

As I was asked to give an account of my vocation story I found myself thinking more of who inspired me rather than what moments inspired me. I've often felt like my vocation story paled in comparison to some of my counterparts because of its lack of dramatic event. However, I will try my best to express my vocation by describing the settings of relationships which inspire it. I hope it suffices.

My name is David Javier Bayardo and I was born on April 5, 1985 in Corpus Christi, Texas to my parents, Pete and Diana Bayardo. My entire childhood and adolescence were spent in the city of Corpus Christi. I was raised in a traditional Hispanic-Catholic family setting and that faith was constantly reinforced by both my parents and my older sister Kathryn. I cannot help but to feel blessed by the situation and family I was born into. My parents always seemed very happy together and I've always believed that my general sense of outgoingness and happiness has always been a defining attribute of mine because of their love for one another. Because of this I have always believed that happy parents produce happy children. I truly believe that my parent's happy relationship has influenced me, even to this day. They were never afraid to tell each other exactly how they felt and how much they loved each other. This was extremely helpful to me and my understanding of family and marriage. They have always been two strong Hispanic people that that are very much in love. There was no greater manifestation of their love than their outright expression of love for each other and to my older sister and me. This is where I believe my vocation began.

Another person that I am lucky to have in my life is my older sister Kathryn. I am so blessed to have had her in my childhood and today as well. The best way to describe her is to say that she is the perfect mixture of parent and peer. I can honestly say that this was extremely evident from a very early age. She was always there for me and I know that she always will be. I respect and love her so much. She is married now and has two children of her own. I cannot help but see some of my mother's faith and nurturing nature along the just and loving nature of my father. She's a phenomenal mother and still a loving sister.

The last person I feel necessary to mention as a big influence is my uncle Fr. Francisco Quezada. If there was ever a certain person or event that directly connected with my initial response to a possible vocation to the priesthood it was my uncle "Franky" celebrating Mass for the family at our home parish of Holy Family. Furthermore, he has always been there as someone who can truly identify with me as I continue discerning the call to priesthood. In a special way he relates to me in a way that no one else in my family can. Being in seminary and discerning a call to a priestly vocation is an extremely countercultural vocation and even though my parents and sister are still very close to me there are just some things that they cannot comprehend about some aspects of my life and inner struggles. My uncle has been the person to whom I can go with certain insights, feelings, shortcomings, wounds, struggles and breakthroughs that are easier for someone who has been through priestly formation and lives a celibate chaste life to understand. I am truly blessed to have him in my life.

In addition to these people whom I am have named by name there are other people in my life that I am constantly thankful for. These people are the friends I have outside of the seminary setting that all too often keep me grounded when my theological mind goes off on a tangent. They are a constant reminder of the people to whom I one day wish to minister. They are a great mix between men and women that constantly supply with inspiration in my vocation. My spiritual director from my college seminary once told me, "It is important to surround yourself with people who believe in your vocation as much or more than you do." This was sound advice and I have never been more mindful of who I keep as friends.

Upon my graduation from Incarnate Word Academy High School in Corpus Christi I decided to join the Diocese of Corpus Christi to discern a call to the Roman Catholic priesthood. The bishop, then Bishop Edmund Carmody D.D., decided to send me to St. Joseph Seminary College in St. Benedict, Louisiana. I studied philosophy there from 2003-2007 and graduated May 11, 2008 with a BA in philosophy. The community at St. Joseph was amazing and I truly believe that if it wasn't for the fraternity encountered there that I wouldn't have been able to become the man I am today. This Benedictine community became my family and literally showed me what a priestly identity should be.

In the fall of 2007 I attended Assumption Seminary in San Antonio for the first year of graduate seminary. My time was one full of learning and amazing opportunity for ministerial growth. I thank OMI fathers for being faithful and pastoral professors and advisors. The fall of 2008 came with even more change as I made the transition to St. Mary's Seminary in Houston to finish the remainder of graduate seminary. In the spring of 2009 I decided to take some time off from formation and discern outside of the seminary. This time was extremely fruitful and would eventually show me why I wanted to be a priest in the first place. This is why:

I searched for work everywhere until one day I got a call from a friend in Beeville, Texas. He was working as the director of faith formation at St. Joseph parish there. I told him about my situation and asked him if he could help in any way. He informed me that he would be leaving that position in three months and would highly recommend me to the pastor. I started showing up to the parish in Beeville and the pastor started giving me work at the parish that other people wouldn't necessarily jump at the opportunity to do. He got to know me, and when my friend left the position, it was given to me. This truly was God working in that parish community in order to help me discern. This job would turn out to be one of the biggest blessings God had ever sent my way. I began full time in June of 2009. Honestly, I had no idea what I was doing. I was responsible for revamping an out of date CCD program, teaching Confirmation classes, being full time youth minister, RCIA director as well as vacation bible school director. It was overwhelming to say the very least. First things were first! I had to sit down with Fr. Pat and learn how to read the budget, realize how much I had for every one of my departments and then make sure that I didn't spend over the allotted amount. I had no idea saving souls was so expensive. Once we did that, I had to pick out new books and a new curriculum. This had to happen for grades pre-k through 8th as well as High School.

This was an eye-opening experience as I waded through curricula that were substandard and too childish or too heady. Once I settled on a curriculum I figured that I could put the whole program in cruise control and everything would be okay. This, of course, would not be the case.

This is when I started seeing what a parish really was. This was the Church that I belonged to. Although saturated with thousands of years of tradition and inspiration, it can often times seem as though it is being dried out by the very people it wishes to share that richness with. I had NO IDEA how much work went into making a parish run smoothly. It was as if I was getting a “behind the scenes” look at a movie, except this was no movie. This was real life. This was the Roman Catholic Church in rural middle class America.

I thought that surely the combination of stress in the office and people’s general disposition to find something wrong with everything I tried to do to help them would break me and drive me out. However, this was not the case. It made me want to persevere. It made me want to be a better person for them. It made me want to be a better minister for them. They, as obstinate as they seemed, were the reason I got up and went to work every day. I wanted them to know how much I cared about our faith so that they too could have a better appreciation for it. I remember what I told my CCD teachers in the workshop I held for them, “...if you pray, they’ll pray. If you go to Mass, they’ll go to Mass. That’s how we show them how to live the gospel.” That truly became my motto for the year. I had to show them that someone cared about the faith! I believe I did that to the best of my abilities this past year that I worked there. We confirmed 25, had 50 receive first communion and had an enrollment of close to 340 children enrolled in our programs this year. There were tough and rough times. There were times when I would spend hours getting ready for an adult scripture course I offered, only to have three people show up. There were times when I was so frustrated and stressed that I wanted to pull out all of my hair and just run out of the office. But more importantly, there were times when I truly saw our parish pray together. There were times when I couldn’t help but be reminded of the missionary nature of our Church by watching our parishioners volunteer. There were the times that I saw what Jesus meant in the Gospel of Matthew when he says to have a, “...childlike heart,” just by watching our CCD students respond to questions asked of them by their instructors. These things outweigh the negative by far! *These* are the reasons I have discerned that God has called me back to seminary. *These* are the people He has called me to. It is because of my time and experience at St. Joseph Parish that I have realized what God is calling me to do. I am forever indebted to these people for helping me realize this. With God’s help and providence I have returned to seminary this year. With the help of your prayers I hope to be ordained and humbly serve you and the Diocese of Corpus Christi.