

All in the family: Seminarians include pair of brothers

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The priesthood is all in the family for two pairs of brothers in the Baltimore archdiocese.

Among the six men who have recently been accepted into seminary formation are 29-year-old Matthew DeFusco, whose 31-year-old brother, Deacon Andrew DeFusco, is already studying for the priesthood; and 19-year-old Peter Rubeling, whose 25-year-old brother, Michael, is also in seminary.

"It's a sign that parents are being generous to God," said Father Michael A. DeAscanis, vocations director, noting that the DeFusco and Rubeling families inculcated a love for the Eucharist and the church in their children.

The other seminarians accepted into formation are Francis Ouma, 27, of Sacred Heart, Glyndon; Matthew Himes, 24, of St. Isaac Jogues, Carney; Zachary Crowley, 22, of St. Mark, Fallston; and Lee Benson, 23, of St. Ignatius, Hickory.

Matthew DeFusco, a parishioner of Church of the Immaculate Conception in Towson, said he first felt called to the priesthood when he was in fifth grade. He and his brother sometimes "played priest" at home, he said. They also volunteered as altar servers growing up in North Carolina.

Throughout several career moves, including years as an officer in the U.S. Coast Guard, DeFusco said the idea of a religious vocation was at the back of his mind. It was a Christmastime showing of the movie, "Les Miserables" that helped steer him more directly into the seminary.

"There was something about Jean Valjean's life that struck me," explained DeFusco, a graduate of Dulaney High School in Timonium. "He had a very self-sacrificing life. I saw the priesthood in his life."

The Valjean character is an ex-convict who reforms his life and then devotes it to others.

Knowing his brother's positive experience in the seminary - as well as that of a cousin who is studying to become a priest with the Legionaries of Christ - DeFusco took a leap of faith and applied for the Baltimore archdiocese. He will study at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg.

"I knew my brother and cousin came from ordinary backgrounds," he said. "Knowing

these guys helped put me at ease with my decision.”

Like DeFusco, Peter Rubeling had felt drawn to the priesthood from a young age. The parishioner of St. Peter the Apostle in Libertytown was particularly inspired by the example of his then-pastor, Monsignor John Dietzenbach, now stationed at Church of the Resurrection in Ellicott City.

“He brought God to the people,” Rubeling said. “I always looked up to that, and I could always see myself doing something like that.”

Rubeling said he was “definitely inclined” to dating and marriage, but kept his heart open to religious life. Watching his older brother go through formation was instructive, he said.

“He was an example of a great Catholic man,” he said. “He just made it very real and something you could look toward as an example.”

Rubeling, who was homeschooled, said his family also played a big role in being open to religious vocations for their children.

“They know our decisions are based in our prayer and trust in God,” said Rubeling, who will become the first Baltimore seminarian to study at Blessed John Paul II Seminary in Washington, D.C. He will also take classes at The Catholic University of America.

With the six new seminary additions, there are now 30 men studying to become priests for the Baltimore archdiocese. Twenty-six are from Maryland and four are from other countries, including Ouma, one of the new seminarians, who was born in Uganda.

Father DeAscanis noted that of those with local ties, 16 went to public school, three were homeschooled and seven went to Catholic schools.

“We’re encouraged by those who have come forward,” he said. “They’re very enthusiastic and very prayerful.”

The vocations director noted that the archdiocese has introduced new overnight camps for young people discerning their future. Parishes and schools need to make it a priority to educate Catholics about religious vocations, he said.

“There are 153 parishes in the diocese and six new seminarians,” Father DeAscanis said. “We are thrilled with those six, but, clearly, our parishes can do more.”

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