

EDUCATION • PARISH • MISSION

Ave CruX



Volume 4 Issue 1 | 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. 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 God's call.

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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instagram.com/cscvocations

Fr. Neil's Letter

"You're next!" I can't help it, at the end of every ordination Mass, if I see a seminarian who is due to be ordained the following year, I can't help but smile and tell them "you're next!" It is exciting – they are the next ones to be ordained. I'm sure I said, "you're next," to at least some of the new priests (Fathers Brian, Brogan, Karl, Thomas, and Bryan) – a year ago as they were finishing up their initial formation, and preparing for final profession and diaconate ordination. Now, as you can see in the pages of this edition of Ave Crux, they have been ordained priests, in the beautiful Basilica of the Sacred Heart at the University of Notre Dame, where last fall they vowed to live poverty, chastity, and obedience according to the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross.

In the stories you are about to read, I am sure will find similarities to your own story of how God has led you to this point in your life. These men are not so different from you – they have had varied family experiences, they have experienced joys and struggles with discerning God's will, and through it all, they have been faithful to the call to serve the people of God. Currently they serve in parishes, colleges and universities, both in the United States and overseas in Chile. Wherever they have been, they've sought to live the charism of Holy Cross, to educate minds and hearts in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to make Him known, loved and served and thus to save souls. This will be their charge for the rest of their lives.

For these five men, they can best live out their baptismal calling by being good and faithful priests in the Congregation of Holy Cross. We all have to discern where God wants us to use our baptismal call to be priest, prophet and king. But gratefully, we don't have to discern it all at once. We just need to pray and discern where God wants us to be next. What is that next step on the journey to the Lord? Is it to contact a vocation director? To schedule a "Come and See" weekend? Or maybe it's simply to get a little more serious in our day-to-day prayer, and find ways to minister to the people of God where you are now, by liturgical ministries or volunteering in the community.

Please consider us in the Office of Vocations to be a resource for you. We promise not to pressure you, but we do want to help you discern that next step. If it's God's will that that step is with Holy Cross, we can help facilitate that. If not, we'll do our best to point you in the right direction. Either way, we will continue to pray for you, and ask that you pray for the men in formation, and for the priests and brothers in the Congregation of Holy Cross. Take time to be with Jesus, and listen to Him in your prayer. May you and your family be blessed as you seek to walk in the light of the Resurrected Christ in this beautiful Easter Season.

Sincerely, in Christ

Rev. Neil Wack, C.S.C.
vocation@holycrossusa.org





Rev. Brian KENNEDY, C.S.C.

When I first heard about the Congregation of Holy Cross, I was in high school and already discerning the priesthood and religious life. My grandfather had returned from my cousin's ordination at the University of Notre Dame, and told me about this interesting Holy Cross priest he had met. He also brought back a vocations pamphlet. Later, another cousin invited me along to a Come and See Weekend at the Old College Undergraduate Seminary for Holy Cross. It was on that visit that I knew that Holy Cross was a religious community that I wanted to discern at a deeper level.

Since that time, I have been in parish ministry and spent three summers of ministry in Latin America, visiting our apostolates in Mexico and Chile, while learning Spanish. Being immersed in another language was one of the harder things I've done during my time in formation, but it was also one of the best, because it humbled me and opened me up to new opportunities for ministry – especially now at my current placement in Goodyear, Arizona, where I speak and preach in Spanish regularly.

Living in Holy Cross, I came to see that we are often self-defined by our work, by what we do. While it is true to a certain extent, it is also true that we exist, first and foremost, as a community of men

consecrated to God in a life dedicated to prayer and sanctity. I love liturgical prayer, celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours with my community, or on my own with Scripture, or in silence. Often I have to resist the temptation to fill my prayer time with reading, thinking (or even planning a homily). It is so important to learn just to sit in the silence and listen. Sometimes I speak – even out loud at times – and wait for a response. I also find it necessary every now and then to reconnect with my Creator by spending time alone in His wild and wonderful creation, whether by a short walk to the park or a longer hike up a mountain. As is my personal experience, I have met a lot of men in Holy Cross who are so much more than their job, if you will. They exude a sense of spiritual depth, a sense that there's something more to their life than what it is they do all day. This is how I want to live my consecrated life: in a way that always points to the God who loves us more than we can ever know.

I have to admit that my experience of the vows leading up to my ordination changed. Having professed them perpetually, I finally committed myself to living them for life. As a family member observed after the Mass, it was so good to see me dedicated to the One I love in such a profound and permanent way. I will long remember the theme of our retreat before Final Vows, taken from our *Constitutions*: “*They are an act of love for the God who first loved us.*”

Now, as a priest ordained in Holy Cross, I am excited to see the work Holy Cross inspires and supports in our local

community. I humbly keep Blessed Basil Moreau's words in mind as the future lies before me: “*Although you have made your choice, nevertheless, count on experiencing some big battles, loathing, even some regrets, perhaps, at the choice you have made.*” Our life is often fun but it's not always easy, and I pray that recognizing this at the beginning of my journey will help me to persist in it with greater faith! I am reminded also of the importance of prayer as my journey begins: “*Ah, let us take our poor, wretched heart and plunge it into this divine fire whose hearth is the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It will come forth from the fire a strong, sturdy apostle's heart, overflowing with an immense love for God and for neighbor.*” This passage from Blessed Basil Moreau reminds me of the importance of prayer, in and of itself, but also of staying strong and grounded in our ministry to others.

REV. BRIAN KENNEDY, C.S.C.

Born: Feb. 14, 1989

Parents: David and Christine Kennedy, Pequot Lakes, Minn.

College: University of Notre Dame, B.A., 2012

Graduate Study: Notre Dame, M.Div., 2018

Entered Formation: 2008, Old College

First Vows: Aug. 3, 2013

Final Vows: Aug. 25, 2018

Deacon Placement: St. John Vianney Parish, Goodyear, AZ

Rev. Karl ROMKEMA, C.S.C.



“*Become another Christ.*” Several times in his *Spiritual Exercises*, Bl. Basil Moreau encourages us to become truly another Jesus Christ. In this simple but powerful exhortation, he captures the essence of the Christian mystery - and the heart of our vocation.

Each of the baptized are called and graced not only to follow Jesus, but to identify so closely with Him that there is no noticeable difference between Master and disciple. When I first learned this, my whole understanding changed. It is a transformative exhortation. I think Blessed Moreau’s spirituality of “Conformity to Christ” has something beautiful and relevant to offer every Christian.

My favorite and most consistent way of praying is *lectio divina*. *Lectio divina* is an ancient way of praying with the Scriptures and incorporating God’s Word into one’s daily life - transforming prayer directly into action. I love praying with the Scriptures and the daily Mass readings because they give me a window into the life of Jesus. I usually spend a half hour in prayer, and God’s Word always has something to offer - words of comfort, challenge, and words that reveal God’s will for me on a daily basis. Recently I had the opportunity to preach this way of prayer to the middle school students at St. Ignatius Martyr in Austin, Texas. *Lectio divina* requires a little practice, but I think it can speak to anyone regardless of their age or state in life.

One of my most transformative experiences in ministry was my summer

in Uganda. I taught in the schools there and encountered poverty like never before. Most impactful was my time at St. Ursula’s, where I worked with incredible students who possess various special needs, including autism, Down syndrome, and cerebral palsy. Through these children, God revealed to me how He cares for His little ones. In Uganda, many of these children would be hidden away by their families out of shame, but St. Ursula’s gives them a place where they can be themselves, learn basic skills, and experience the friendship and love that every child deserves; I was blown away by the transformation these students underwent, when the environment was dedicated to them. The ministry of the sisters and teachers of the school showed me how Jesus really works wonders through His Body, the Church.

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If God is calling you to something, He will also give you the grace to fulfill that call.” This has proven so true in my life! God has given me so much grace throughout my life, and He has helped me overcome so many fears.

I began feeling called to the priesthood when I was just six years old. At first, I was afraid of these feelings because I felt I was too shy to be a priest. But my Mom always gave me the following advice: “If

God is calling you to something, He will also give you the grace to fulfill that call.” This has proven so true in my life! God has given me so much grace throughout my life, and He has helped me overcome so many fears. After I entered formation in Holy Cross, a number of additional fears entered my mind - Have I entered the perfect religious community? Will I miss my family too much? Do I have what it takes to be a good Holy Cross priest? Throughout all of this, God has provided me with so much transforming joy in my vocation, that I know I will be happy as a priest in Holy Cross. When we are discerning something that scares us, sometimes we have to take a risk and humbly trust in God’s providence.

REV. KARL ROMKEMA, C.S.C.

Born: June 25, 1991

Parents: Mike and Karen Romkema, Clarkston, Mich.

College: University of Notre Dame, B.A., 2013

Graduate Study: Notre Dame, M.Div., 2018

Entered Formation: 2009, Old College

First Vows: Aug. 2, 2014

Final Vows: Aug. 25, 2018

Deacon Placement: St. Ignatius Martyr Parish in Austin, TX



Rev. Brogan RYAN, C.S.C.

“We asked how we might follow, and we found many footprints on the road. A great band of men had passed this way, men who had made and lived by their vows, men who had walked side by side in their following of the Lord. They beckoned us to fall in step with them. We wanted to be part of the family they formed in order to share in their life and work.”

~ Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross 1:5

As a Holy Cross priest, my vows are my commitment to living a life centered completely on God; and through them, I hope to grow deeper and deeper into relationship with God every day. In that way, my vows will be the centerpiece of my ministry and life. I was lucky to be able to celebrate my Final Profession of Vows with many family and friends who have been vowed – in marriage and religious life – for many, many years. This includes my parents who have been married for over 40 years. I look to them as examples and encouragement of the joy that can come from striving to live their vows faithfully. It is also remarkable to me how – only 5 years into the vowed life – the meaning and significance of this vowed commitment to God continues to unfold and deepen.

As ordination approached, I was incredibly excited. Discernment and formation was a long process for me. I am grateful that it led to ordination and

I was excited to be able to share the day with many family members and friends. These have been difficult days for the Church, so I feel humbled in my vocation yet energized to be a good and holy priest. The Sacraments have always been the most attractive aspect of the priesthood to me, particularly celebrating Mass. And, as a priest in Holy Cross, I feel particularly drawn to the ways that the Sacraments draw us closer to God through one another – in community. I think we are often the light that shines in one another’s darkness.

When I met the Congregation, it was through relationships with individual religious. Only when I saw their individual “footprints” did I get to know the “great band of men.” The reference to a great band of men in our Constitutions also reminds me of my experience of family life and my hope for community. The greatness is in the coming together, not in remaining individuals; it is a *great band* of men, not necessarily a band of *great men*. Knowing that you are surrounded by many people willing to contribute their different gifts to the same mission gives you a lot of freedom to be able to share the gifts that God has given you. The deep joy I witnessed in many priests throughout my life is what first made me consider that God could be calling me to the priesthood; I hope that that will be true of my priesthood as well.

My own discernment was a little roundabout. I taught and then worked as an accountant before entering formation! I believe that God was

working in my life through all of that, and it ultimately helped lead me to where I am now. Even if you walk down this path, it may not be for you, and that too is okay. Do not be afraid to discern a different vocation for yourself. Some of the most courageous people I have known in my formation are those who entered formation, poured their hearts into it, and then, feeling that God was calling them to something else, had the courage to leave.

My advice to you, if you or someone you know is considering a vocation, do not be afraid. Don’t be afraid to consider it, to tell someone, to talk to someone, to visit the seminary, to apply. If you are trying to seek the good and do God’s will, you are not wasting time, nor is God wasting time on you.

REV. BROGAN RYAN, C.S.C.

Born: Sep. 12, 1985

Parents: Robert and Mary Ginn Ryan, Columbus, Ohio

College: University of Notre Dame, B.B.A., 2008

Graduate Study: Notre Dame, M.Ed., 2010; M.Div., 2018

Entered Formation: 2012, Posulant Program

First Vows: Aug. 2, 2014

Final Vows: Aug. 25, 2018

Deacon Placement: Rector, Keough Hall at the University of Notre Dame

Rev. Michael THOMAS, C.S.C.

Two dimensions of the Holy Cross charism have crystalized for me during my time in formation: the centrality of the work of education and formation of the young and a sort of itinerant/special-forces dimension to broader pastoral needs. Education, specifically work in schools, has been a central apostolate since the community's origins in France, and some of our earliest apostolates in Europe were actually orphanages in Poland and Italy. Our founder, Blessed Basil Moreau, was a well-known professor and teacher and was preoccupied with Christian pedagogy and formation of youth. We have also always been involved in parish work, preaching tours, and even a kind of Catholic-style revivalism in France and in the U.S. in the form of the mission band. Fr. Moreau himself was a famous preacher, and would travel through France on preaching tours. The history of the U.S. Province reveals a constant commitment to parish work. What makes us special, however, is our ability to respond to particular pastoral needs of a place: to take on a difficult parish, a new mission, etc.

At the heart of our charism and mission, no matter where we find ourselves is brotherhood in Holy Cross. It is what sustains us in ministry, and is a sign to us of the love of God. But it is also bound up tightly with our mission to the world: to be a sign of communion and love in communities that often suffer the wounds of alienation and loneliness. Some of my closest friends are my brothers in Holy Cross, and I would never have been able to discover my vocation and to follow God without their accompaniment and friendship.

Community life is the hearth of joy and energy that warms us to head back out into ministry. It has helped me to name my own gifts and my own shortcomings, it has frustrated me, and been a consolation and a home; belonging to the community of Holy Cross is how God asks me to belong to His Church and how God asks me to love the world.

"The Resurrection of Christ is true, observable by the senses and enduring. Such ought also to be the characteristics of your new life."

~ Blessed Basil Moreau

I really like this quote for three reasons: 1) It is true to Moreau's intensely Christocentric vision for his religious – we are to become other Christs through the transformation and conversion of our whole selves; 2) That we are images of the resurrected Christ means that our lives will be lived in the future hope of Resurrection, restoration, perfect joy, and justice now, which means that we will live in such a way that others will know that God exists and that God is love, and that this love is victorious over every sin and even over death; 3) That the Resurrection of Christ, and our lives in Christ, are "observable by the senses" means that this is not some fluffy enlightenment, but rather the saving power of God that drips into how we talk to people, the decisions we make at the parish, how generous we are, how we pray, and whether or not we act out of fear and self-preservation or out of hope and burning love. People should be able to observe that Christ is risen when they see us. It's a tall order, but there is no more beautiful vocation. If you feel drawn to this vocation yourself, pray.



Pray to God with as much honesty as you can, asking Him to show you His desire for your life. Then listen, watch, and wait, trusting that God will guide you through spiritual consolation, the words of others, or an experience of His love. Start working in apostolic work at your parish, talk to a vocations director and go on a retreat or Come and See Weekend. Finally, and this is critical for us Millennials: Take a leap. Commit to taking a chance to discern God's will. Freedom comes from living abundantly with God, not from keeping all options open (which usually just generates anxiety). Trust that following His will leads only to more joy and blessing, even if you cannot see how at first.

REV. MICHAEL THOMAS, C.S.C.

Born: Feb. 2, 1990

Parents: Wayne and Karin Thomas, Lakeville, Ind.

College: Indiana University - Bloomington, B.A., 2012

Graduate Study: Notre Dame, M.Div., 2018

Entered Formation: 2012, Postulant Program

First Vows: Aug. 2, 2014

Final Vows: Aug. 25, 2018

Deacon Placement: St. George's College, Santiago, Chile



Rev. Bryan WILLIAMS, C.S.C.

Our pastor growing up always preached vocations at the school Masses, and by the seventh grade the question of whether to enter formation for the priesthood was a live question for me. I went back and forth asking, “God, do You want me to become Your priest or do You want me to do something else with my life?” During my sophomore year in high school at Strake Jesuit we heard two Jesuit novices present on the Jesuits and then on their own stories of how they came to enter formation. One of them had asked the same questions I was asking, so I prayed, asking God the very same questions. The following day, our theology teacher played the *Fishers of Men* vocations video that presents the drama of the priesthood in an attractive light. Something about watching it that time pushed me off the fence. I made up my mind to enter the seminary.

A friend of mine had also entered a college seminary program, so when I looked at colleges, I would ask them if they had a seminary program. When I visited Notre Dame during the summer before my senior year, the admissions tour guide told me about Old College Undergraduate Seminary. That October, I went on a Come and See visit to Old College and made my formal visit at the end of January to apply. The familial focus of community life I experienced on those two visits, the joy that the men

exuded, and the variety of ministries Holy Cross serves appealed to me – from colleges and universities in residence life or teaching to parish ministry to bringing the Gospel to other countries. Throughout my formation, I have seen Holy Cross in each of these settings and can honestly say that I would be happy to serve in any of them.

Discernment is a unique thing. While God does speak to us, He does not drop down out of the sky to give us explicit marching orders. He will more often than not draw us along, stir our heart, or speak through an encounter with another person. Hearing God’s call is not a hard thing to do, but it does take listening – how exactly? One acronym I like for this process is PSG which also happens to be the acronym for a famous soccer team in France called Paris Saint - Germain. The acronym provides a good general structure for discernment:

Prayer - If we are going to listen for God’s call, we have to give time for Him to speak by spending quiet time alone with Him. We have to create an empty space into which to speak.

Saintly Life - Wherever God calls us, it will be a call to become a saint and to grow in the life of virtue. Any vocation is a call to holiness, and growing in Christian virtue will only assist us in continuing on that path.

Gather Information - Every discernment is a discernment between practical options, ex: religious life or marriage, or between Holy Cross and a diocese or another religious order. Knowing more about, or spending a weekend with, a particular community will help us discern where God is calling.

Listening for God’s call involves both interior and exterior listening. Interior listening will involve asking questions such as:

- What do you keep coming back to? To what does my prayer often return?
- Is there some event or something that someone said to you that has stayed with you?

Exterior listening, on the other hand, involves asking:

- What have others’ comments been? (An outside perspective can show us something we may have missed.)
- What have others helped me to name? (Such as a feeling or a comment I always make.)

It comes down to desire. It has always helped me to refocus on why I pray. Even short, seemingly nothing times in the chapel are moments spent learning to desire God deeper. Prayer consists less of words than of desires and aspirations of the heart that need no long formulas nor abundance of word. Prayer is a fervent and continuous desire.



REV. BRYAN WILLIAMS, C.S.C.

Born: Sept. 30, 1990

Parents: Warren and Melanie Williams, Sugar Land, Texas

College: University of Notre Dame, B.A., 2013

Graduate Study: Notre Dame, M. Div., 2018

Entered Formation: 2009, Old College

First Vows: Aug. 2, 2014

Final Vows: Aug. 25, 2018

Deacon Placement: Campus Ministry at Stonehill College



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Office of Vocations

P.O. Box 541

Notre Dame, IN 46556

(574) 631-6385

vocations@holycrossusa.org

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Front Cover Photo: Rev. Karl Romkema, C.S.C., Rev. Michael Thomas, C.S.C., Rev. Brian Kennedy, C.S.C., Rev. Bryan Williams, C.S.C., and Rev. Brogan Ryan, C.S.C., pose for a group photo.

Back Cover Photo: Group photo taken at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart during the Final Vows Mass.