro -May 10

Mark your calendar with Seminarian Birthdays and pray for the seminarian's intention.



In case you missed it at Miega High School, catch *Runnin' with the Revs* at Hayden High School, 7:00 PM, Monday, 4/25/2022! Check the [web-site for details](#).

Jesus is never outdone in generosity. I have found seminary to be one of the greatest blessings of my life, especially that the seminary experience has helped me grow in a personal relationship with Jesus and shaped me to seek His Will over my own. I appreciate deeper love, joy, and peace in knowing Jesus more intimately.

Other random things about me include sports participation, singing choral music, learning new languages, and reading. I listen to podcasts, particularly Pints with Aquinas, Godsplaining, and the Thomistic Institute. I have a strong devotion to the two main food groups: bacon and peanut butter. My favorite spiritual role models are Our Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, Pope St. John Paul II, St. Thomas Aquinas, and the Carmelite mystics. My favorite authors are C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, G.K. Chesterton, Evelyn Waugh, Michael O'Brien, and Fr. Thomas Dubay.

I am the oldest of four boys. The first few years following my family's conversion to Catholicism were powerful. I grew in devotion to the Rosary, Adoration, and Sacred Scripture. We were not the perfect family, but because my parents were so enthusiastic and energetic when we did family activities together, I paid attention and tried to emulate them. My father, Kelly, is starting his own business. My mom, Dena, recently obtained a master's degree in Education and works as a teacher at Ascension School in Overland Park.



To anyone contemplating the seminary or religious life, I offer the words of Saint John Paul II, "Be not afraid!" and "Open wide the doors to Christ!" Our Lord desires infinitely your ultimate good, your ultimate happiness, your ultimate fulfillment. He knows what He's doing if He's inviting you to more deeply consider a vocation that you haven't thought about much. So "ephphatha--be opened" to what He wants to tell you. It will be helpful to begin a practice of discipline. Attend daily Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least monthly. Doing these things cultivates friendship with Jesus, Who, in the context of that deepening friendship, will speak to you through powerful Sacramental graces He hands down to His Bride, the Church. And if you discern eventually that you are called to a different vocation, e.g., marriage and family life, praise God! Regardless your vocational call, continue to pursue a deep friendship with Jesus. Being best friends with Jesus is not something just reserved for priests and religious!

Pray for Alex and all his seminary brothers!

We arrived at the House of Ephesus, the home of the Benedictines, around 0830 AM, about half an hour ahead of the appointed time. Ephesus is north and east of Gower, MO, about an hour from Olathe. It sits on a country hilltop, a serene environment for the contemplative sisters; the gate adorned with a wrought iron arch bearing the message, “Pax Intransitus” – “Peace to those entering.” We had time to make a visit to the chapel, which we did.

Tim rang the doorbell where a small sign said, “Porter.” Momentarily, we were greeted by Sister Marie Bernard, who said, “Come in! Come in! It’s cold outside!” We exchanged greetings, and she explained that the community didn’t have an official porter. The task of greeting visitors (true Benedictine hospitality) fell “to the sister in the office for the day.” Sister Marie Bernard acknowledged that she had the day’s duty, with a hearty laugh. I had the inclination that it was going to be a wonderful morning! She invited us next door to the Gift Shop, “where all of the vestment stuff is,” adding cheerfully that she would swing round and make sure the door was open.



We stepped outside and around to the Gift Shop entrance where we were soon met by Sister Misericordia. Graced with humor and a magnanimous personality, she made us feel immediately at home. After introductions, the work at hand began promptly as Sister Misericordia pulled out several loops of material swatches, trim embroidery samples, and various other elements of the vestment-making work done by the sisters. The epitome of patience as she worked with two men in a process with which neither of us had any familiarity, Sister Misericordia offered helpful suggestions, affirmation of Tim’s ideas, all the while taking notes on a small notepad as the chatter continued.

We soon felt like we had met a long-lost friend. In fact, Tim commented on the return drive that it seemed he’d met a lost sister.

Sister Misericordia told us that the community’s sewing room was staffed by five full time seamstresses, “and two or three part time staff who help us out at crunch times.” It was impossible not to smile while listening to her explain the process to us. She acknowledged the website’s assertion that they were booked up until May 2023, but assured Timothy that his vestment would be done in time for his first Mass. “We have some short periods of down time,” she observed, “where we work on smaller projects or get an early start on booked projects.”

“Like Christmas,” she said. “Well, except for the cows. The cows don’t take a Christmas break,” she laughed.

I note here that the community is largely self-sustaining, including the management of a small herd of cows. She wasn’t exactly joking despite her lightheartedness!

From the sisters’ website: “In our prayerful support for priests, we desire to assist them in a very tangible way by the handcrafting of vestments, priestly apparel, sacred linens and altar cloths. We use the finest materials available, primarily pure silks and Belgian linen, in order to give the best of God’s creation back to Him, and for the restoration of beauty to the altars where He dwells among us.

Carried out in the Benedictine spirit of silence, each stitch by the sisters is a prayer for the sanctification of the priest who will be using our vestments.”

What an utterly beautiful purpose!

Again, from the website, “Due to the contemplative nature of our life, we devote approximately five hours of the day to work. During that time, we attend to all matters of ordinary farm and household maintenance in addition to our sewing.”

We wrapped up our discussion with Sr. Misericordia in the Gift Shop and headed back to the chapel for Mass. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was sublime. If you have not heard the sisters’ music, you have missed out on a treat! I found “Silent Night” from a most-recent Christmas album, Christmas at Ephesus.

Our conversation as we began the journey back to Kansas City initially focused on the breadth of experience with which we are blessed in the Church today including different religious communities with different charisms, nuances in the experience of the Holy Mass, the blessing of priests in our lives and the blessing of religious sisters in our lives, as well. Tim observed, “It’s one big Church, Dad.”

“And we are many parts,” I replied, deeply grateful for what I have known in my life as a Catholic, and thankful for Tim’s invitation to join him on this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Pray for Tim and his seminary brothers, George Rhodes, and Colm Larkin, as they make final preparations for their diaconate ordinations on May 21, 2022. Pray also for Rev. Mr. Andrew Gaffney and Rev. Mr. Sudeep Kodigandla as they make final preparations for their priestly ordinations on May 28, 2022. See the [website calendar](#) for details.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Date	Agenda	Location
April 1 Friday	First Friday Holy Hour for Vocations 11 AM	Holy Spirit Church Overland Park, KS
April 5 Tuesday	First Tuesday Holy Hour for Vocations 6 PM	Curé of Ars Church Leawood, KS
April 7 Thursday	JOCO Serra General Membership Monthly Meeting 6:30 PM	Curé of Ars Church Leawood, KS
April 14 Thursday	JOCO Serra Rosary for Vocations 7:30 pm	Virtual Rosary
April 21 Thursday	JOCO Serra Rosary for Vocations 7:30 pm	Virtual Rosary
April 25 Monday	Runnin' with the Revs Charity Basketball Event 7 pm	Hayden High School Topeka, KS
April 26 Tuesday	JOCO Serra Board Meeting 7 pm	Cornerstone Companies
April 28 Thursday	JOCO Serra Rosary For Vocations 7:30 pm	Virtual Rosary
May 3 Tuesday	First Tuesday Holy Hour For Vocations 6 pm	Curé of Ars Church Leawood, KS
May 5 Thursday	JOCO Serra General Membership Meeting 6:30 pm	Curé of Ars Church Leawood, KS

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OF JOHNSON
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Mark your calendars now! Pray for our Ordinandi!
Diaconate Ordinations, 10:30 AM Saturday, May 21, 2022, at Christ the King Church in Topeka, KS
 Ordinandi:
 George Rhodes, Colm Larkin, and Timothy Skoch
Priestly Ordinations, 10:30 AM Saturday, May 28, 2022, Cathedral of St. Peter
 Ordinandi:
 Rev. Mr. Andrew Gaffney and Rev. Mr. Sudeep Kodigandla



SISTER M. MARIS STELLA LARKIN



Sister M. Maris Stella Larkin, FSGM, credits our Lord for the grace of her vocation. Closely behind the Lord's grace, she identifies the fidelity witnessed in her parents' marriage, and the loving and safe home life they provided for the four Larkin children. "I grew up seeing them sacrifice for us," she said. Pictured here with her parents, Dennis and Jean Larkin, Sr. Maris Stella is the second of four children in the family. "My parents raised 4 athletes," she reflected, "so there was never a lack of competition or rowdiness to be had!" Born in Salina, KS, and raised there through her first eight years, Sister said the family "moved around a lot" during her formative years. Relocation to Omaha, NE, for twelve years saw Sister graduate from Omaha Gross (Catholic) High School. A move to Cedar Rapids, IA, followed, where the Larkin family lived for about ten years. "My parents have since relocated to Kansas and retired in Atchison," she added.

Sister attended Benedictine College, where she first experienced a tug on her heart to follow the Lord in religious life. She recalled once attending Eucharistic Adoration, at a time when she anticipated few others around. "My friends had talked a lot about how awesome the campus Adoration Chapel was, but I hadn't been there yet." After attending a FOCUS Conference (now known as "SEEK"), she knew she was not going to use a Biology and Chemistry degree after college, but she wasn't sure where Jesus was leading. "I felt noticed by Him during that conference so many months earlier. "So, I went to Adoration that late summer night and told him: 'Lord, I don't know what you want me to do with my life.'" She said that the Lord responded to her before she could get the entire statement out. "I heard, almost audibly in the depths of my heart, 'You.'" She described being a bit fearful, and was compelled to repeat her prayer statement, not knowing what He wanted of her. "Again," she said, "His response was just as loud and clear: 'You.'" Sister told Him: "Lord, I will do anything except be a teacher or a Sister." She related with humor her idea that, in attempting to make a deal with Jesus, she was, in her mind, "allowing Him hundreds of other perfectly suitable jobs to which He could call me." And then Sister deadpanned: "I spent the next 7 years trying to follow His will, but only became really great at running from the call while the Hound of Heaven pursued me." Haven't we all been there?

"The monks at Benedictine College had a deep impact on my faith journey. The college and those monks truly changed my life." She also observed that, in college, it was very easy to get distracted with pretending to "have it all together." "This was my biggest distraction. If I 'had it all together,' then I could get into PT/Pharmacy School, marry the man I was dating, and raise a beautiful family. Though these desires were good, they were distractions."

After graduation from Benedictine in 2011, her spiritual director, Abbot James Albers, recommended to Sr. Maris Stella that she spend time as a missionary . . . in Belize, Central America. "My year in Belize had a profound impact upon my discernment and my ability to embrace the reality that Our Lord was indeed calling me to Himself," she observed. The mission was run by the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity (SOLT). Sister and her teammates lived, worked, and prayed with the community. She taught what is equivalent to sophomore Biology & Chemistry and assisted with campus ministry events, while also creating and coaching the girls' basketball team. "That was nothing short of a rodeo!" she exclaimed. In seeing the poverty and brokenness of a 3rd world country, she was able to embrace the 3rd world country that lived, too, within. "My poverty, sin, and darkness were not too much for our Lord," she realized. It was Holy Thursday when one of the Sisters told her: "You have a vocation and you have got to go back to the States to discern it."

"This rocked me to my core" she said. "I eventually came back to the States to discern the call to religious life," she said. Sister had encountered the Franciscan Sisters of the Martyr St. George (FSGM) during her years at Benedictine, but always avoided them. Invited by the vocations directress to come for a visit, "simply to rest in Him", Sister accepted, "as I was experiencing a lot of culture shock, when I came back from Belize." It was during that first day while visiting the Franciscans that Sr. Maris Stella was given a tour of the Provincial House in Alton, IL, where she observed a statue of Our Lady of Cuba (Nuestra Senora de la Caridad del Cobre) right next to a statue of Our Lady of Brazil (Nossa Senhora Aparecida). Sister related, "During my time in the missions, I had developed a devotion to both Marian images. I found them to be very beautiful images of Our Lady. I remember feeling in the depths of my being, as I stood before those two statues in the Provincial House, that this truly was where the Lord was calling me. I had no doubt." Despite her confidence, she again felt fearful of the seriousness of God's invitation.

Over the next few years, she remained in contact with the FSGM vocation directress, while discerning life her vocation. After a series of events, Sister was doubly certain that the Lord was calling her to join the Franciscan community of the Martyr St. George. She applied, and then walked the El Camino de Santiago (not just your Sunday afternoon stroll!) for the intention of being accepted into our community. "A month later I received a phone call from Mother, informing me that I had been accepted into our community as a postulant. She called me on the Feast of St. James. Truly, our Lord is The Way!"



St. M. Maris Stella enjoying lunch with some of her Sisters.



Sister M. Maris Stella with her godson, Aidan

Sister has an older brother, Liam, married to his wife Christie. Their 5-month-old son, Aidan is her godson. A younger sister, Clare, teaches in the Math department at St. James Academy. She is engaged to be married in the summer. "My younger brother, Colm is a seminarian for the KCK diocese and will be ordained a deacon this May. He and I often joke about our formation experiences," she commented adding, "the four of us siblings are very close!"

When asked how she might advise a young woman contemplating her response to God's call to consecrated life, Sister offered the following: "You must be unafraid to let yourself be known. Allow the One who is accompanying you to know you. Do not run from Love. The Lord will simply continue to pursue you!"

"The greatest freedom is in opening oneself to the penetrating love and will of our Lord! He will redeem what one is afraid to expose!"

Let us keep Sister M. Maris Stella as she continues in formation for final profession of vows.