

SPOTLIGHT ON ALUMNUS: 27 YEARS A SEMINARIAN

The story of a man's persistent and distinctive call to the priesthood

“God will not give up on you, even when you feel like you have given up on yourself.”

BEFORE THE SEMINARY

At an early age Father Paul Heric (NET alumnus ???) struggled with dyslexia, a learning disability that became his main discouragement for entering seminary. Receiving a C was a great success for him. He explains, “I wanted to be a priest, but did not want to attend school.”

After speaking to the vocations director in hopes of entering the seminary, Father Heric was accepted on academic probation with the understanding that it may take 10 years for him to become a priest. Regardless of his academic inabilities, his identity in Christ and unwavering desire for the priesthood is what anchored him.

TIME IN THE SEMINARY

Father Heric describes his time in the seminary as a constant feeling of being inadequate. In response to those around him he formed an “I’ll show you” mindset.

This consistently strong mentality is what eventually pushed him through seven years in the seminary, and through his ordination as a deacon.

He found himself two and a half months away from the priesthood, an accomplishment that he admits surprised himself and everyone who said he couldn’t make it.

Unfortunately, his only remaining desire to finish the seminary was to prove wrong all those who thought he couldn’t do it. The prize of finishing had smoldered his

original desire for true priestly vocation; he said, “I was pursuing a prize versus a vocation.”

My thought was that if I became a priest I would finally, be someone, but the reality was that I had been operating out of a dry well. At the end of the day I would come home after deaconing and find myself in deep depression. My deaconate year was dark. I was far from God. With very little joy, it was stress and darkness that permeated my soul.”

As the day of ordination approached, Father Heric felt an even greater sense of vocational confusion. It was for this reason, he explained, that he decided to leave the seminary.

LIFE OUTSIDE OF SEMINARY

Although no long in the seminary, he was still a transitional deacon, holding the same sacramental responsibilities as any deacon.

Now trying to find his way in the world outside the seminary, Deacon Paul worked many different jobs. He explained that each job left him unsatisfied; his heart was still longing for something different, and his thoughts were continually wrapped around the idea of pursuing the priesthood again.



FR. PAUL HERIC

At the age of 44, the peace in his heart was lost. He was outside the seminary but the desire for priesthood still lingered, which caused the direction in his life to remain blurred.

Out of desperation he shouted to God, "You've got to take this desire away, or open a door - now!"

Around that time he received an unexpected call from his oldest brother explaining that his stepfather had been murdered.

Father Heric was flooded with emotion. As hard as he tried he could not forgive the man who killed his stepfather, and became confused as to what the Lord was doing with his life.

Hitting rock bottom, he quickly lost the little desire he had left for the priesthood, and even considered leaving the Catholic Church.

Two weeks after the incident, Father Heric set up a meeting with the bishop asking for laicization (removal from the status of being a member of the clergy), and to discuss leaving the Catholic Church.

AWAKENING

The bishop walked into the room where Father Heric waited, hardly acknowledging him. He sat down, looked at the deacon's file, and asked, "Paul, do you want to be a priest?"

Upon hearing this simple and direct question, Father Heric explains it had been the first real consolation his heart had experienced in over a decade. "After leaving the seminary, my heart had never been at peace. I have worked many jobs, and my heart has always remained empty."

His reply: "I don't know how I would get there... but I think the Lord does want me to be a priest."

After settling things back home, Father Heric received a direct call from the bishop asking him to come back

to the diocese of Spokane.

RETURN TO THE VOCATION

"I had something significantly broken in me, and now I have complete restoration of what was broken."

Two years later, on ordination day and after a 27-year journey, Father Heric says he experienced heaven on earth.

During the consecration, as he lifted the bread and wine, transforming it into the body and blood of Christ, he explained it was a glimpse into the Eucharistic feast in heaven.



FR. HERIC, SECOND FROM TOP, ON HIS ORDINATION DAY

LIFE AS A PRIEST

Father Heric was ordained by Bishop Cupich, and is currently the pastor of St. Rose of Lima parish in Spokane, Washington.

He says, "God wanted priesthood more for me than I did, and starting with my experience as a NET missionary, God led me through an insane 27-year journey to the priesthood."

Jeremiah 29:11 says, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'"

Are you considering a vocation to priesthood or religious life? Pray about it! We'd love to pray for you, too. Email ministry@netusa.org and send us your prayer requests.

