

Archdiocese welcomes 17 new seminarians, largest group in at least 36 years

The many challenges the Catholic Church has faced in recent years with the clergy sexual abuse crisis didn't deter Samuel Huffer from answering the call to religious life.

"It made me want to be a priest even more," said Huffer, an 18-year-old college seminarian at St. John Paul II Seminary in Washington, D.C., who is studying to become a priest for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

"We need good, holy priests," Huffer explained. "God is calling all of us to be saints. I want to pursue sainthood through my vocation to the priesthood."

Huffer, a homeschooled parishioner of St. Peter the Apostle in Libertytown who has thought about becoming a priest since age 12, said he was inspired by the good priests he met at his parish and around the archdiocese at events such as the Quo Vadis vocations camps for boys.

"All the priests I've encountered have been amazing," the former altar server said.

Father Steven Roth, vocations director for the archdiocese, said Huffer's attitude is typical among the 17 men accepted into the newest seminarian class, the largest in the archdiocese in at least 36 years.

The addition of 17 new seminarians brings the total number studying for the archdiocese to 52.

Although people struggle to understand the church's past mistakes, Father Roth said, they still want priests in their lives. Seminarians recognize that and want to give their lives in service.

"The men we see stepping forward want to ensure that there is a future generation

of great priests like we have now,” Father Roth said.

Click the play button that follows for an extended radio interview with Father Roth; story continues below

Archbishop William E. Lori noted that in what he called a “challenging time in the life of the church,” he is grateful that “these courageous men are answering the Lord’s call.”

The newest seminarians range in age from 17 to their mid-30s and come from strong Catholic family backgrounds, the vocations director said. They hail from the city and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Howard and Washington Counties.

Father Roth noted that the vast majority are from the archdiocese, with others coming originally from El Salvador, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Cornelius Ugwu, a 33-year-old seminarian at St. Mary’s Seminary in Roland Park, came to the archdiocese after studying for the priesthood in Nigeria and after taking some time to discern his vocation in the United States. A friend suggested he reach out to the Baltimore archdiocese.

“It’s felt like home here,” said Ugwu, who is from Enugu in the eastern part of his country. “The people are very hospitable.”

Ugwu said he wants to bring others into a closer relationship with Christ.

“I want to help the people in their need for Christ – in the hospital, helping those with depression, to pray for the sick and also mentoring young people to grow in good Christian faith,” he said.

Father Roth said prayers for vocations have become more intense across the archdiocese. Some parishes offer eucharistic adoration specifically for vocations while others regularly include prayers for vocations in the Mass intentions.

This year, parishes have requested 800 posters promoting vocations and more than 39,000 prayer cards, he said.

Huffer knows about the power of prayer. He noted that in his first week in seminary, he learned that his mother named him “Samuel” after the Old Testament prophet because she was literally offering him to God. While not pressuring her son to become a priest, she had been praying for years for him to be open to the priestly vocation.

“When I found out, it was pretty powerful,” said Huffer, the seventh of nine children. “It was a big confirmation that this is where God wanted me to be.”

New seminarians accepted in 2019

With home or sponsoring parishes and seminaries

John Anderson

St. Mary, Hagerstown; St. John Paul II Seminary

Pascal Atunzu

St. Philip Neri, Linthicum; St. John Paul II Seminary

Tre Bart

St. Joseph, Cockeysville; Mount St. Mary’s Seminary

Chancellor Claypool

Immaculate Conception, Towson; special pastoral assignment

Samuel Huffer

St. Peter the Apostle, Libertytown; St. John Paul II Seminary

Alexander Kulik

Church of the Nativity, Timonium; Mount St. Mary’s Seminary

Joseph LeGare

St. Joseph, Emmitsburg; St. John Paul II Seminary

Andrew Lukas

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Crofton; college placement

Timothy McNamara

St. Mary, Annapolis; St. Mary's Seminary

Michael Misulia

St. Peter the Apostle, Libertytown; St. Mary's Seminary

Michael Moore

St. John, Frederick; St. John Paul II Seminary

Roger Mungala

Our Lady Queen of Peace, Middle River; Mount St. Mary's Seminary

Ben Oursler

St. John, Severna Park; St. John Paul II Seminary

Deacon Christopher Pinto

Sacred Heart, Glyndon; pastoral year

Jose Orlando Pineda Rivera

Resurrection of Our Lord, Laurel; St. Mary's Seminary

Khoa Anh Tran

Immaculate Heart of Mary, Baynesville; St. Mary's Seminary

Cornelius Ugwu

St. William of York, Baltimore/St. Agnes, Catonsville; St. Mary's Seminary

*For more information about the priesthood, click **here**.*

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