

Summer 2017, No. 2

VOICES from the Vineyard

A magazine about ministry for alumni of Saint Meinrad.



Ministry on the Margins

A Pastor's View

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Christian Mocek

I’ve heard people ask, “What do you do with a theology degree?”

In a society that prizes those who do over those who don’t, a degree in theology may seem pointless to the casual observer. But I don’t need to convince our alumni that there is certainly a

lot one can do with a degree in theology.

In this, our second edition of the new *Voices from the Vineyard* magazine, our alumni authors explore the meaning behind and the lessons learned from the wonderful work they do. From a seminarian’s experience at the Mexican-American border wall, to lessons learned from moving three times in the first five years of priesthood, to the grace found in working for marginalized communities, and to the fulfillment found in living out the mission of Christ – our alumni show there is a lot to be learned from ministering to the people of God.

I hope you find their stories as moving as I did. If you like this issue, would you click here to take a quick survey about this magazine? It will help us prepare for future issues and improve your reading experience. I appreciate any help you can give. As always, if you have any feedback or questions, please reach out to me at cmocek@saintmeinrad.edu.

Christian Mocek

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Produced by the Alumni Office and the Communications Office at Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

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MINISTRY ON THE MARGINS: A Pastor's View

by: Christian Mocek



Fr. John McCaslin

Fr. John McCaslin is a man on the move. His parish office says as much – papers piled high on his desk, accolades hastily hung on the walls, and books crammed into every open space. Some would call it a mess, but Fr. John seems at home

sitting in a worn-out office chair that probably has a few stories of its own.

Collar pushed to the right and top button undone, he is not one for formalities. Laid back, approachable and gregarious, he is the kind of parish priest who knows everybody and everybody knows him. His quick wit is matched only by his deep spiritual fervor.

Fr. John is the pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Parish on the near west side of Indianapolis. In many ways, Fr. John's office represents well the story of his parish. The

“The more you engage your people in the mission of your parish, the more joyful they will be – and quite honestly, the freer you will become.”

parish sits right in the middle of a neighborhood in transition – boarded up homes, overgrown lawns and broken fences are a common sight.

But just as Fr. John sits comfortably among the chaos of his office, his parish is a place of stability in a neighborhood fraught with a seemingly endless list of problems associated with poverty.

“St. Anthony's is an anchor institution in this neighborhood,” explains Fr. John. “We are a neighbor and a voice for the community in many ways.”

The near west side of Indianapolis was originally settled by working-class Slovenians, Irish and Germans. In the early part of the 20th century, the Slovenian Catholics left St. Anthony's to found Holy Trinity Slovenian Catholic Church. For over a century, these two Catholic parishes provided for the spiritual and temporal needs of the community.

However, like many working-class neighborhoods in the Midwest, the near west side of Indianapolis experienced a significant population shift in the latter half of the 20th century. Holy Trinity eventually closed its doors, and the pews at St. Anthony's are now filled with young Hispanic families.

Leaning back in his office chair, hands folded comfortably on his lap, Fr. John breathes a big sigh. The story of his parish is the story of many across the country.

“The most painful moment for me in ministry was closing Holy Trinity. I still to this day miss those parishioners who went elsewhere. I feel that more than I feel elation for the successes.”

And there have been plenty of successes. Last year, Fr. John reopened St. Anthony of Padua



For the past three years, Saint Meinrad Day of Service volunteers have worked on homes for Hearts and Hands of Indiana. Hearts and Hands purchases and renovates homes in the neighborhood surrounding St. Anthony of Padua Parish on the near west side of Indianapolis. Through the leadership of Fr. John and other dedicated volunteers, Hearts and Hands has renovated nearly 15 homes since 2009, when the organization was first formed.



Fr. John McCaslin has been pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Indianapolis for 11 years. He graduated from Saint Meinrad in 2002.

Catholic School after seven years. In an agreement between the Archbishop's Office and the Mayor's Office, the charter school that was operating in the building closed to make way for the new school.

"Over 90% of the kids in the charter school were Catholic, so we felt that students were there," explains Fr. John. "At a Catholic school, there is freedom to speak about faith with everybody, so it is great. I love it."

Located on the second floor of the parish offices is the office of Hearts and Hands of Indiana. Through Hearts and Hands of Indiana, Fr. John and a slew of volunteers have purchased property around St. Anthony's and rehabbed nearly 15 dilapidated homes for use as single-family homes.

Hearts and Hands began in 2009 when Fr. John shared a vision for rebuilding his near west neighborhood with a group of former parishioners. In short order, his vision turned into a small nonprofit. The organization now has an active board of directors and a fulltime executive director with offices directly above Fr. John's.

A few blocks down the road from his office, past the parish food pantry he started, past the updated St. Anthony's parish church that he refurbished top to bottom during his time as pastor, down a street Fr. John walks with surprising familiarity, sits a beautiful new home with a Hearts and Hands sign in the front yard.

New siding, a new roof, beautiful new windows and a well-manicured lawn adorn this once-abandoned property. "Some may ask how building a house for somebody is part of the mission of Jesus Christ," says Fr. John, as he inspects some of the new siding. "Well, ask that family what it means to have a home to come to every night. Ask them how they feel that the Catholic Church made that possible for them."

Back in his office, Fr. John shifts from his usual wit as he reflects on his time at the parish.

"There is always this tension between what is emerging within the community and what is emerging from you, from your own vision and prayer as a leader," explains Fr. John. "How do you have a pastoral patience that says this may

be a wonderful idea, but it is not its time? You have to wait until you find the right moment or the right people to champion a good idea.”

Finding the right people to champion a good idea is Fr. John’s forte. He firmly believes that is key to running his parish community effectively.

“Who are our natural partners on things that will help us get things done? It is crucial to invite parishioners to respond to their baptismal call. The more you engage your people in the mission of your parish, the more joyful they will be – and quite honestly, the freer you will become.”

In the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, priests typically pastor a parish for two six-year terms. Fr. John has been at St. Anthony’s for 11 years, so his time at this parish is coming to a close. Fr. John is pleased at what he was able to accomplish – increased Mass attendance, reopening a Catholic school, starting a neighborhood revitalization effort, and countless other initiatives. Shifting his feet a little and repositioning his hands, Fr. John looks up and smiles.

“At the funeral of a priest-mentor of mine, the homilist shared that every priest preaches only one homily. I didn’t get it then, but I get it now.

You know, we preach a homily every week, but we all have a common thread that runs through all of that. I would say mine is embracing the truth that God loves you and living a life of love.”

Outside Fr. John’s office and across the parking lot sits his Ford Escape. A black sport coat hangs behind the driver’s seat. On the right shoulder is the crest of the Indianapolis Fire Department. Among his many other responsibilities, Fr. John is a chaplain to the men and women of the IFD.

It seems fitting, really. The second half of the mission statement for the Indianapolis Fire Department reads, “Serving our community with courage, commitment and compassion.” Fr. John lives those words well – always ready to tackle the next challenge with courage, commitment and compassion.

Fr. John is indeed a man on the move. It’s a good thing his back seat has what he needs to tackle what’s next. ♦



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Fr. John McCaslin graduated from Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in 2002. He has been pastor of St. Anthony’s Parish since 2006. Before being assigned to St. Anthony’s, he served as associate pastor at St. Barnabas Parish on the south side of Indianapolis.

He serves as the chairman of the Board of Directors for Hearts and Hands of Indiana, is a chairman emeritus of the Board of Directors for the Indianapolis Congregation Action Network, and is a chaplain to the Indianapolis Fire Department.

In 2014, he was awarded the “Lead. Learn. Proclaim. Award” from the National Catholic Educational Association during the NCEA’s annual conference in San Diego for reopening St. Anthony’s Catholic School. The award honors “the outstanding work of Catholic school educators in communities across the country.”

PERMANENCE AS PILGRIMAGE:

Tips for making a transition

by: Fr. Alan Carter T'13



Fr. Alan Carter

Fr. Peter Marshall T'09, director of spiritual formation at Saint Meinrad Seminary and newly appointed director of the Institute for Priests and Presbyterates, is doing fascinating research on the spirituality of the diocesan priesthood

for his doctor of ministry degree at Catholic University.

As I understand it, he situates the spirituality of a diocesan priest's permanence in ministry (incardinated to a particular diocese) within the context of the movement of pilgrimage. Why? Because – diocesan priests move, and sometimes priests move a lot.

I celebrated four years of priesthood a few weeks ago – and in those four years I've had four assignments. My first year of priesthood was at the largest parish in the diocese – with a large staff, a school and more than 3,000 families. The next year, I "flew solo" at the eastern edge of the diocese covering three counties, two parishes with a total of 50 families between them.

Next was a placement in campus ministry in the heart of the diocese. A year ago, I became pastor of a fairly large parish and the diocese's vocations

director. Including my time in seminary, everything I own has been packed in boxes, transported and unpacked 20 times in the last 10 years.

Lately, I've been reflecting on these moves and the idea of pilgrimage Fr. Marshall is developing. From that reflection, here are a few suggestions that might be helpful in times of movement and transition.

Find Your Anchor(s)

We all have anchors that offer stability – it's just a matter of noticing and using them.

At some point in the middle of my third move – when the 456th thing had gone awry – it felt like my whole journey to the priesthood had been just a series of big moves from one place to the next.

I reached for the phone and texted my support group. In the next half-hour, I received calls from Fr. Jerry Byrd T'12 and Fr. Chris Mileski T'13. In both of those conversations, I said, "Sometimes it feels like the only things that





should work hard to be present wherever we are – because where we always are is “on the way.” And for the priest, we’re “on the way” in service of this people, this place, this diocese and this Church – even when it changes to that parish.

We all say our goodbyes and hellos in transition differently – and that’s as it should be. We’re different people and

are constant are moving and you guys at the other end of the cell phone.”

“Anchors” take time to cultivate and maintain. They are strong friendships and family ties, the rhythm of prayer that marks our days and weeks, and spiritual direction. Some of these anchors are clear: our “stability” is to the local Church, which is a large family of faith and fraternity of ministers gathered around a bishop in the diocese (not, primarily, the parish).

I might be sleeping in a different bed, buying groceries at a different store, celebrating sacraments at a different altar and caring for a different group of people – but I’m always in service to the Diocese of Lexington and an anchored part of that community.

Whether it’s your first move or your fifth move, finding, tending and focusing on the anchors can be a real help when feeling blown about in transition.

Give Meaningful Hellos and Goodbyes

Understanding our “permanence” as pilgrimage means that, in the ebb and flow of relationships, ministries and locations, we

times of transition work best when we’re real and really ourselves. There are things, however, that are universally true in providing stability and permanence when leaving one place and moving to another. The trick is – even amid the stress and anxiety that comes along with these transitions – to remain others-focused.

When saying goodbye, feel what you feel (or don’t feel) and be as authentic about that as possible with those around you. Be generous with gratitude and forgiving with hurts. In addition, work hard to set “the next guy” up for success.

When saying hello, accept every invitation possible in the first six weeks. When they ask, “Father, can you come by the fill-in-the-blank for a few minutes?” Say, yes – yes I can!

And work hard to fight what I’ve come to believe is the biggest enemy of healthy arrival: comparison. Instead of saying, “At St. Mathilda By-the-Sea of Outer Yonder, we always did such-and-such,” why not just ask, “How do we do such-and-such here?”

Move in, I Mean Really Move in

Having traditions that establish our “home” can provide a sense of permanence and stability, no matter how frequently or infrequently our assignments change.

No place ever feels like home for me until I hang pictures on the wall. So much so, that in every single one of my 20 moves in the last decade, the very first thing I do is hang pictures on the wall. Once I do that and organize the kitchen so that I can cook a nice meal, I learn the locale. Where’s the gas station? The post office? The best coffee shop in town?

Meeting new folks, saying our goodbyes and hellos well, building relationships with parishioners and staff – and all the other things we have to do – can leave us ignoring what it takes to really “get here.” But if we ignore whatever it takes to make this place and this place our home, it can leave us feeling like we’re blowing in the breeze.

Learn from Jesus and Moses

Sometimes it can feel like we’re the proverbial rolling stone. It can feel that way whether we’re moving after 10 months or 10 years. It can feel like we’re as uprooted and nomadic as Jesus or Moses. But just how uprooted or nomadic were they, really?

In the difficulty of that first unexpected transition, my spiritual director – a no-nonsense, straight-to-the-point priest – looked at me and said, “Carter – what’s your deal? Jesus wasn’t a drifter and Moses lived a stable life. Can you be where you are and learn the only kind of stability that matters from them?”

I began to pray with the narratives about Jesus and Moses in scripture pretty routinely after that. And you know what? He is right! Jesus spent his public ministry moving from place to place, meeting new people all the time. But what He did where He found Himself was always the same.

Jesus got to know whoever was there. He was available and invited others into relationship and he accepted invitations into relationship. He went away to pray, then came back to serve and teach. Moses did the same.

Synagogue on the Sabbath. Gathering manna. Going away to pray. Following the pillar of cloud by day or fire by night. Preaching the Gospel. Leading God’s holy people. Visiting the hospital. Opening the breviary. Celebrating Mass. Jesus – Moses – You – Me.

Stability in the lifelong journey. Constancy in the cacophony of arriving, settling, being available to stay and being ready to go. Static rootedness in the very dynamism of the Great Adventure of priesthood itself. ♦



Fr. Alan Carter (T’13) is a priest of the Diocese of Lexington, KY, where he serves as pastor of Saints Peter & Paul in Danville and as vocations director. He is the current president of the Alumni Association Board of Directors, and a spiritual director at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology.

CAN I SEE CHRIST IN THE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE?

One seminarian's experience at the Mexican-American border wall

by: Anthony Cecil Jr. T'19



Anthony Cecil Jr.

As is now the tradition at Saint Meinrad, this past January the Second Theology class, myself included, travelled to San Antonio, Texas, for our January Interterm. We stayed at the Mexican American Catholic College (MACC) and had several conferences

surrounding the topic of how to better minister to and more fully embrace the ever-growing population of Hispanic Catholics in our dioceses.

We learned about the cultures of the various countries they come to us from and experienced their cultures through music and food. Out of everything that happened over those two weeks, the most impactful part for myself – and I believe everyone else – was a weekend trip.

We boarded a bus for a four-hour drive from San Antonio to San Juan. This was for what MACC called the “border experience.” There was a mix of feelings on the bus – excitement, even a little nervousness.

Some spent the time sleeping, others reading, and others running the political rhetoric of the times through their head – all the things we hear back home about immigration and the border wall. We came to the realization that we were fortunate enough to come face-to-face with all of this.

There are many lessons I could share from the border experience, but two have stuck with me the most. One of these was driving down to Brownsville, Texas, a city that borders Mexico. As we were driving in, we could see the border fence.

It was built very close to some people's homes, looming over them as if it were an ever-present invasion. It cut many of the local residents' properties right down the middle,



and there were gates for them to access the other side of their property.

We came to a park downtown and were able to walk up to the fence – it wasn't that tall, really. I was struck by how quiet it was; people who were near the fence weren't loud. All of

“As I stood at the border fence, I remembered the faces of those I met.”

the seminarians separated down the fence line. Some prayed and some stood holding on to the fence trying to take it all in. I believe that this seemingly simple experience – looking at a fence – was so striking, because of all that had led up to it.

The other experience that stuck with me took place before our visit to the border. We met immigrants – some who had come legally and some illegally – and heard their stories. Many of them weren't from Mexico, but from Central America. They were living amidst unspeakable violence and no longer felt safe in their homes, so they fled. Many tried to come legally, but the process was taking so long that they were too scared to wait any longer.

Some had literally run for their lives, fleeing from gunfire directed at them. They now lived in poverty in the Rio Grande Valley, but were thankful they were in America and they were safe. As I stood at the border fence, I remembered the faces of those I met. It was almost as if I could see them running to save

their lives only to be met by a barrier that could mean losing their lives. There was no choice but to climb, so they did. I don't believe I could ever fully understand their courage.

I do not believe that MACC had a political agenda in taking us to the border. Rather, I believe they wanted us to ponder what I'm still pondering: instead of building walls, should we not build bridges? Should we not build bridges of hope? Of safety? Of refuge for those running for their lives? Should the system not work against these people, but for them? Can I see Christ in the immigrant and refugee? I believe that He is there – we need only open our eyes to see Him. ♦



Anthony Cecil Jr. T'19 is a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Louisville studying at Saint Meinrad. He will begin third theology in the fall of 2017. Originally from Lebanon Junction, KY, he graduated from Marian University and Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary in Indianapolis, IN, in 2014.

He is currently fulfilling his clinical pastoral experience requirement at Baptist East Hospital in Louisville, KY. You can follow his blog at <http://anthonycecil.wixsite.com/anthony/blog>.

Q&A: ALUMNA FINDS MEANING IN SERVING her Louisville community

by: Janet Millen



Janet Millen

Janet Millen is the parish and community engagement volunteer coordinator for Catholic Charities in Louisville, KY. Her job is to connect those who want to help with the needs of the Louisville community.

Catholic Charities of Louisville serves refugees, the elderly, new moms, immigrants, the unemployed, the trafficked, the imprisoned and the homeless.

Q. What attracted you to your current position at Catholic Charities of Louisville?

I realized that the work of Catholic Charities, the charitable arm of the Catholic Church, is the fulfillment of the Gospel. The word “volunteer” is really the call to the baptized into a life of discipleship.

The work of the staff of Catholic Charities, while professionalized due to the nature of some of the work, is the work of each one of us to care for our families, the stranger, the lost and the imprisoned, through subsidiarity, accompaniment and the corporal works of mercy.

Q. It sounds like Catholic Charities does a lot of great work in the community. What have you enjoyed most about your job?

The greatest joy is to witness a person who possesses the gifts that are needed and gives

them freely. I continue to be amazed by those who step outside themselves to meet the needs of the stranger – whether that stranger is one of our refugee clients from across the globe or the elderly Louisville resident who needs a ride to a doctor appointment. I literally pause in awe of these people and thank God for them!

Another joy is talking with people who have been profoundly touched by their experience of working with our clients. They express their surprise and gratitude for having the opportunity to give of themselves in ways they didn’t expect. Often, a person thinks they have gifts to bless the marginalized when, in fact, they discover the marginalized bless them.

Q. I imagine working in this position also comes with its challenges. What challenges have you faced in your work and what lessons have you learned from them?

The greatest challenge for me is the magnitude of the unmet needs of the poor and marginalized in our community and world. Working at Catholic Charities, I experience firsthand the individual human suffering that results from the systemic shortfalls of institutions, government, families and society in general.

Coupled with that challenge is the arduous work of communicating these human needs to others to inspire their participation in alleviating the suffering. It’s frustrating to know that resources are out there, but making the connection between the two seems impossible at times. This is when our staff

Janet Millen MAPT’14 (’08-14) is the parish and community engagement volunteer coordinator for Catholic Charities in Louisville, KY. She graduated from Saint Meinrad in 2014 with a Master of Arts in pastoral theology. She lives in Louisville with her husband, Ralph.

must step back, hit pause and realize that our role is to be patient, knowing that each encounter and each effort, no matter how incomplete, is enough.

Q. You graduated from Saint Meinrad in 2014. What did you learn during your time at Saint Meinrad that helps you in your current work?

My education at Saint Meinrad was invaluable – academically, spiritually and personally. All but a few of my classes were on the Hill. Traveling to Saint Meinrad once a month for the weekend provided time and space for me to process what I was learning in the context of my personal life and my desire to serve in the Church.

Conversation with classmates over meals was enlightening, as we discussed the topics we learned in class. The spiritual formation that came from time in prayer with the monks, particularly at Sunday liturgy, was a gift that brought full circle my reason for being at Saint Meinrad in the first place.

Through the Saint Meinrad community, over a five-year period, I also grew in self-knowledge,

which is a key element for successful ministry. Saint Meinrad provided me a strong foundation to minister to those on the margins.

Q. What advice do you have for other alumni who have ministry work on the margins?

I encourage my fellow alumni to practice daily prayer and to find support through spiritual direction or a small faith community. I completed the Certificate in Reflective

“The greatest joy is to witness a person who possesses the gifts that are needed and gives them freely.”

Practices at Saint Meinrad and that process provides invaluable support through self-awareness, which is essential to effective ministry.

Without the opportunity to verbally articulate and express our challenges in ministry, we quickly become overwhelmed, lose perspective and, ultimately, become a detriment to those we serve, rather than fulfill our purpose to be a source of compassion and hope. ♦



PREACHING AS LISTENING – LISTENING AS PREACHING

by: Dr. Richard Stern



Dr. Richard Stern

Since my days in graduate school studying communication, I became thoroughly convinced that preaching should be considered as primarily a listening activity. Lots of listening before getting to the final stage of actually

preaching.

Preachers need to do a responsible job of listening to the listener, the Bible, the texts assigned for the day, the history of interpretation of a given text or texts, not to mention, of course, listening prayerfully to the Holy Spirit. This notion has shaped my teaching here at Saint Meinrad since my arrival in 1990.

When I was in seminary, the motivating question seemed to be, “What am I going to say on Sunday?” It was a lonely enterprise.

Over time, however, I managed to rework the question and found preaching to become much more enjoyable as a result. It was a fairly simple change, but has made all the difference. The new motivating question became, “What is being said here?”

Suddenly, I had innumerable conversation partners to help me along the way to a relevant homily. I could listen to the Spirit engaging me in the Bible, as well as to parishioners in a Bible study, Bible commentaries, news stories, random conversations, fellow preachers and so many more. So much for preaching as listening.

After a while, I realized that this is only half of the preaching equation. The other half has to



do with the listening of the *listener*. Notice, I wrote the listening *of* the listener, not listening to the listener, as above.

We can do a much better job of preparing listeners, preparing ourselves, to be listeners, fulfilling our role in the preaching enterprise. Indeed, we cannot afford *not* to do a better job of preparing listeners to fulfill their vocation as listeners.

The new motivating question became, “What is being said here?”

A few weeks ago, I went to church on a Sunday morning at the small parish where I am a member, but not on staff. The council president approached and said the pastor had taken ill and was not going to be able to preside. Could I do it? Yikes! After my blood pressure and heart rate settled down, I agreed that I could do it.

And I had an idea for the preaching. It turned out to be a wonderful opportunity. After we processed in, I informed the assembly that we would together preach the homily for the day.

I asked them to listen even more carefully to the readings for the day and we would find out what people heard in those readings – a group *lectio divina*. I also told them, in that

catechetical moment, that this is really what we do every Sunday. That day we were just making it more obvious.

Whether the pastor preached or I preached or a visiting missionary preached, we all always attach our meanings to the preacher’s words. We each create our own preaching from what we heard or think we heard or wished we had heard or wished we had not heard from the preacher. It is just inevitable, inescapable; this is what happens.

It is just that we, as listeners, need to be more intentional, more conscious and more conscientious about this responsibility. What did you hear the homily say to you? So what? Is there any impact that it might have for you? And now what are you going to do about that?

This is when listening becomes preaching. ✦

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Dr. Richard C. Stern is professor of homiletics at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology where, for over 25 years, he has taught homiletics and other communication classes, both in the seminary and in the Permanent Deacon Formation Program.

He has produced a six-part videotape series, “Preaching for Today ... and Tomorrow,” and, among other articles and papers, has co-authored *Savior on the Silver Screen* with two other Saint Meinrad faculty members.

He is a past president of the Catholic Association of Teachers of Homiletics and has been a board member of the Academy of Homiletics and the Catholic Coalition on Preaching.

Our greatest fulfillment lies in
GIVING OURSELVES TO OTHERS.

– Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*



Interested in hearing more stories like these? Do you know alumni who should be featured? Please share your feedback and suggestions with Christian Mocek, director of alumni relations, at cmocek@saintmeinrad.edu or (812) 357-6501.



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