The more you strive toward Him,  
the more you exalt Him.  
He is present to Me who goes out from the world;  
he is present to Me who thinks of Me, looks on Me,  
has hope of Me, he whose portion I am.  
He is present to Me who has been absent to himself,  
he is present to Me who has denied himself.  
He is with Me who is not within himself,  
because he who is in the flesh is not in the spirit.  
He is with Me who goes out from his own self,  
he is near Me who has been outside of himself,  
he is whole to Me who has lost his life  
on account of Me.

-St. Ambrose (c.339-397)
# Table of Contents

Introductory messages........................................................................................................ 3  
Sacrament of Reconciliation .......................................................................................... 6  
Spiritual Direction.......................................................................................................... 8  
Some ideas on purity and chastity............................................................................... 14  
Spiritual Reading ........................................................................................................ 16  
Lectio Divina ................................................................................................................ 25  
The Duty of Self Denial ................................................................................................. 28  
Excerpts of Cardinal Mercier’s Conferences ............................................................ 31  
The Mount: Cradle of Saints ......................................................................................... 34  
  A. Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton ............................................................................ 34  
  B. Servant of God Father Simon Bruté ......................................................... 35  
  C. Bishop James Edward Walsh ........................................................................ 35  
  D. Father Flanagan ............................................................................................ 36  
  E. Blessed Stanley Rother .................................................................................. 36

---

## IMPORTANT NOTICE

The main presentation of the Spiritual Formation program is found in the **Rule of Life**, Section I. The “Personal and Communal Dimensions” as well as the “Celibacy Statement” should be read with care.

Additionally, the **Seminarian Handbook** contains spiritual formation goals in the Formation Advising section. This booklet is intended to provide more practical information and useful aids for carrying out the goals and guidelines found in these other documents.
Introductory messages

St. John-Baptiste Marie Vianney
May 8, 1786—August 4, 1859
Patron Saint of Priests

Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia
“From the Beginning of Our Priesthood”
Pope John XXIII

To the venerable Brothers, Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and to the other Ordinaries in peace and communion with the Apostolic See.

Conclusion
. . . At the end of this letter, venerable brothers, We wish to tell you of Our entire sweet hope that, with the grace of God, this centenary of the death of the holy Curé of Ars may reawaken in every priest the desire to perform his ministry more generously and, above all, his "first duty as a priest, this is to say the duty to achieve one's own sanctification."

When from the heights of this supreme pontificate, where Providence has placed Us, We consider the immense expanse of souls, the serious problems of evangelization in so many countries and the religious needs of the Christian peoples always and everywhere, there is present in Our sight the figure of the priest. Without him, without his daily work, what would become of the undertakings, even those most suited for the present hour? It is precisely because of these beloved priests on whom rest so many hopes for the progress of the Church, that We venture to request, in the name of Jesus Christ, complete faithfulness to the spiritual demands of their priestly vocation.

May these words, full of wisdom, of St. Pius X give weight to Our appeal: "So as to make Jesus Christ reign in the world there is nothing as necessary as the sanctity of the clergy, because with example, with the word and with the knowledge they guide the faithful." St. Jean
Marie Vianney said almost the same thing to his bishop: "If you wish to convert your diocese you must make all your parish priests saints. . . ."

Given at Rome at St. Peter's, August 1, 1959, the first year of Our Pontificate.

IOANNES PP. XXIII

Pius XI Pontifical Regional Seminary of Puglia, Molfetta, Italy, 2016

Pope Francis’ address to seminarians from the Pius XI Pontifical Regional Seminary of Puglia, located in the city of Molfetta, Italy. December 12, 2016.

Dear Brother Bishops and Priests,

Dear Seminarians,

I meet you joyfully and greet you all who are part of the “Pius XI” Pontifical Regional Seminary of Puglia, accompanied by the Bishops of the Region. I thank the Rector for his courteous words and I greet you in a special way, dear seminarians, who, thank God, are numerous.

I would like to take up briefly with you what I said during the Assembly of Italian Bishops last spring on the identity and ministry of presbyters. On that occasion I described a presbyter’s ministry through a threefold belonging: to the Lord, to the Church, to the Kingdom. Such
belonging, of course, is not improvised, nor is it born after ordination if first — in fact, in the years of the seminary - it was not cultivated, protected, made to grow with care and a sense of responsibility. See why today I would like to take advantage of your visit to take up again that reflection, which I consider important also for the young seminarians who are preparing to become priests.

First of all, the word “belonging” bears in itself the idea of feeling oneself part of a whole. Only if we feel part of Christ, of the Church and of the Kingdom will we walk well in the years of the seminary. To receive the whole it is necessary to raise one’s gaze, to stop thinking that I am the whole of my life. Therefore, the first obstacle to overcome is narcissism. It is the most dangerous temptation. Everything does not begin and end with me; I can and must look beyond myself, until I realize the beauty and profundity of the mystery that surrounds me, of the life that surpasses me, of faith in God who sustains everything and every person, including me. How can I be aware of Christ if I look only at myself? How will I be able to enjoy the beauty of the Church if my only preoccupation is to save myself, to come out undamaged from every circumstance? How can I be enthusiastic in the adventure of the building of the Kingdom of God, if every enthusiasm is halted by fear of losing something of myself? In this liturgical Season of Advent, which makes the Lord’s invitation to vigilance strong, we are invited to watch the real risk of being narcissistic, because without this vigilance no vocational path is really possible.

To belong, then, also means to be able to enter in relation. We must prepare ourselves first of all to be men of relation – with Christ, with the brothers with whom we share the ministry and the faith, and with all the persons we meet in life. And to be able to live relations well one begins in the seminary! One cannot think of walking towards the priesthood without having taken this decision in the heart: I want to be a man of relation. May this be the first care in these years, the first formative end. Can I really verify, as the years go by and ordination looms, if I am progressing in this dimension, if my relational capacity is growing, is maturing? The building of the community, which one day you will have to lead as priests, begins in everyday life in the seminary, be it among yourselves, be it with the persons you meet in your path.
Do not feel different from your contemporaries, do not think you are better than the other young men, learn to be with all, do not be afraid to soil your hands. If tomorrow you will be priests who live in the midst of the holy People of God, today you begin to be young men who are able to be with all, who are able to learn something from every person you meet, with humility and intelligence. And may at the base of all relations be the relation with Christ,” as you get to know Him, listen to Him, are bound to Him in trust and love; make His love your own, put it in your relations with others, become “channels” of His love through your relational maturity. The place where the relation with Christ grows is prayer, and the most mature fruit of prayer is always charity.

Finally, belonging is confronted with its opposite, which is exclusion, rejection. One who grows in belonging to Christ and discovers in Him a look that gazes on all, how can he be in his lifestyle a man that excludes? Begin by the common life you have in the seminary: is there someone who is excluded? Who remains on the margins? Your belonging to Christ asks you to go to meet him, to bring him to the center, to help him, also, to feel part of the community. As you grow in the sense of belonging to the Church and of enjoying the beauty of fraternity, be able to ask yourselves if you are able to engage in the effort of forgiveness, in small as well as in great things. If nothing in life excludes us from the Lord’s merciful gaze, why should our look ever be to exclude someone?

I know you are a large seminary, visited by the Lord’s grace with so many vocations. This abundance is also a responsibility: be attentive to the quality of the formative path, numbers are not enough. Therefore, in thanking you for your visit, I assure you of my prayer so that you walk always in a good formative quality. And you also, please, do not forget to pray for me.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Seminarian is to enjoy freedom of choice in regards to a confessor. However, in order to safeguard the internal forum, he may generally choose to confess, among resident priests, only to his Spiritual Director or the Director of Spiritual
Formation, Msgr. Cummings. Msgr. Cummings is always available upon request and also every day in the morning:

- Monday-Friday **5:50-6:40** a.m. in I.C. Chapel (confessional by entrance. Note, use only the right side. A light will go on above the penitent when in use, but no light signifies that it is available)
- Saturday from **6:45-7:30** a.m. in St. Michael’s Hall (please leave the door open after your confession as a sign to others that they may come in)
- Sunday **7:15-8:00** a.m. also in St. Michael’s Hall

Additionally, Fr. Jose Ruisanchez comes on Wednesday evenings (7:00-8:00pm), and there are confessions at the Seton Shrine from Monday to Friday and on Sunday (12:15-1:15 pm) and at the Grotto on Saturday and Sunday (10:45 am).

Finally, there are Penance Services with multiple outside confessors several times a year – at the beginning of each semester and during Lent.
Spiritual Direction

Meetings with your Spiritual Director

The time you spend with your spiritual director is sacred time. The task of your spiritual director is to guide you “in arriving at the interiorization and integration needed for growth in sanctity, virtue, and readiness for Holy Orders” (PPF #110, Spiritual Direction).

Seeking moral guidance, disclosing one’s problems in confidence, and relating life experiences is the responsibility of the seminarian who is seeking God’s will. In his sincere desire for holiness the seminarian will benefit most from spiritual direction when he brings his authentic self to each meeting.

Preparation

Spiritual direction involves more than the actual time you are with your spiritual director. Spend at least 10 minutes in quiet preparation before each appointment. Since your last meeting: what is uppermost on your mind or in your heart? Did something strike you in prayer, at Mass, from your spiritual reading, during lectio divina, while listening to a conference, or perhaps something from one of your classes? Is there an issue regarding your relationship with your family or with other relationships? Are there issues related to vocation or sexuality? Pray for yourself and for your spiritual director that God will open minds and hearts to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Regarding these and any other issues, you might consider keeping a daily spiritual journal. Perhaps keep a note card in your breviary to jot down ideas and subjects you wish to talk about later.

The Meetings

Seminarians are required to meet with their spiritual directors at least once every three weeks, though every two weeks is common. Meetings are usually 45 minutes to an hour. Remember to keep your appointment and to be on time. Call your director if you’re going to be late or need to reschedule the appointment. Also, do not assume the director is ready to see you if you are a few minutes early for your scheduled appointment.
At the end of each session be sure to set the date and time for your next meeting. If something important comes up between meetings, do not hesitate to contact your director for an impromptu meeting.

Sometimes during spiritual direction there are moments of prolonged silence. There is no need to feel embarrassed or uneasy. Such moments allow for reflection and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit within spiritual direction.

If you wish to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance, you are encouraged to do so with your spiritual director. To allow for the appropriate amount of time, it is helpful to inform your director at the start of your appointment if you wish to celebrate the Sacrament.

**Changing Spiritual Directors**

A seminarian who maintains a consistent relationship with his spiritual director is the ideal. However, if a seminarian, who has been meeting with his spiritual director for a time, eventually concludes that the relationship is not working, it is best for him to be open and honest about it. A seminarian is always free to choose a new director when this becomes necessary. If a seminarian decides that he would like to change his spiritual director, he must first make an appointment to speak with the Director of Spiritual Formation. Ordinarily, changes will be permitted only at the start of a semester. Courtesy demands that you discuss your desire to change with your current director and thank him personally for the help he has given you. [N.B. the list of available spiritual directors is posted in the Spiritual Director’s display in the mail room].

**The External and Internal Forum**

Since trust and openness are essential for effective spiritual direction, a seminarian must be confident that he can speak freely with his spiritual director. To help a seminarian to enter more fully into this vital relationship, the Church makes a distinction between the “external forum” and the “internal forum.”

The **external forum** includes matters revealed outside of spiritual direction by the seminarian through observable behavior or which are freely disclosed by the seminarian outside of confession and spiritual direction.
The **internal forum** includes matters revealed within spiritual direction by the seminarian to his spiritual director. These matters include his “personal history, personal relationships, prayer experiences, . . . and other significant topics . . . “ (PPF, 128).

“**Disclosures that a seminarian makes in the course of spiritual direction belong to the internal forum.** Consequently, the spiritual director is held to the strictest confidentiality concerning information received in spiritual direction. He may neither reveal it nor use it (CIC, 240,2). The only possible exception to the standard of confidentiality would be the case of grave, immediate, or mortal danger involving the directee or another person. If what is revealed in spiritual direction coincides with the celebration of the **Sacrament of Penance** (in other words, what is revealed is revealed *ad ordinem absolutionis*), that is, the exchange not only takes place in the internal forum but also in the sacramental forum, then the absolute strictures of the seal of confession hold and no information may be revealed or used” (PPF, 134).

**Self-Questionnaire for the Directee**

a. What is my understanding and experience of spiritual direction?

b. What is the practice of my personal prayer life and how would I describe it to my spiritual director?

c. How would I describe my relationship with God?

d. More than anything else, what is my greatest desire?

e. What have been “good” moments in prayer for me, including any significant experiences in prayer or outside of prayer?

f. What do I see as personal obstacles to my growth in the spiritual life?

g. What are the Christ-like characteristics of the priest which attract me to the priesthood?

h. What is my understanding of the ministry of the priest?
i. What is my devotion to our Blessed Mother?

j. What are my priorities regarding my spiritual life as a seminarian?

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Potential Subject Matter for Spiritual Direction

I. LIFE HISTORY

- Family relationships and history of significant events
- Experiences of prayer, sacraments, parish life
- Sense of vocation
- Social relationships, past and current
- Sexuality issues, sexual orientation, any struggles with sexuality
- Personal faith, relationship with Jesus, with our Blessed Mother
- Conversion experiences
- Sense of self-identity; confidence, insecurities
- Academic issues

II. PRAYER

- Personal habit of prayer: what priority is given to my prayer?
- Frustration with prayer, distractions in prayer
- Spiritual reading
- The Rosary
- Eucharistic devotion
- Marian devotion
- The Saints, devotions in general
- The Mass: my preparation and participation
- Praying the Divine Office; praying with the Scriptures (lectio divina)
- The Sacrament of Penance: frequency and preparation
- Formation of conscience: laxity, scrupulosity

III. BASIC HUMAN LIVING ISSUES

- Sleep, diet, use of stimulants
- Recreation, exercise
- Time management, organizational skills, work habits
 Living a balanced life
 Knowing oneself and being comfortable with one’s own personality
 A sense of humor and the ability to keep things in perspective
 Financial responsibility
 Dealing with anger
 Relating to authority
 Knowing one’s strengths and weaknesses
 Being able to trust others
 Ability to maintain the confidence of others
 Friendship: one or two close friends or only many acquaintances?
 Ability to relate to people in different age groups, of different races and cultures
 Relating with women
 Negative patterns of thinking/feeling/behaving (clericalism, narcissism, sense of entitlement)

IV. LEADERSHIP
 Taking initiative
 Working with others
 Working alone
 Need for affirmation and the ability to function well with or without it
 Self-acceptance: being secure enough not to need always to be in control
 Setting priorities
 Decisiveness
 Honesty; integrity
 Open to the point of view of others
 Motivating others
 The problem of perfectionism
 Shyness

V. COMMUNITY LIFE
 Getting along with others, social skills
 Thoughtfulness, common courtesy
 Patience
 Charity in conversation
 Gossip
 Reconciliation and forgiveness
VI. DISCIPLINE

- Ability to work steadily
- Procrastination
- Commitment to daily prayer
- Ability to practice self-denial, asceticism
- Perseverance
- Misuse of electronic media/devices

VII. SIN

- Avoiding the near occasions of sin
- Addictive/compulsive patterns of behavior
- Complacency
- Selfishness
- Rationalization, inability to be honest with oneself
- Dealing with discouragement regarding habitual sins
- Examination of conscience

VIII. GROWTH IN VIRTUE

- Faith, hope, love
- Prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude
- Humility
- Love of God and neighbor
- Poverty, chastity, obedience
- Purity of heart
- Simplicity of life

IX. PRIESTHOOD

- Pastoral charity
- Apostolic zeal and priestly service
- Compassion
- Priestly fraternity
- Spiritual leadership: avoiding clericalism
- Obedience
- Personal understanding of the priestly life
- Expectations/obstacles concerning the priestly vocation
- A joyful commitment to celibacy
- Issues regarding loneliness and solitude
- A simple lifestyle
Reverence for the sacred
Ability to listen to others
Models of priesthood in your life (Ss. John Vianney, Philip Neri, Don Bosco, Charles Borromeo, Francis de Sales, et al)

The Importance of a Spiritual Director

“Nothing is more important for souls who sincerely wish to give themselves entirely to God than, first, to be thoroughly convinced of the need of a director; second, to make a good choice of one; and third, to make use of him according to the designs of God when they have once chosen him.”

-Jean Nicholas Grou, S.J., Manual for the Interior Life

Some ideas on purity and chastity

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Mt 5:8)

Spiritual directors are well aware that when dealing with issues of pornography and masturbation, addictive cycles of shame and fear can reinforce a sense of frustration and helplessness in the face of temptation, stress, and boredom. However, the seminarian can be confident that through the Holy Spirit he will receive the graces and the formation he needs in order to lead a life of chaste celibacy.

Rightly, the seminarian places his hope in God’s call, for chastity is the possible and expected norm for seminarians and priests.

If you are struggling in this area, your spiritual director may suggest:
- the particular examen of St. Ignatius of Loyola
- focused prayer and fasting to support chastity
- an accountability partner whom you can call when tempted
- *The Friends of St. Joseph* or similar support group
- the daily rosary and other devotions to Mary and the Saints
- healthy recreational activities and hobbies/interests
- perseverance with projects to build a sense of self-worth
regular physical exercise
✦ H.A.L.T. (never going online when hungry, angry, lonely, tired)
✦ psychological counseling and healing prayer

“I will not set before my eyes anything that is base.... Perverseness of heart shall be far from me; I will know nothing of evil” (Ps 101:3.4).

In addition to regular confession and spiritual direction, other measures to consider include:
✦ Install filters on personal devices or disabling access/changing devices
✦ Computer/phone monitoring programs (e.g., covenanteyes.com or k9webprotection.com or netnanny.com)
✦ Peer support (laptop/tablet/phone held overnight in a friend’s room)

If you find yourself spending too much time on the Internet, consider the following:

1. Take a personal inventory:
   a. How much time—how many hours—am I spending online and what exactly am I looking at?
   b. How much time am I devoting to personal prayer?
   c. How much time am I devoting to study and spiritual reading?
   d. How much time am I giving to socialize with others or to exercise?

2. Cultivate healthy offline activities that are fulfilling and personally productive to fill the void that can otherwise lead to excessive and/or sinful use of the Internet.

3. Speak openly with your spiritual director. Feelings of shame that reinforce sexual addiction can cause a seminarian to run to different confessors for the Sacrament of Penance. However it is best—as far as it is possible—for the seminarian to receive the Sacrament consistently from a particular confessor and ideally one who is also his spiritual director.

4. Consider joining one of the established seminarian
fraternities such as Legion of Mary, Militia Immaculata, Jesu Caritas, New Evangelization Club, Blessed Frassati Group, Communion and Liberation, or The Friends of St. Joseph (a support group for those who struggle with pornography / masturbation).

5. Recommit yourself to honest, personal prayer with the Lord.
6. Establish sound habits of rest, nutrition, and a daily exercise program.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us . . .” (Heb. 12:1).

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Spiritual Reading

“The will is a blind faculty that needs direction and enlightenment before it can love and desire the good. For that reason meditation and spiritual reading play an important part in the practice of affective prayer; they supply the material that stimulates the activity of the will.”

-Jordan Aumann, O.P., Spiritual Theology

“Love inevitably brings with it an irresistible need to know.”

-Archbishop Mariano Magrassi

Among the purposes of spiritual reading are:
1) to inform ourselves about God and about the spiritual life;
2) to keep our ideas about God and eternal truths fresh in our minds so that they may influence our actions.

To profit most from spiritual reading, choose a time and a place most conducive to a sense of being alone with God.
Suggestions for Spiritual Reading

N.B. We are developing an internal lending library of Spiritual Reading books. You will find them in the John Paul II room in Keating, Ground floor. Take for as long as you like, but return it!
*Tolle, Lege, Redde!

The Bible

**JESUS CHRIST**

*Emmanuel - Reflections on the God Who is with us*, Rev. Donald X. Burt, O.S.A.

*Fully Human – Fully Divine*, Michael Casey, C.SS.R.

*Jesus A Portrait*, Gerald O’Collins, S.J.

*Jesus of Israel: Finding Christ in the Old Testament*, Fr. Richard Veras

*Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict XVI

*Jesus of Nazareth - Holy Week: Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, Pope Benedict XVI

*Knowing the Love of Christ*, Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering

*The Cry of Jesus on the Cross – A Biblical and Theological Study*, Gerard Rossé

*The Inner Life of Jesus – Pattern of All Holiness*, Romano Guardini

*The Life of Christ*, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen

*The Priority of Christ – Toward a Post-liberal Catholicism*, Rev. Robert Barron
The Sacred Passion, Luis de la Palma

The Sadness of Christ, St. Thomas More

The Way to Christ – Spiritual Exercises, Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II)

The Word Made Flesh -- The Meaning of the Christmas Season, Pope John Paul II

To Know Christ Jesus, Frank Sheed

**BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

Following Mary to Jesus: Our Lady as Mother, Teacher and Advocate, Andrew Apostoli, C.F.R.

Mary in the Redemption, Adrienne von Speyr

Mary: The Virgin Mary in the Life and Writings of John Henry Cardinal Newman, Philip Boyce, ed.

Meet Mary: Getting to Know the Mother of God, John-Mark Miravalle

My Ideal: Jesus Son of Mary, Fr. Emil Neubert, S.M.

Our Lady and the Church, Hugo Rahner, S.J.

Our Lady of Guadalupe: History and Meaning of the Apparitions, Manuela Testoni

The Gospel of Mary: A Month with the Mother of God, Gabriel Amorth, S.S.P.

The World’s First Love: Mary, Mother of God, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen

True Devotion to Mary, St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort

**SAINTS**


A Simple Life – Wisdom from Jane Frances de Chantal

Augustine – Major Writings, Fr. Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R.

Augustine on Prayer, Thomas A. Hand, O.S.A.
City of God, St. Augustine

Confessions, St. Augustine of Hippo

Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena

Divine Mercy in My Soul - Diary of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, St. Maria Faustina

Elizabeth Bayley Seton 1774-1824, Annabelle M. Melville

For the Life of the World - St. Maximilian and the Eucharist, Jerzy Domański, O.F.M. Conv.

I Believe in Love – A Personal Retreat based on the Teaching of St. Therese of Lisieux, Father Jean C. J. d’Elbée

Introduction to the Devout Life -- Treatise on the Love of God, St. Francis de Sales

John of Avila, Audi, Filia – Listen, O Daughter; trans. by Sr. Joan Frances Gormley

John of the Cross – selected writings, Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D.

Kolbe and the Kommandant - Two Worlds in Collision, Ladislaus Kluz, O.C.D.

Knowing the Love of Christ – An Introduction to the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, Michael Dauphinais / Matthew Levering

Life of St. John-Baptist Vianney: Cure D’Ars (1907), Alfred Monnin & Henry E. Manning

Love Without Measure: Extracts from the Writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, introduced and arranged by Paul Diemer

On Living Simply; St. John Chrysostom

Padre Pio’s Words of Hope, ed. Eileen Dunn Bertanzetti

Philip Neri – The Fire of Joy, Paul Türks of the Oratory

Saint Ambrose – Seven Exegetical Works, trans. by Michael P. McHugh

Saint Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1879), Abbe Francios Trochu
Saint Peter Chrysologus: Selected Sermons and Saint Valerian Homilies, transl. by George E. Ganss, S.J.

Saintly Solutions to Life’s Common Problems, Fr. Joseph Esper

Spiritual Canticle; Living Flame of Love; Dark Night of the Soul; The Ascent of Mt. Carmel, St. John of the Cross

St. Benedict and St. Therese – The Little Rule and the Little Way, Dwight Longenecker

St. Francis of Assisi, G. K. Chesterton

Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux

The Art of Loving God – Simple Virtues for the Christian Life, St. Francis de Sales


The Cure d’Ars (St. John Vianney), Abbé Francis Trochu; trans. by Dom Ernest Graf, O.S.B.

The Eucharist – Our Sanctification, Rev. Raniero Cantalamessa

The Last Letters of Thomas More, Alvaro de Silva

The Life of St. Teresa of Avila by Herself, transl. with an Introduction by J. M. Cohen

The Science of the Cross, Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, O.C.D.), transl. by Josephine Koeppel, O.C.D.

The Spirit of St. Francois de Sales, Jean Pierre Camus (Bishop of Belley)

The Spiritual Direction of Saint Claude de la Colombière, transl. by Mother M. Philip, I.B.V.M.

The Wisdom of the Saints – An Anthology, Jill Haak Adels

Vincent de Paul - the Trailblazer, Bernard Pujo

PRAYER

A Theology of Christian Prayer, John H. Wright, S.J.
A Treatise on Prayer from the Heart: A Christian Mystical Tradition Recovered for All, Jean Pierre Caussade, SJ

Augustine on Prayer – St. Augustine

Beginning to Pray, Archbishop Anthony Bloom

Deep Conversion – Deep Prayer, Rev. Thomas Dubay, S.M.

Difficulties in Mental Prayer, Rev. Eugene Boylan, O.C.S.O.

Fire Within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel on Prayer, Thomas Dubay, S.M.

In Silence – Why We Pray, Donald Spoto

Meditations on the Cross, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

On the Lord’s Appearing, An Essay on Prayer and Tradition, Jonathan Robinson

Opening to God, Rev. Thomas Green, S.J.

Prayer, Rev. Hans Urs von Balthasar

Prayer in Practice, Msgr. Romano Guardini

Prayer Primer – Igniting the Fire Within, Thomas Dubay, S.M.

St. Augustine Answers 101 Questions on Prayer, Fr. Cliff Ermatinger, ed.

Teach Us How to Pray, Louis Evely

The Art of Prayer – An Orthodox Anthology, Igumen Chariton of Valamo

The Need and the Blessing of Prayer, Rev. Karl Rahner, S.J.


The Praktikos & Chapters on Prayer, Evagrius Ponticus

The Prayer of the Presence of God, Dom Augustin Guillerand

Too Deep for Words – Rediscovering Lectio Divina, Thelma Hall, R.C.
Toward God – Ancient Wisdom of Western Prayer, Michael Casey

Where the Spirit Breathes – Prayer and Action, Fr. Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus, O.C.D.

PRIESTHOOD/RELIGIOUS LIFE

A Shepherd in Combat Boots: Chaplain Emil Kapaun of the 1st Cavalry Division, William L. Maher

A Spiritual Theology of the Priesthood – the Mystery of Christ and the Mission of the Priest, Rev. Dermot Power

Cardinal Mercier’s Conferences Delivered to his Seminarists at Mechlin, J.M. O’Kavanaugh

Christ the Ideal of the Monk – Spiritual Conferences on the Monastic and Religious Life, Dom Columba Marmion, O.S.B.

Christ the Ideal of the Priest, Dom Columba Marmion, O.S.B.

He Leadeth Me, Walter J. Ciszek, S.J. with Daniel L. Flaherty, S.J.

Follow Me – The Call to the Religious Life Today, René Voillaume; trans. by Alan Neame

For Love Alone: Reflections on Priestly Celibacy – preface by Cardinal Jose Sanchez

Gift and Mystery – On the Fiftieth Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination, John Paul II

Haerent Animo (To the Catholic Clergy on Priestly Sanctity), Pope St. Pius X

Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist, Brant Pitre

Letters to My Brother Priests (Holy Thursday 1979-1991), John Paul II

Meditations on the Catholic Priesthood, Rev. Charles P. Connor

On the Priesthood: Classic and Contemporary Texts, edited by Matthew Levering

Ordained to Preach – A Theology and Practice of Preaching, Charles E.
Miller

*Pastores Dabo Vobis* (“I Will Give You Shepherds”), Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day


*Presbyterorum Ordinis* (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests), Vatican II Documents

*Priest of Christ*, Canon Francis Ripley

*Priestblock 25487 -- A Memoir of Dachau*, Jean Bernard

*Priests for the Third Millennium*, Bishop Timothy Dolan

*Tenders of the Flock*, Leo J. Trese

*The Grace of Ars*, Rev. Frederick L. Miller

*The Mass: The Presence of the Sacrifice of the Cross* – Charles Cardinal Journet

*The Priest in Union with Christ*, Rev. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.

*The Priest’s Way to God*, Father M. Eugene Boylan, O.C.S.O.

*The Shepherd Who Didn’t Run – Fr. Stanley Rother, Martyr from Oklahoma*, María Ruiz Scaperlanda

*The Spiritual Life of the Priest*, Rev. Eugene Boylan, O.C.S.O.

*The Victory of Father Karl*, Otto Pies, S.J. (transl. from the German by Salvator Attanasio)

*Theology of the Priesthood*, Jean Galot, S.J.

*We Are Your Servants – St. Augustine’s Homilies on Ministry*

*With God in Russia*, Walter J. Ciszek, S.J. with Daniel L. Flaherty, S.J.

**CELIBACY/CHASTITY**

*And You Are Christ’s – The Charism of Virginity and the Celibate Life*, Rev. Thomas Dubay, S.M.

*Celibacy and the Crisis of Faith*, Dietrich von Hildebrand

*Courage to be Chaste*, Benedict Groeschel, O.F.M., Cap.


*When God Asks For An Undivided Heart – Choosing Celibacy in Love and Freedom*, Andrew Apostoli, C.F.R.

*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Vat. II

*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, Paul VI

**ST. JOHN PAUL II**

*Annual Lenten Letters to Priests* (see Vatican website)

*Blessed are the Pure of Heart: Catechesis on the Sermon on the Mount and Writings of St. Paul*, John Paul II

*Christ is the Answer: the Christ-Centered Teaching of Pope John Paul II*, John Saward

*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul II

*John Paul II’s Way of the Cross*, Pope John Paul II

*The Theology of Marriage & Celibacy*, John Paul II

*Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, George Weigel

**BENEDICT XVI**
Behold the Pierced One – An Approach to a Spiritual Christology

Co-workers of the Truth

God and the World

God Is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life

Jesus of Nazareth

Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week

Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives

Salt of the Earth

POPE FRANCIS

Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)

The Church of Mercy – A Vision for the Church

Lectio Divina

“Holy (Spiritual) Reading”

Tolle lege, “take it and read” (St. Augustine, Confessions, Book VIII, 12)

“Scripture was not given to us only to be preserved in books, but to be kneaded into our hearts...”

-St. John Chrysostom

Lectio Divina is:

- A meditated reading of the Bible that is prolonged in contemplative prayer
- A pilgrimage of words towards the Mystery of the Word
- A reading gratuitously made in order to receive gratuitously from the Author of grace
- A transformative reading that evangelizes us, making us evangelizers
- A slow assimilation of saving Truth while in dialogue with the Savior
The gratuity of *lectio divina* is different from the utility of study. Study endeavors to master the word; *lectio divina* surrenders and yields before it.

*Lectio divina* also differs from spiritual reading. Although ideally spiritual reading can lead to prayer, it can also be simply the acquisition of knowledge and the formulation of convictions. The aim of *lectio divina* is prayerful union with God in faith and love.

Generally speaking, given that it is an active/passive activity of long duration, *lectio divina* may not be immediately gratifying. *One does not reap the harvest the day after one sows!*

There is nothing as purifying as when one endures the silence of the Word. All who know how to do it wait to reap the reward.

In *lectio divina* do not neglect the Fathers of the Church, for their writings confirm and amplify the biblical message. Because of their Christian spirit the Fathers are sure guides of correct interpretation; and by their holiness of life they teach us how to live and help us to commune in the Holy Spirit.

Other books are helpful in the measure that they allow us to assimilate the Mystery and be transformed by it.

The various movements of *lectio divina* come together in one movement of the Spirit. They can co-exist and mutually overlap; they can even alternate in an ever-changing order. A pedestrian makes many movements, but all come together in one action: walking.

Reading is a form of listening that permits one to return to what was heard in an interpersonal relationship. If you read *to read* and not merely to have read, then your *lectio* is serene, restful, and disinterested. Read slowly and pay attention; it is God who wishes to speak to you.

**How to practice lectio divina**

1. *Lectio divina* is a daily practice at a privileged hour. Choose a **time** when you are least likely to be distracted.
2. Sit upright. Make sure your posture is one that allows for attentive reading of the text. Be mindful of the holiness of the One before Whom you place yourself as you begin to read the Scriptures (“Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” Ex 3:5).

3. Choose your text: perhaps the day’s liturgical readings or a particular passage from the Bible.

4. Resist the temptation to think, “I already know this text” and skip over it. The wise man knows that it is one thing to know the chemical formula of water and another to savor it on a summer’s day.

5. Read slowly—very slowly, listening to the words interiorly and with your full attention. Read the text in its context; perhaps compare it with parallel texts. Look up key words to determine their true meaning.

6. When a word or phrase gets your attention, when it speaks to your heart, then stop and rest with it. Allow the thought to continue for as long as possible.

7. After a time, allow for quiet prayer: praise, petition, thanksgiving or contrition.

8. Silence can also be a prayerful response, as much for the one who prays and is carried out of himself as for Him Who knows you better than you know yourself.

9. Conclude your lectio divina with humble gratitude for the gift of God’s presence to you.

“Learn to know the heart of God in the words of God”
-St. Gregory


To contemplate is to take silent delight in the Lord. Contemplation is to be at a loss for words simply because one knows. He who has
progressed in lectio divina experiences the need for fewer words and more of the Word.

For those who practice it, the experience of lectio divina sharpens perception, enriches understanding, rouses from sloth, banishes idleness, orders life, corrects bad habits, produces salutary weeping, and draws tears from contrite hearts...curbs idle speech and vanity, awakens longing for Christ and the heavenly homeland.

It must always be accompanied by prayer and intimately joined with it, for we are cleansed by prayer and taught by reading. Therefore, whoever wishes to be with God at all times must pray often and read often, for when we pray it is we who speak with God, but when we read it is God who speaks with us.

Every seeker of perfection advances in reading, prayer and meditation. Reading enables us to learn what we do not know, meditation enables us to retain what we have learned, and prayer enables us to live what we have retained.

Reading Sacred Scripture confers on us two gifts: it makes the soul’s understanding keener, and after snatching us from the world’s vanities, it leads us to the love of God.”

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

The Duty of Self Denial
Parochial and Plain Sermons, Blessed John Henry Newman

I hope I have made it clear, by these instances, what is meant by Christian self-denial. If we have good health, and are in easy circumstances, let us beware of high-mindedness, self-sufficiency, self-conceit, arrogance; of delicacy of living, indulgences, luxuries, comforts. Nothing is so likely to corrupt our hearts, and to seduce us from God, as to surround ourselves with comforts, – to have things our own way, – to be the center of the sort of world, whether of things animate or inanimate, which minister to us.

For then, in turn, we shall depend on them; they will become necessary to us; their very service and adulation will lead us to trust
ourselves to them, and to idolize them. What examples are there in Scripture of soft luxurious men! Was it Abraham before the Law, who wandered through his days, without a home? or Moses, who gave the Law, and died in the wilderness?… or the Baptist, when the Gospel was superseding it, who was clad in raiment of camel’s hair, and ate the food of the wilderness? or the Apostles, who were “the offscouring of all things?” or our blessed Saviour, who “had not a place to lay His head?” Who are the soft luxurious men in Scripture? There was the rich man, who "fared sumptuously every day," and then "lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torments."… .

Far be it from us, soldiers of Christ, thus to perplex ourselves with this world, who are making our way towards the world to come. "No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also competes as an athlete, yet is he not crowned, unless he strives lawfully" (2 Tim. 2:4,5).

This is St. Paul's rule, as he has already been referred to: accordingly, in another place, he bears witness of himself that he "died daily." Day by day he got more and more dead to this world; he had fewer ties to earth, a larger treasure in heaven. Nor let us think that it is over-difficult to imitate him, though we be not Apostles, nor are called to any extraordinary work, nor are enriched with any miraculous gifts: he would have all men like himself, and all may be like him, according to their place and measure of grace.

If we would be followers of the great Apostle, first let us with him fix our eyes upon Christ our Saviour; consider the splendor and glory of His holiness, and try to love it. Let us strive and pray that the love of holiness may be created within our hearts; and then acts will follow, such as befit us and our circumstances, in due time, without our distressing ourselves to find what they should be. You need not attempt to draw any precise line between what is sinful and what is only allowable: look up to Christ, and deny yourselves everything, whatever its character, which you think He would have you relinquish.
You need not calculate and measure, if you love much: you need not perplex yourselves with points of curiosity, if you have a heart to venture after Him. True, difficulties will sometimes arise, but they will be seldom. He bids you take up your cross; therefore accept the daily opportunities which occur of yielding to others, when you need not yield, and of doing unpleasant services, which you might avoid.

He bids those who would be highest, live as the lowest: therefore, turn from ambitious thoughts, and (as far as you religiously may) make resolves against taking on new authority and rule. He bids you sell and give alms; therefore, hate to spend money on yourself. Shut your ears to praise, when it grows loud: set your face like a flint, when the world ridicules, and smile at its threats. Learn to master your heart, when it would burst forth into vehemence, or prolong a barren sorrow, or dissolve into unseasonable tenderness. Curb your tongue, and turn away your eye, lest you fall into temptation. Avoid the dangerous air which relaxes you, and brace yourself upon the heights. Be up at prayer "a great while before day," and seek the true, your only Bridegroom, "by night on your bed."

So shall self-denial become natural to you, gently and imperceptibly; and, like Jacob, you will lie down in the waste, and will soon see Angels, and the way open for you into heaven.
Stirrings of Vocation
Dislike for worldly pleasures went hand-in-hand with an inclination for prayer. The more you withdrew from the world, the nearer you drew to God. You began to see a nobler, a higher object in your life, your thoughts became deeper; half unconsciously, perhaps, he began to feel that life in the world, however good it might be, however suitable for others, would be for you a void.

But the day comes when repentance seizes on their hearts; they conceive a sudden disgust for what has led them captive; they recognize the voice of God calling them out of their self-made darkness, and, like Paul on the road to Damascus, they rise again in the full light of grace to become apostles of Christ. Thus God has various ways of acting on the souls he prepares for the service of his altars . . . .

Love of Silence
Now, if the knowledge of God can be reached only by our own efforts, do you not see at once how much of the religious soul that yearns for God needs silence?

Apostles of the inner life, as you will one day be, establish yourselves, I beg of you, and keep yourselves in the requisite condition for the development of your own inner life. Withdraw willingly into solitude, and there learn to love silence.

St. Bernard:  “When we keep silence with men, we will speak all the better with God.”

Zeal for Souls
But to preach the faith with efficacy you must have it; to bring others to love God before all else, you must be convinced that your own love for Him will never be full and perfect. Therefore, under pain of total or partial failure in your vocation, you must consider it your bounden duty to profit to the uttermost by the years of retreat the Church provides for you in this home of prayer and study, to the end that you may accumulate within you a rich store of apostolic ardor, and so carry,
later on, into your long desired field of labor, a burning zeal for the salvation of souls.

**Prayer**

Prayer is, and must remain, an essentially friendly conversation with Jesus. . . To know that we are loved is the fundamental condition, the necessary starting point, the very soul of prayer.

Since the multiplicity of things that solicit and absorb our attention obliges us to devote to prayer a fixed time of the day, let us impose on ourselves strict punctuality in the fulfillment of this pious duty.

**Trust in God**

But you, my dear friends, have quite a special motive for putting your trust in God. You are called to further His interests in this world; you are His delegates to the peoples of the earth.

"You and I must really take the resolution never to miss making our mental prayer, every day— I repeat, every day!"

- **St. Vincent de Paul**

"Do not fail to apply yourself to whatever inspires the most devotion in you. The most beneficial prayer will be the one which moves your heart in the most beneficial way."

- **Blessed John of Saxony**

"The mouth speaks through the medium of words; the heart speaks through the medium of its desires. It is your heart's desire that is your prayer.... It is not words that God wants of you, but your hearts. It is with the heart that we ask; with the heart we seek; and it is to the voice of the heart that the door is opened... The cry of the heart is a solemn earnestness of thought, which, when given vent to in prayer, expresses the profound yearning of the one who prays.

- **St. Augustine**

"If a soul is seeking God, its Beloved is seeking it much more."

- **St. John of the Cross**

"It is your divine calling to pave the way in men's souls for the love and grace of Jesus Christ. To do it you must yourselves first be enkindled
with that love. If you ask Us what is Our message to priests at the beginning of Our Pontificate, We answer: Pray! Pray more, and more earnestly.”

—Pope Pius XII (discourse to seminarians of the Roman Colleges, June 24, 1939)
The Mount: Cradle of Saints

Mount Saint Mary’s Seminary has been called “The Cradle of Bishops” on account of the many graduates who have served in the American hierarchy. Her illustrious sons range from the first Cardinal of New York City to the present Archbishop of Baltimore.

Nonetheless, Mary’s Mountain is more appropriately thought of as a “Cradle of Saints”. Many persons have drawn inspiration here to grow in holiness, only some of whom are highlighted below.

A. Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

Mother Seton moved to Emmitsburg in 1809, one year after the founding of Mount Saint Mary’s School for boys. She lived on the site of the Grotto for six weeks, while her school for girls was being built with the financial contribution of one of the seminarians, a convert by the name of Samuel Southerland Cooper.

Along with her sisters, St. Elizabeth Ann would come on foot every Sunday to the Mount for Mass and to teach catechism.
B. Servant of God Father Simon Bruté

Father Bruté grew up without a father in Brittany, during the French Revolution. As a boy, disguised as a baker’s assistant, he took the Holy Eucharist to imprisoned priests. After the revolution, although trained as a medical doctor, he joined the fathers Saint Sulpice. Turning down an offer to be chaplain to Napoleon I, he set his sights on the missions in the newly United States.

Father Bruté had a great reputation for piety and learning, serving at Mount Saint Mary’s as Spiritual Director for over twenty years. This included directing St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. He left the Mount in 1834 to become first Bishop of the Diocese of Vincennes, bifurcated from the Diocese of Bardstown. He was consecrated bishop by Bishop Flaget of Bardstown, with whom he had travelled from France so many years before. His territory included all of Indiana and half of Illinois. In the five years of life remaining to him, he did all possible to obtain priests, sisters and money for the faithful entrusted to him.

C. Bishop James Edward Walsh

James Walsh was born in Cumberland, Maryland, in 1891, and attended Mount Saint Mary’s College where he played baseball. Upon graduation, he joined the Maryknoll Missioners and took part in their first mission to China in 1918.
At the age of thirty-six, he was consecrated bishop, on Sancian Island, where St. Francis Xavier had died in 1552. The Communists took control of China in 1949, but Bishop Walsh was not arrested until 1958. He spent twelve years in isolation but was unexpectedly released in 1970. Returning the United States, he died at the age of 90 in 1981.

D. Father Flanagan

The founder of Boys Town, Father Edward Flanagan, came to the Mount soon after his arrival from Ireland in 1904. (He is pictured here returning to the Mount in 1945.) Ordained for the Diocese of Omaha, Nebraska, he began to dedicate himself to care of homeless boys. After the first boarding house he opened quickly filled, he obtained a larger tract of land outside the city. Here, contrary to the prevailing culture, he welcomed boys of all races and creeds, accepting even boys convicted of serious crimes. His work became legendary, especially after the 1938 film starring Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney.

E. Blessed Stanley Rother

[The following is taken from “Father Stanley Rother: American Martyr in Guatemala” by John Rosengren St. Anthony Messenger, July 2006]

Fr. Stanley Rother was murdered 25 years ago, but his memory still lives large in his native Oklahoma and in his adopted homeland.
Raymond Bailey, a staff member at the United States Embassy, had hastily departed Guatemala City that morning upon learning about the murder of an American missionary, Fr. Stanley Rother. Bailey traveled 50 miles west to Father Stan’s mission in Santiago Atitlán, a village of 20,000 Tzutujil [pronounced ZOO too heel] Mayans on the shores of Lake Atitlán.

The diplomat was not prepared for the throng crowded into the dirt plaza outside the colonial church. Over a thousand dark leathery faces turned toward the whitewashed church with the volcano rising behind it, eyes imploring, beseeching the heavens. Their silence thundered through Bailey. “It was as if they’d lost their God,” he said.

Fr. Stanley Rother so endeared himself to the Tzutujil over 13 years as their parish priest that they still feel his loss today, a quarter century after his murder by a paramilitary death squad. Caught between the revolutionary poor and the military government in Central America’s longest and bloodiest civil war, Fr. Stan refused to preach rebellion, but his pastoral devotion to his people eventually cost him his life.
Declared a martyr and since proposed for sainthood by the bishops of Guatemala, Fr. Stan was an ordinary man who found extraordinary courage in his faith.

Ordinary Start
Fr. Stanley Rother arrived in Santiago Atitlán in 1968 without fanfare. The then-33-year-old diocesan priest had driven his Chevrolet over 2,000 miles from his native Oklahoma to the Guatemala mission sponsored by the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. Ordained four years earlier, he had avoided a near miss.

The farm kid from Okarche had flunked out of the seminary on his first try, defeated by the Latin. Only on a second chance from a supportive bishop did he complete his training at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Maryland (Class of 1963), where he was more comfortable restoring the school’s grotto than studying in the library.

After several brief pastoral assignments in his home diocese, he accepted an invitation to join five other priests, three religious sisters and three laypeople who staffed the Guatemala mission. Once in Santiago Atitlán, Fr. Stan lent a hand to the construction of a hospital and set about the more difficult task of learning Spanish.

By 1975, Fr. Stan had become the head missioner by default. The others had left to marry, retire or pursue other assignments. Fr. Stan worked hard, true to his German heritage and farm roots, replacing the church’s stained-glass windows, raising the altar, commissioning the renovation of an elaborate altarpiece, overseeing the translation of the New Testament into Tzutujil, experimenting with different crops on the parish farm and fulfilling his pastoral duties. That sometimes meant as many as five Sunday Masses in four different locations and up to 1,000 Baptisms a year. He seemed to blossom with the challenge.
He endeared himself to the people with his unpretentious style. The men who worked the fields respected a priest who was as comfortable atop a tractor as he was at the altar. Families appreciated his visiting their homes—often shacks no more than 15 feet square—and sitting on the floor to break bread with them. The elders honored him with a traditional scarf that he wore proudly on special occasions. Perhaps most significantly, Fr. Stan not only learned Spanish, he also learned Tzutujil, a difficult Mayan dialect spoken by the villagers but not by many gringos.

By 1980, Guatemala’s civil war had reached the highlands, including the region of Lake Atitlán. In October, army trucks rumbled into Santiago Atitlán. Troops set up camp on the outskirts of town, occupying a section of the parish farm.

**Land of the Disappeared**
That week, community leaders started to disappear. The night of October 23, day three of the army’s occupation, soldiers blocked the ends of the street where Gaspar Culan lived. Culan, a former deacon who left the seminary to marry, ran the mission’s radio station, using it as a platform for human rights. Masked men entered his house, shot Culan and dragged him out to a waiting car. His wife and their baby daughter watched the car drive off.

Culan’s kidnapping and presumed murder followed the military government’s counterinsurgency strategy to criminalize and eliminate anyone working to combat poverty, illness and illiteracy.

An anti-Communist group later broke into the radio station, rifled files and stole equipment. Rumors raged about informants and names on death lists. Two more community leaders disappeared.

Fr. Stan wrote to his archbishop, Charles Salatka, “Anyone who has made an advancement at all is being pursued,” but resolved, “I still don’t want to abandon my flock when the wolves are making random attacks.”
Fr. Stan reinforced the church and rectory with fences and locks. He and his assistant, Padre Pedro Bocel, avoided going out at night. Hundreds of villagers sought refuge in the colonial church at night while catechists took turns keeping watch. Fr. Stan slept in different rooms of the rectory to confuse possible intruders. The night following the radio station break-in, he slept with his shoes on, afraid that the same group would attack the rectory.

Fr. Stan was not a political activist; nor was he swayed by liberation theology, a movement catching hold in Latin America in the early 1980s. He was aware of the government’s abuses, but his old-school faith swayed him to respond pastorally rather than politically. He set up a fund for the widows and orphans of the disappeared men in his village, knowing the danger of such a charitable deed. “Shaking hands with an Indian has become a political act,” he wrote home.

When one of the mission’s brightest catechists, Diego Quic, wound up on a death list after openly criticizing the army and asked Fr. Stan to shelter him in the rectory, the priest knew the danger but couldn’t refuse. His pastoral orientation won out over prudence.

The evening of January 3, 1981, Fr. Stan was listening to music in the rectory living room, the way he liked to unwind after a long day. Diego was returning to the rectory, shortly after nightfall. Three masked men ambushed him in front of the church’s stone steps.

Diego fought his way to the rectory porch. The thugs pried him from the wooden banister, splintering the railing. Padre Pedro, the assistant pastor, heard the ruckus and called Fr. Stan.

The three masked men wrestled Diego down to a car waiting in the plaza. Fr. Stan and Pedro watched the men shove Diego into the backseat. The attackers had Diego’s head covered, but Fr. Stan knew it was him. “¡Ayudame! [Help me!],” Diego screamed. One of the kidnappers tried to clamp his hand over Diego’s mouth. “¡Ayudame!”
Fr. Stan and Pedro watched in disbelief. The car kicked up dirt out of the plaza. Fr. Stan feared they would torture Diego, then murder him in some brutal way, the way he had seen it happen to others. He could do little more than phone the police in the next village, the direction the kidnappers had headed.

The moment shook Fr. Stan. Diego’s cry haunted his mind’s ear. “¡Ayudame!” For days afterward, Fr. Stan drove along the roads outside Santiago, looking. He checked fields the killers had littered with other bodies. He visited neighboring village police stations and asked for information about Diego and the kidnappers. He searched the plaza for clues. Nothing. Diego was desaparecido [missing].

In a letter to Father John Steichen, chancellor of the Oklahoma City Archdiocese and official liaison to the Santiago mission, Fr. Stan described Diego’s abduction in detail. He also described his effort to raise funds to support the eight widows and 32 fatherless children of the 11 men who disappeared since the army’s occupation began less than three months earlier.

“Since helping these people,” Fr. Stan wrote, “could very easily be considered as subversive by the local government, we have asked that the money be deposited directly in the bank there, and that there be no direct communication between the donors and me....Be careful about sending letters here mentioning relief, etc.

We never know when the mail may be intercepted and read. This letter is being hand-carried to the States and I can say things that I ordinarily wouldn’t, using the local mails.”

The New York Times printed this letter after Fr. Stan’s death. It had been circulated by human-rights groups and some speculated that it had been seen by the wrong eyes, which may have made Fr. Stan a marked man.
Four days after Diego’s kidnapping, in retaliation for a guerrilla attack, the army indiscriminately gunned down 17 civilians near the Chacaya coffee plantation in the Santiago Atitlán area. Fr. Stan surveyed the bloody corpses laid out in the plaza under the watchful eyes of his Tzutujil parishioners and the army soldiers. He ordered the bodies of the dead Catholics to be carried to the church for Christian burial—another pastoral duty that could be viewed as public defiance of the military’s terror tactics.

**Marked Man of God**

On January 12, friends stopped Fr. Stan on his way through the neighboring village of San Lucas Toliman, where fellow American missioners Father Greg Schaffer and Father Pat Greene warned Fr. Stan, “They’re on the streets to get you.”

Fr. Stan refused to leave the country without Padre Pedro, whom the death squads had also fingered. Father Schaffer smuggled Pedro out of Santiago, wrapped in blankets in the back of his car. Fr. Stan and Pedro hid for 16 days in Guatemala City until Fr. Stan could secure special clearance for the Guatemalan priest to enter the United States.

Fr. Stan languished three months at his family’s farm in Okarche, where he grew up. He lent a hand to the spring harvest. He helped his mother clean the house. But his thoughts were in Guatemala. His family would find him sitting in a darkened room, gazing out the window.

He knew the danger, but he could not stomach the thought of abandoning his people. He told a friend about some nuns in Nicaragua who left during the fighting and later wanted to go back. The people asked them, “Where were you when we needed you?”

“I don’t want that to happen to me,” he wrote. “I have too much of my life invested [in Atitlán].”

Another priest invited Fr. Stan to preach at his suburban Oklahoma City
church in late March. In response to the new Washington administration’s spin on the Communist threat in Central America, Fr. Stan commented, “Don’t believe everything your government tells you.” His remarks upset the patriotic sensibilities of at least two parishioners, one of whom wrote the Guatemala Embassy in Washington, D.C., “I feel obliged to warn your nation’s government of the Church involvement within the leftist organizations attempting to establish a socialist (or Marxist) government in Guatemala.”

In April, word arrived that Fr. Stan’s name was no longer on the death list. At the time, he did not know that his source for this information was no longer reliable. The archbishop counseled Fr. Stan that he might not come back to Oklahoma alive, but Fr. Stan insisted he must return to his people. He belonged back with them. He told friends that whatever happened to him would be God’s will. He returned in time to celebrate Holy Week with his parish. Padre Pedro remained in hiding.

Fr. Stan plunged back into his ministry. In the early morning hours of July 28, three tall men wearing ski masks and civilian clothes sneaked into the rectory and moved directly to Fr. Stan’s upstairs bedroom. Not finding him there, they startled Francisco Bocel in the room across the hall. They demanded that the assistant pastor’s brother, who had been staying at the rectory, lead them to Fr. Stan. Francisco noted that they spoke a Spanish dialect unlike that of the local villagers. He also felt a gun pressed against his head.

He led them to the downstairs study that Fr. Stan had converted into his bedroom. “Padre, they’ve come for you,” he shouted, before slipping away.

Fr. Stan had told friends that he did not want to be tortured like those whose bodies he had found with eyes gouged, skin peeled off their face, cigarette burns over their flesh. Francisco heard thuds and furniture tumble. The fight rubbed Fr. Stan’s knuckles raw. Francisco heard him yell, “Kill me here!”
The killers pinned Fr. Stan into a corner. One fired a shot into his face. Fr. Stan crumpled to the floor. The assassin bent over him, placed a handgun against his left temple and fired another shot. Francisco heard the shots from where he hid in his bedroom. He heard rummaging in the rectory office for several minutes, then quiet. He finally worked up the nerve to wake the Carmelite sisters in the adjoining convent and an American nurse staying in the rectory. They found Fr. Stan lying in a pool of his blood. The nurse pronounced him dead. The nuns knelt to pray.

**Parishioners Without a Padre**

Word of the priest’s murder raged through the village and summoned the Atitecos [residents of Santiago Atitlán] to the town’s heart. They grouped on the church’s stone steps and clustered throughout the plaza. They had already lost over 30 of their brothers, fathers, uncles, sons and neighbors. Now their priest was gone.

The crowd alarmed Father Greg Schaffer, who had driven over from San Lucas early that morning. How much longer until the mourners morphed into a mob that marched out to the barracks to avenge their beloved pastor’s murder? Their blind anger would turn a murder into a massacre. With the help of others, he ushered them into the church, where Sister Ana Maria Gonzalez, one of the Carmelite sisters, comforted the crowd with hymns of resurrection.

Inside the church, Schaffer came upon a Tzutujil woman, shriveled by age and curled up in the corner of a pew. Sobs racked her frail body. Schaffer placed a hand upon her shoulder. “*They killed our priest,*” she said. “*He was our priest. He spoke our language.*”

Meanwhile, back inside the rectory, Sister Linda Wanner, an American nun who lived and worked in San Lucas, preserved the slain priest’s blood. Just three days earlier, Sister Linda had spent Saturday afternoon with him in that very room. He had sat in the red plastic chair now splattered with his blood. His generous and patient
hospitality had impressed her.

She thought of this while she ladled his blood into a mason jar. She thought of the terror he must have felt fighting his attackers. She thought of the senseless brutality behind the bullets they fired. She saw his life poured out on these tiles. She sensed that his faith, his courage had seeped into the very carpet. On her knees, she reverently scooped Fr. Stan’s blood into the jar. “I sensed what the blood of martyrs really means,” she says.

Sister Linda found a bullet slug on the ledge of a bookshelf. It must have struck the floor and jumped there. She brought the inch-long bullet to Fr. Schaffer, who turned it over to the U.S. embassy officials. The slug came from a nine-millimeter shell used in a Smith & Wesson. This wasn’t the type of gun that fell into the hands of guerrillas or bandits; it was the type used by the army and government-backed paramilitaries.

The Guatemalan police arrested three men from Santiago Atitlán and charged them with killing Fr. Stan during a botched burglary attempt—despite the fact that they did not match Francisco Bocel’s description. The three men were convicted, though later acquitted by an appellate court under pressure from the U.S. State Department.

Archbishop Salatka and U.S. Senator Charles Boren of Oklahoma, among others, called for a thorough investigation, though none occurred. Fr. Stan’s killers were never brought to justice.

**Where he Found his Treasure his Heart Remains**

Fr. Stan’s Tzutujil parishioners believed Fr. Stan should stay with them. His parents wanted to bury their son in the family’s Okarche plot. They struck a compromise: The Tzutujil enshrined Fr. Stan’s heart in the church along with the mason jar of his blood, and Fr. Stan’s body returned to Oklahoma. In death, as in life, Fr. Stan was of Oklahoma, but his heart resided in the Mayan church.
His memory burns strong in the hearts of those who knew him. “I think he’s a saint,” Father Schaffer says, voicing the thoughts of many, “because of his complete and total dedication and care and giving to those people. That was built on his faith and love of God. He is a good example of what a martyr is about.”

'The Memory of the Just Will Be Blessed' (Proverbs 10:7)
Father Stanley Rother died 25 years ago, but his memory lives large in his native Oklahoma and his adopted home of Guatemala.

In Santiago Atitlán, the room where Fr. Stan was murdered has been converted into a chapel visited annually by hundreds of people from as far away as Japan and Kenya. The church fills to capacity every year on the anniversary of his death for a memorial Mass attended by many children named after him. His heart rests in a shrine inside the church, part of a memorial to all of the Atitecos who have died for their faith.

Fr. Stanley Rother was beatified in Oklahoma City, OK on the 23rd of September, 2017.
Blessed Stanley Rother,
pray for us!
“And in the morning, a great while before day, He rose and went out to a lonely place, and there He prayed.”
(Mk 1:35)