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Capuchin

Vocation Update

Province of St. Joseph

A Novice Reflects

(David Hirt is in his second full-time year of formation with the Capuchins. The first year is called postulancy and it is located Milwaukee. The second year is called novitiate and it is located in Pittsburgh. After the year of novitiate friars live in Chicago to continue to integrate the Capuchin charism into their daily lives and to begin studies in theology. David recently finished his midyear self-evaluation and we asked him to share his experience of novitiate with us.)

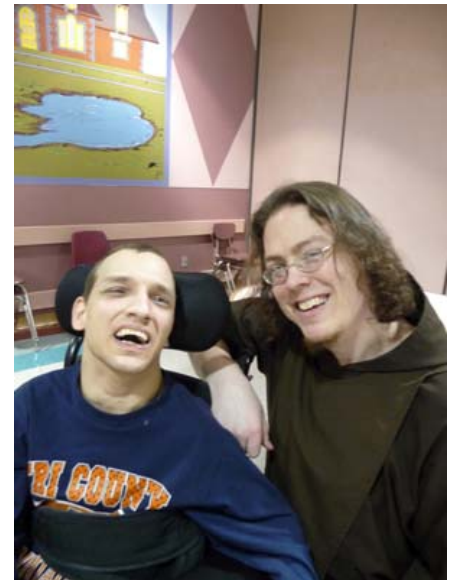
Having been doing the postulancy and novitiate thing for a year and a half now and, having been doing serious discernment, I feel that 'Yes' I am suited to consecrated life. I've been learning a lot about my strengths and weaknesses and, having had a chance to deal with them, I feel stronger for it.

I am both an introvert and an extrovert. I've found both are important. I have to be able to be alone effectively to pray but living in community keeps me grounded and open. I used to be more introverted, often pulling into myself to the exclusion of the outside world and relationships but entering religious life has brought the extrovert I was as a child back out of me and the two are now balanced. I have a tendency to withdraw from people and that shared life keeps me healthily involved. I know I can tend to be escapist at times so the external ministry is also a balancing element of my Capuchin life. I've been told I'm good at getting people to open up to me. I don't know if this is true, but I think that's a strength. I find purpose in helping others for God and in prayer.

I think even my weaknesses suit me for religious life. I need people, even though I have tried to deny it at times in my life. The shared religious life gives me direction in a world I was bad at giving myself direction in. I think God always knew I was supposed to be here and it was only when I abandoned myself to his will that my life began to have purpose and... it just started to make sense. It keeps me holy. God hasn't called me to religious life because I'm already perfectly suited for it but because for me to grow into the person I am in his eyes, I need to be here.

I am becoming more of a person of prayer. I think I have more growth to do there yet. But I know that the difference between now and before this ever came about; the difference is night and day. Prayer has become an important part of my life, so much so that I hope to spend time during my religious life at an Inter-provincial House of Prayer. Both the active and contemplative apostolates appeal to me and as a Capuchin I get the best of both worlds. I'm learning not to be grasping and "gimme now" in prayer. I'm reaching and desiring but content with what God is doing in me now and knowing I am growing and have further to grow.

I am becoming a more fraternal person. I am good at spending time with my brothers; checking on them if they need it. I am becoming aware of moods and learning to reach out to my brothers. I think my time in community will feed my ability to love the people I minister too. I think I will make a loving brother, but that doesn't mean I've stopped growing in love and don't have further to go. One can always go further in love. With my spiritual director I'm re-claiming my affectivity.



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The most difficult thing of entering religious life is just trying to get myself to fit into community... allowing myself to be vulnerable from time to time, such as in faith sharing. Vulnerability is tough but it makes all the difference. I've grown in my ability to be vulnerable even more this year than I did in my Postulancy. That doesn't mean I tell my brothers everything. They don't expect me to and I don't expect them to do it either.

I've learned that I have a temper. I don't like this temper, but when I denied it, it would sometimes sneak out unexpectedly. Discovering weaknesses I didn't know I had was painful, but it has helped me to begin growing through them and, hopefully, I'll become more integrated. It's about process. I'm confident, though, that I've started this journey and it will end well.

Novitiate has helped me rediscover the visual artist in me and that has helped me to deepen my prayer and my understanding of myself. I think I'm becoming more accepting of people, though I still have a ways to go before I'm completely non-judgmental. However, I'm very judgmental of myself as well; a bit of a perfectionist. I'm working on this. Taking it to God in prayer has been the key.



The event in the friary that had the biggest effect on me was the death of one of the brothers in the nearby retirement home. I've never experienced death in such an intimate way before; being there with him at the moment of his death. It took me just over two weeks to really get through it. I didn't know why God had chosen me to be there. I felt incredible pain at his passing from this world. And yet, praying through the experience and working with my spiritual director, I was able to incorporate this into myself. I used to worry that I would die alone, with no one even knowing it had happened until too late. And now I know that as I was with Blaise, someone will be with me.

I think I can honestly say I can live the vows. I used to think Chastity was going to be my problem, but once I surrendered my sexuality to God, it became easier. I know God is providing for me what he commands. God has always planned for me to be a celibate. It is my favorite of the vows. Obedience has been growing. I think I proved to myself I can be Obedient when I was told to remove a puzzle I was working on in another room so a guest could stay there. I made a request, which was refused, and I moved on and did what I was required to do. It was easier than I thought. Poverty I'm still making progress in. I've discovered a tendency in myself to buy music when I have spare money, but I've been making a conscious effort to always have money left every two weeks. I think I am making steps toward living Poverty.

I do not feel called to priesthood. I never have. It's why I stayed away from religious life for so long. I knew I'd be a bad parish priest. I didn't feel I had strong leadership skills or an ability to preach. But then I discovered the Lay option. The Lay option is suited to me and I feel real peace in seeking that vocation. I feel purpose in a lay vocation... a way to use my writing ability to bring awareness of the lay vocation to the Church. I feel called to minority and I feel I can express that better as a Lay brother. For me, being a lay brother puts me with the people I will minister to and the ministries I'm attracted to tend to be the service ministries, though, at the same time, though, I feel I may be called to be a spiritual director and work at some of our retreat houses in the future. I think ministering to both the physical and spiritual needs of people will balance me.

I am very much at peace with the thought of professing temporary vows. I have some worries about school and such next year, and the thought of having a whole life ahead of me in religious life... but the anxiety is part of my personality and it is fleeting and I always move beyond it. With God's Grace, I will be a good Capuchin before I die. I'm on a journey. As the path unfolds before me, questions may rise but I'll deal with them as they arise, knowing that God is with me. I'll get there when I get there. It's all Grace.

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