

EDUCATION • PARISH • MISSION

Ave✠Cruz



Volume 2 Issue 2 | The Ordinandi

Office of Vocations, Congregation of Holy Cross



Ave Crux, Spes Unica – Hail the Cross, Our Only Hope!

We in the Congregation of Holy Cross profess this truth as the center of our spiritual tradition, and for 175 years, we have worked to bring the hope of the Cross to schools, universities, parishes and other ministries on five continents.

We are men with hope to bring, yet discerning God's will and taking this step in our lives was not entered into lightly or on our own – finding the right next step often comes by reaching out to a vocations director. Our role is to help you hear and answer God's call. Drop us a line and we will help you discover where God's call is leading you.

CONGREGATION *of* HOLY CROSS
UNITED STATES PROVINCE
OF PRIESTS AND BROTHERS

Office of Vocations
P.O. Box 541
Notre Dame, IN 46556
(574) 631-6385
vocations@holycrossusa.org
holycrossvocations.org



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Sharing their Journeys

"Let those who are to be ordained priests please stand." Just this past April 22, Fr. Michael Palmer, C.S.C., and Fr. Ryan Pietrocarlo, C.S.C., heard this in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the campus of the University of Notre Dame. When they heard those words, and their names being called, they each stood and confidently said "present." It's quite a moment; they affirmed once again that this is where they were supposed to be, and God is calling them to be a Holy Cross priest forever. Fittingly, they did this in the same place that they said "forever" last fall in their final profession, saying "forever" to living, working, and dying in the Congregation of Holy Cross as consecrated religious.

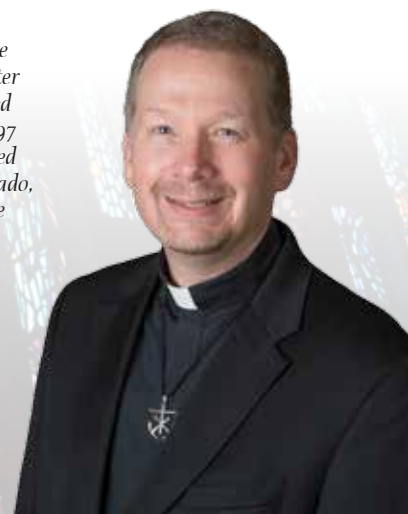
We are happy to share the stories of these two new priests in this issue of *Ave Crux*. I hope you find something of your own story in their experiences, which go from Michigan and New York through Old College to places like México, Army Chaplain School, and finally to two parishes in South Bend, Indiana. We in Holy Cross are grateful for their willingness to join us, and all of us in the Church can be filled with joy that we have two new priests who will bring the Eucharist and God's mercy and love to so many people in their lifetimes.

You'll find in this issue some ways that Fr. Michael and Fr. Ryan discerned God's call, before and during their formation. In my ongoing conversation with those who are discerning God's call, we often talk about the "next step" rather than the "final step." That is, what is God calling you to do NEXT, instead of what is His call for you for the rest of your life? To look at "forever" can be too daunting right now, but to discover where God wants you to be next is a worthwhile pursuit, to be sure.

As you continue in your own discernment of God's call, know of our prayers for you. Remember, nothing replaces a daily prayer life, so take time to be present and listen to Him in your prayer, and He will bring you clarity in discerning the next step you are called to take. May God be with you in this holy Easter Season!

Rev. Neil Wack, CSC
vocation@holycrossusa.org

Rev. Neil Wack, C.S.C., is director of vocations for the U.S. Province of the Congregation of Holy Cross. After earning a degree in computer science, Fr. Neil entered the seminary at the University of Notre Dame in 1997 and was ordained a priest at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in 2004. He was assigned to a parish in Colorado, and then transferred to his home parish of Christ the King in South Bend, Indiana, in 2005, and served there for ten years. As director of vocations, Fr. Neil coordinates vocation promotion efforts at Holy Cross campuses, parishes and other apostolates across the United States.



Unspeakable Joy Awaits Us

Fr. Michael Palmer, C.S.C.

I am surprised to write this, but I have probably grown the most in my understanding of brotherhood in Holy Cross. When I was discerning a vocation in high school, the fraternity between the Holy Cross seminarians was one of the strongest factors in my decision. Coming from a large family and very tight-knit home parish, I thought there wasn't much more for me to learn about Christian community.

I was blessedly *wrong*.

I often repeat passage 4:42 of the Holy Cross Constitutions to myself in prayer, since it reminds me why I joined Holy Cross in the first place. If I can truly love my God and my brothers, then that alone will show the world the unspeakable joy awaiting us in the Kingdom of God!

You see, when we talk about *brotherhood* here, it means much more than a loose collection of men in the same group. It means we are brothers in Christ who share the same heart and the same mission. In times of suffering and despair, I have been repeatedly floored by how naturally our community rushes to the aid of one another and to those we serve, without seeing it as an inconvenience or something out of the ordinary.

One of my closest mentors in the community, Fr. Mark DeMott, C.S.C., likewise helped me to see our ministry at its most joyful and effective - when we speak and act authentically to God's people. As supervisor for my pastoral year at the University of Portland, Fr. Mark also taught me so much about how to bear witness to our vows in active ministry, especially among students.

A particularly joyful moment in ministry - and one of the greatest days of my life -



Above: Deacon Michael Palmer, C.S.C., baptizing his niece, Carlisle at his family's home parish.

was the day I baptized my niece, Carlisle, at my family's home parish in Michigan. As I poured water and sacred chrism on her head - surrounded by family and friends in the very same church where I was baptized - I was overwhelmed with how surreal it all seemed. Here I was, plunging this precious child into the eternal life of Christ, then preaching to her parents about their holy obligation to raise Carlisle in the Catholic faith.

Could I honestly dare to administer God's grace in front of those who knew all my strengths and flaws?

Could I, a sinful man, truly bless and heal others as Christ did?

Yet, this day was one of the most grace-filled moments of my entire life. It united my identity as a Palmer with my life as an ordained minister, and in the process gave me great enthusiasm for my future ministry.

Reflecting on my new identity as an ordained minister and the three vows I took in priestly Ordination, I now fully recognize how the vows call us to be

"It is essential to our mission that we strive to abide so attentively together that people will observe: 'See how they love one another.' We will then be a sign in an alienated world: men who have, for love of their Lord, become closest neighbors, trustworthy friends, brothers."

(Constitution 4:42)

authentic disciples and sons of Jesus Christ. When lived faithfully, all three of these vows will conform me evermore to the person of Jesus Christ:

Vowed poverty encourages detachment from earthly goods - making room in my heart for love of God and neighbor, and binding me to the suffering of the poor and powerless (since I, too, rely on the generosity of God and others for my livelihood).

Vowed chastity is not something that “robs” me of fatherhood or a full life; it is a liberating call to pour out my life and love for the sake of my brothers and sisters! It joins me to the love-wounded heart of Christ, who longs to heal the

scars and gashes of sin among His people. I hope and pray that my spiritual fatherhood will lead many souls to the heart of our Savior.

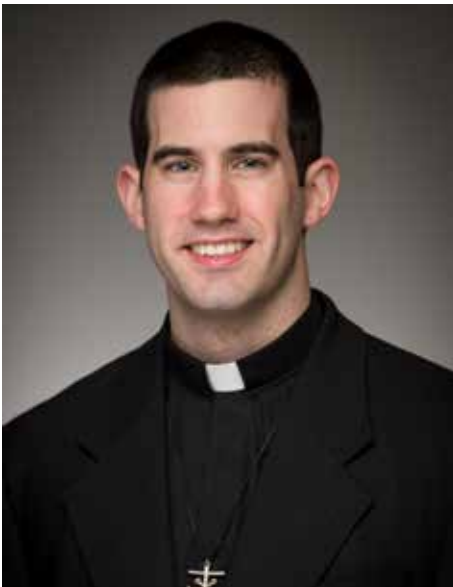
Vowed obedience is an invitation - to unite my will with God, placing my time and gifts at the service of God and His Church. It is also a daily reminder that my life and work belong to the Lord, and I trust that He will guide me where I need to go - even if I do not always understand why.

Looking back upon my discernment, my greatest fear was that I would miss out on other things, or that I would never be 100% sure of my calling. Put out into the deep, as I did, and be not afraid! If you

enter discernment with an open mind and an open heart, God will never lead you astray or make your efforts fruitless! Whatever your calling may be, honest discernment brings about great joy and wisdom.

Be fearless in giving it serious consideration!

Below: Deacon Michael Palmer, C.S.C., at his Chaplain School Graduation.



REV. MICHAEL PALMER, C.S.C.

Born: July 12, 1989

Parents: Warren & Victoria Palmer, Berkley, Michigan

College: University of Notre Dame, B.A., 2011

Graduate Study: Notre Dame, M.Div., 2016

Entered Formation: 2007, Old College

First Vows: July 28, 2012

Final Vows: Aug. 27, 2016

Deacon Placement: Deacon, Christ the King Catholic Church, South Bend, IN



Rolling Along With Faith in God

Fr. Michael Palmer, C.S.C.

The charism of Holy Cross became real for me when I joined the Army Chaplain Corps nearly three years ago - following a Holy Cross tradition that began in the Civil War. The particular path I've been on began way back in high school, when

I first started to discern my vocation. As a sophomore, with many relatives who'd gone into the Army and my own brothers accepted into West Point, I was being asked by just about everybody if I was going to go to West Point, or joining the Army, to which I kept responding, "Well I like the Army, but I don't think I'm cut out for it." And, I meant that.

I started to think, "Well, okay, if I'm not going to be in the Army, then what am I going to do with my life?"

That prompted me to start looking into seminaries, and looking at the priesthood. Growing up in a big Catholic family, that was kind of on my mind anyway.

Around the same time, my uncle who'd been in Iraq for about a year came back home. While talking one evening, he mentioned that while in Iraq he never saw a single priest there, and that chaplains in general are pretty scarce. For a whole year, he didn't have Mass, didn't have Confession, and in general, didn't have an opportunity to talk to a Catholic minister.

"Well, that's terrible," I responded. And then ten seconds later, my second response was, "Well, somebody should do something about that." And then, gradually, I was like, "Well, maybe I could do something about that." That was really how it started. I wouldn't call it a St. Paul moment, but a gradual process. I was just following along and things kept falling into place, and just happening, and happening, and happening. "Oh, okay, I guess I'll go to a retreat at the seminary." And then, "Okay, I guess I'll fill out an application." I kept following.

Fast-forwarding to my first year of vows in Holy Cross, chaplaincy had popped

up in my mind from time to time, but I had never actually acted on it - it was still kind of a pipe dream, I guess. Then, about half-way through my first year of vows, meeting with the formation staff, I was asked, "Well, as you're moving forward in Holy Cross, are there any special ministries that you want us to look at, or that you'd be interested in?" I thought a bit, and decided the worst they could say is no! So, I just put it out there and told them how I was still feeling interested in what Army chaplaincy would entail, and how there's still a huge need for it.

"Would I be able to look into that?"

I was very grateful for how they responded.

"If this is something you feel you're called to, we'll support you 100%." They knew I'd been thinking about that for a long time, that my family was involved in the military, and that Holy Cross has a long tradition of chaplaincy; from Fr. Corby in Civil War times on, we've always had priests serving as chaplain, and currently Fr. Bill Dorwart, C.S.C., is a two-time Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy (Naval District Washington [NDW] Religious Services).

I went through the application process, was commissioned a second lieutenant in the summer of 2014, went to Army Chaplain school for 12 weeks in 2015 at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina (all concurrently with the standard formation process in Holy Cross). I am now in the Army Reserves, training one weekend per month with a nearby unit. In a class of close to 90 chaplain students, I was one of only 4 Catholics, and the other three were in their 40s and 50s. It was a wonderful experience for me. I was able to dive in and learn about real life. What does it take to be a chaplain? What do we do? What are you expected to know? And, being surrounded by other people who are going through the same experience, regardless of their faith tradition, was beautiful in a lot of ways.

I'm a ranking first lieutenant, and now that I'm ordained, I'll become a full chaplain once the one-year time requirement has passed. People ask me, "Oh, well when are you getting



deployed?" Truthfully, I have no idea. Realistically speaking, it wouldn't be any sooner than, two-and-a-half or three years from now at the least, and legally speaking, my vow of Obedience to Holy Cross takes priority over my oath as an Army officer. So, they can't just call me up, and say, "Hey, pack your bags, you're deploying next week." They have to contact and ask permission from my superior to release me to serve.

If God wills it, I hope to go into active duty and bring the Sacraments to our brothers and sisters, no matter where they are, as our call to follow the Cross across all borders certainly rings true in the military, where men and women often have no one to turn to in the midst of suffering. The shadow of the Cross looms large - but God's love knows no borders, and neither does Holy Cross!

Chaplains, like medical personnel in the military, are non-combatants. Their mission is to perform and provide religious support for all troops regardless of their denomination, regardless if they even have a faith tradition. Chaplains are one of, if not the only, completely confidential resource a soldier has. As a Catholic chaplain, Fr. Michael would certainly be expected to celebrate Mass for Catholic soldiers, but would also be expected to minister to all soldiers who need spiritual and moral support.

Below: Newly ordained Deacon Palmer and Deacon Pietrocarlo exchange first blessings.



Humbled by He Who Hath Called Me

Fr. Ryan Pietrocarlo, C.S.C.

What attracted me to Holy Cross in the beginning still attracts me today and that is the diversity of ways to serve the Church - and you certainly must have gotten a strong sense of that reading Fr. Michael's reflection. I am excited to see how the Holy Spirit will guide me throughout my life to serve His people, yet I know my greatest challenge will be facing those who are resistant to that call or have experienced great difficulty, making them question that truth. It is then that the message of the Cross as Our Only Hope can prove most powerful.

I love Fr. Moreau's quote, "Do not educate the mind at the expense of the heart." I think this is essential for growing as persons and growing in faith. It is important to learn about Christ intellectually, but the key is to feel Him within our hearts, to have a living relationship with Him. This is what will drive us and sustain us; it will make our faith the most alive. It is both with the head and the heart that we come to find Jesus and it is being led by both that will help us come to know Him ever more fully.

Maintaining that living relationship is fed by prayer. I love to pray through Scripture. *Lectio Divina* (Divine Reading) is my favorite type of prayer because I love to meditate on the richness of the Word of God. God can speak to us very profoundly through the Scriptures and He has given me many words and images to chew on during my life. I think the most powerful image I have mediated on is the Cross. It is an image that has become more powerful in my life since entering Holy Cross because this is the great symbol of our faith. It signifies the many trials that we experience in life, but the hope that life never ends in trial, but only carries us

to the glory of the Resurrection. Discerning a vocation in Holy Cross, I found yet another living relationship that brings our faith alive more fully - our community of Holy Cross Religious. I've found Holy Cross Religious to be genuine, real guys who desired to serve God above all things, and I have experienced a stirring sense of community and fraternity. That was a great comfort to me, as I knew it would be something important to sustain me throughout my life.

In fact, I often feel like the first disciples in the Acts of the Apostles

who lived together, ministered together and held everything in common. There is something very powerful about working together for a common mission and supporting each other in that task, especially during formation. It was a blessing to journey with other men discerning the same path and common mission in religious life. I often felt refreshed, challenged and greatly supported by my brothers in community and credit a lot of my formation to where I am today because of them.

In the time leading up to an Ordination, most recently my own, there's a great excitement, as well as a sense of unworthiness. No one is fully worthy to take this office. Yet, I am humbled by God who has called me. I look forward now to serving His people and His Church as a priest; to celebrating the Sacraments for the people of God.

Below: Deacon Ryan Pietrocarlo, C.S.C., distributing the Precious Blood to a student at St. Adalbert's School in South Bend, Indiana.





Across All Borders

Above: Deacon Ryan Pietrocarlo e

Fr. Ryan Pietrocarlo, C.S.C.

My pastoral year (2014-2015) found me at Parroquia Nuestra Madre Santísima de La Luz in Guadalupe, Nuevo Leon, México - a parish with 30,000 registered people. The parish is involved in three main areas - social justice, two soup kitchens, CCD, an extensive education program for adults and children, as well as youth ministry. I assisted a full-time social worker in making house visits to help people with government and health care paperwork, helped run both soup kitchens with volunteers, and helped out with CCD and youth ministry. It made for a full schedule, but I was doing a lot there.

If you've never heard it said, we refer to

our Holy Cross Community as a family, and we mean it completely - in the way we live and carry out our ministries. Between México and the United States, we are pretty consistent, but México really takes to that, as *familia* (family) is so fundamental to the people there - it's truly rooted in the culture and is the bedrock of the foundation of their lives. It is so strong that the men in formation come to see each other as blood relatives. This familial bond comes out in ministry, meaning there's a very personal aspect of ministry. You can sense a deep connection between the pastor and the parish, and those in the parish long to be there. It was very refreshing for me to see that, and

looking forward to my own ministry, I would love to incorporate that here in the states.

With mission as a pillar of our Province, and looking specifically at Latin America, there's a lot of need for ministers of the Church there. Faith is so strong there, even among those who've never stepped foot in a church! You'll find an altar to Guadalupe in the homes, as faith is a part of the culture - and they long for spiritual guides.

The U.S. and México are separate nations. We have divisions, but we are all human beings, and we are all working hard to provide for our



xchanges greetings with friends at his Final Vows Mass.

families. We (in Holy Cross) in the United States and México have a need for the internationality that is a part of our mission. We need to care for each other, and we do! La Luz gets donations from parishes in the United States, such as Holy Cross sponsored parish, St. Ignatius Martyr, in Austin, Texas. That connection reaffirms for families in La Luz that there are people who care about them and want to help them. Going forward, it's just going to be a matter of continuing to motivate people to think about it that way - and also to address any fears our religious have of traveling to another country. It's not easy to do, no matter the political climate. You're going to a much more impoverished

area with a different culture, different language, different customs. But I like what we're doing at Moreau Seminary in the summers - having seminarians go to different countries of the world to see it firsthand - because you can have a perspective of something, but until you go there, until you actually put a face to the people that are there and have what Pope Francis calls "an encounter," it doesn't hit home. Then, you see the needs there, you see that we are all human beings. And you'll be inspired! Our busiest night at the parish was Friday night! In an American parish, you basically have the night off on a Friday. Yet, people wanted to go to church - to Bible studies, prayer groups, youth groups and so on. They want to be with God at the end of the week. That is a beautiful lesson for us; to have the Church be more and more a part of our lives.

This pastoral year changed me.

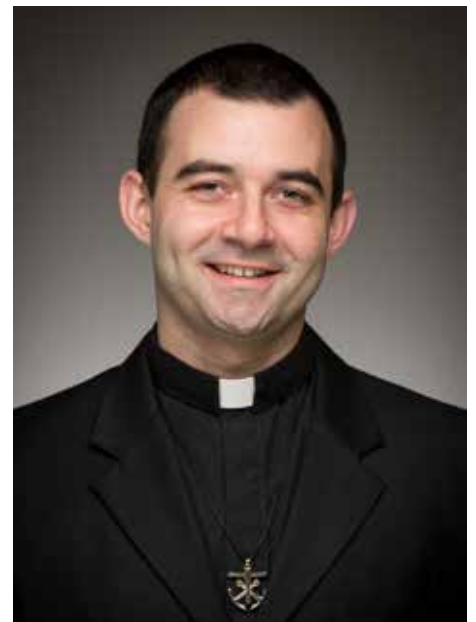
My appreciation of the Mexican culture and passion for Hispanic ministry grew as a result of my encounter in Monterrey. I feel called to this as a priest, and came back to the United States and did Hispanic ministry at St. Adalbert's in South Bend, Indiana.

I also cannot forget the needs there, nor can I pass up a chance to tell others how a better education system overall could assist them in getting out of poverty. Some kids that entered the seminary out of high school could barely read and struggled so in their studies. Formation there can take a long time.

And lastly, it opened my eyes to the way we live here. I lived so simply there. The seminary and house of formation there is considered luxurious for the seminarians, yet from the standpoint of the seminary here in the U.S., we might say we're roughing it a little bit. The seminarians came from dirt floor houses, and some perhaps never took a shower before in their lives or had a flushing toilet. So, to see how simply they lived, but how joyfully they lived showed me that simplicity of life can bring great joy, no matter where you are, as long as you are among your Holy Cross *familia*.

"Often we must make ourselves at home among more than one people or culture, reminding us again that the farther we go in giving the more we stand to receive."

(Constitution 2:17)



REV. RYAN PIETROCARLO, C.S.C.

Born: November 14, 1988

Parents: Joe & Karen Pietrocarlo, East Rochester, New York

College: University of Notre Dame, B.S., 2011

Graduate Study: Notre Dame, M.Div., 2016

Entered Formation: 2007, Old College

First Vows: July 28, 2012

Final Vows: Aug. 27, 2016

Deacon Placement: Deacon, St. Adalbert & St. Casimir Parishes, South Bend, IN

Holy Cross Formation ..



Old College

LENGTH OF TIME:
3 Years (Freshman - Junior)

LOCATION:
University of Notre Dame

DEGREES SOUGHT FROM:
• University of Notre Dame
• Holy Cross College



Postulancy

LENGTH OF TIME:
1 Year

LOCATION:
Moreau Seminary on the
Campus of Notre Dame

POSTULANTS COME
FROM TWO GROUPS:
• Senior students from
Old College
• Post-graduates



Novitiate

LENGTH OF TIME:
1 Year

LOCATION:
Cascade, Colorado

Novices profess Fir
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. The Road to Ordination



Temporarily Professed

LENGTH OF TIME:
4 Years

LOCATION:
Moreau Seminary on the
Campus of Notre Dame

Temporarily professed men will complete their Master of Divinity Degree at the University of Notre Dame.



Transitional Diaconate

LENGTH OF TIME:
1 Year

The Sunday after the profession of Final Vows, members are ordained deacons, usually at Moreau Seminary, and will serve up to eight months as transitional deacons before their Ordination to the Presbyterate.

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ate year.



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Office of Vocations

P.O. Box 541

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Front Cover Photo: Bishop Arthur J. Colgan, C.S.C., presides over the Diaconate Ordination of Ryan Pietrocarlo, C.S.C., and Michael Palmer, C.S.C.
Back Cover Photo: Fr. Ryan Pietrocarlo, C.S.C., and Fr. Michael Palmer, C.S.C., at their M.Div. graduation ceremony.