

# THE COMPANION

Companions of Christ Newsletter - Summer 2022





# KNOWN AND LOVED AS BROTHERS

This spring, the Companions of Christ welcomed two newly ordained priests, Father Connor McGinnis and Father John Utecht, to our number, bringing the total number of priests and priest candidates for the Companions to 34, with more than a dozen other priests and seminarians discerning membership. Now in our 30th year, we are not only growing, but spreading, with chapters in Denver, Colorado, and Joliet, Illinois, and potential new groups forming in Michigan and Texas.

Why are the Companions taking root and bearing fruit? Ultimately, it's a work of the Holy Spirit for the time we are in. The Church needs healthy and holy priests, and this necessitates the accountability and support of brother-priests. The Companions of Christ are certainly not an elite group of "super-priests." On the contrary, many of us embrace the Companions because we know we can't fulfill God's call in our lives alone!

I was a priest for five years before I joined the Companions. Although I knew many of the men, it wasn't until I was in active ministry that it became clear my own priesthood would be healthier lived in intentional community. At the time, I was serving both as a pastor and as Director of Vocations for the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. Many of the young men I was accompanying in their discernment and who were considering a step into seminary voiced to me their fear of being isolated by priestly ministry and overwhelmed by the administration entailed of parish priesthood. The old saying that no one understands a priest like another priest resonates because it's true. All of us want to be known and loved.

Companions make the same promises as every other diocesan priest, but we live our call in a particular way. The primary mark of our charism is intentional community, not merely dwelling as housemates, but committed to pursuing a common life together as priests. As far as possible, the Archbishop tries to place us where we can live in households of at least three priests, and in cases like mine, where that isn't possible at the moment, we have permanent small groups and weekly gatherings of area Companions for Lord's Day on Saturday evenings, as well as monthly and annual gatherings. These opportunities for fellowship and prayer together keep us rooted in union with each other and with Christ. We live the beauty and fullness of our vocation together—understood, accepted, and supported, even in our weakness and vulnerability.

For three decades now, the Companions have been brothers dwelling in unity. Thank you for your support of our charism and our call, and please continue to pray for vocations and our members!

In Christ,  
**Father Peter Williams**  
Moderator

**Above, Father Peter Williams teaches parish children about the newly renovated Adoration Chapel at Saint Ambrose Catholic Community in Woodbury. Photo courtesy of Hilda Berdie Photography.**

**On the cover: New Companion of Christ Father John Utecht is ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Bernard Hebda on May 28. Photo courtesy of Dave Hrbacek/The Catholic Spirit.**



# DEEPLY ROOTED

## Father Utecht's Connections to Priesthood, Companions of Christ Are Personal

It's not every day that a newly ordained priest is assisted at the altar by his father. On May 28, Father John Utecht was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis; the next day, he celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving at his home parish, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church in Hastings, with his dad, Deacon Joe Utecht, at his side.

It was a blessed moment, bringing their vocational calls full circle: At Deacon Joe's ordination three years ago, his son was one of the seminarians serving at the Mass and helped to vest his father. Last spring, Deacon Joe returned the favor when his son was ordained a transitional deacon.

Father John's priestly vocation and his call to the Companions of Christ are rooted in personal connections like these. In addition to his father's ministry, his mother, Margaret, has served their parish in a variety of capacities for 30 years and works as a receptionist for NET Ministries in Saint Paul. He grew up surrounded by good, holy priests who inspired him to consider the priesthood—and the Companions.

"I've known the Companions for pretty much my whole life because my parents have been friends with a lot of the priests," said Father John. "I have also had Companions as formators and teachers throughout my time in seminary. I've looked up to these priests for a long time."

"The reason I personally felt called to join the Companions was their communal life of prayer. I was really attracted to the idea of living with brother priests who not only help me in my priesthood but also push me to grow in holiness," he said. "It was a very natural fit for me."

Reflecting on his ordination and early priesthood, Father John has been struck most by the great love Catholics have for their priests.

"It was just super powerful to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders after working towards it for eight years," he said. "One of the many striking things about my



**Newly ordained Father John Utecht celebrates a Mass of Thanksgiving alongside his father, Deacon Joe Utecht, at their home parish of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church in Hastings. Photo courtesy of the Utecht family.**

ordination was how many people were there from different parts of my life to support and pray for me!"

In addition to family and friends, his entire teaching parish committee from St. Michael Catholic Church in St. Michael came to the Cathedral and received a blessing from him following the Mass.

It's priestly interactions like that—big and small—that resonate most with him in his ministry. He is currently assigned as the parochial vicar for Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church and School in Edina, with fellow Companion Father Kevin Finnegan.

"So far the best part of being a priest is having my whole life dedicated to bringing Jesus to people, both through the sacraments and through simple things like having dinner with people," Father John said. "Everyone from friends and family to my new parishioners have been so loving and supportive."





## HOW GOOD AND HOW PLEASANT IT IS WHEN BROTHERS DWELL IN UNITY (PSALM 133:1)

The Companions of Christ is a fraternity of diocesan priests and seminarians in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis established as a public association in 1992. For more information, visit [companionsofchrist.org](http://companionsofchrist.org).

Photos are courtesy of the Companions unless otherwise noted. On the back page: Seminarian Nick Vance plays a game with members of the Handmaids of the Heart of Jesus on Memorial Day.



Top: Father Joe Kuharski, seminarian Nick Vance, Father Matthew Northenscold, Father Evan Koop, Father Marcus Milless, and Father Tim Sandquist enjoy a Memorial Day hike with sisters from the Handmaids of the Heart of Jesus. Middle: Father Sam Gilbertson (center), soon-to-be priest candidate for the Companions, and Director of Vocations and Companion Father David Blume (behind to the left) at Father Gilbertson's Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Henry in Monticello. Bottom: Father Chad VanHoose and seminarian Joe Wappes brought students to a High School Youth Conference in Steubenville, Ohio, in June.

Above left: Father Michael Barsness, Father James Still, and Father Joseph Williams, at his episcopal ordination in January. Above right: Most Companions of Christ members, as well as seminarians, gathered for the ordination of Father Connor McGinnis. Father McGinnis and Father Utecht are the newest Companions of Christ. Photo courtesy of Dave Hrbacek.



# NEW APPOINTMENTS

FATHER NICHOLAS HAGEN\*  
Pastor, Church of Saint Raphael (Crystal)

FATHER NATHAN HASTINGS  
Parochial Administrator, Church of the Holy Spirit (Saint Paul)

FATHER CONNOR MCGINNIS  
Parochial Vicar, St. Michael Catholic Church (St. Michael)

FATHER MARCUS MILLESS  
Parochial Administrator, Church of St. Helena (Minneapolis)

FATHER JOHN UTECHT  
Parochial Vicar, Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church (Edina)

*\* Priest candidate in formation for membership in the Companions of Christ*



...es, and friends enjoy a beautiful spring day following  
...nt: Father Peter Williams presents his brother, Bishop  
...r. Photo courtesy of Dave Hrbacek/The Catholic Spirit.  
...as a former Companion, Bishop Andrew Cozzens,  
...s; Father Sam Gilbertson, and Father John Utecht.  
...ompanions; Father Gilbertson will begin formation for  
...k/The Catholic Spirit.

Top: Three former parochial vicars of All Saints in Lakeville (all Companions) and newly ordained Companion and All Saints parishioner Father Connor McGinnis join All Saints pastor Father Tom Wilson after Father McGinnis's Mass of Thanksgiving. Pictured left to right: Father Jonathan Kelly, Father McGinnis, Father Wilson, Father Chad VanHoose, and Father Marcus Milless. Bottom: Father Michael Barsness and Father Peter Richards concelebrate Mass in the Holy Land earlier this summer.

# CHRIST-CENTERED Adoration Draws the Faithful into an Encounter with the Living God

Even to the faithful, Eucharistic Adoration can seem strange. Many baptized Catholics struggle to understand or believe the Church's teaching that Jesus is truly present in the Holy Eucharist, so kneeling before a monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament can be challenging—but even a few minutes alone with the Lord can be enough to change minds and hearts.

## SILENCE AND PRESENCE

Father Jake Anderson, pastor of St. Lawrence Catholic Church and Newman Center on the University of Minnesota's Minneapolis campus, has seen transformations firsthand.

"Students come in off the street with their backpacks on and a deer-in-the-headlights look. They go into the Adoration chapel for a half hour, an hour, and when they come out, you see the peace in their eyes. Their whole disposition is changed," he says.

Adoration is an easy way to invite students into a real relationship with the Lord.

"They're used to the noisy tumult of life," he says.

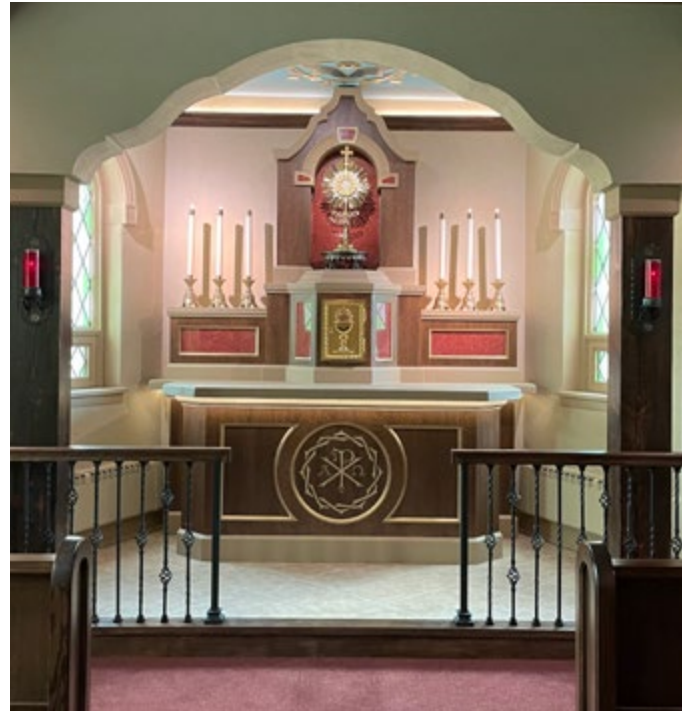
"They come into this sanctuary, and in the silence, there's a presence."

Students who attend the Newman Center's Fall Retreat often experience a powerful encounter with the Eucharistic Lord. Retreat small groups sign up for an hour of Adoration on Saturday night, and retreatants encounter Jesus in an up close and personal way on Sunday as Father Anderson processes the monstrance throughout the chapel, spending 30 to 60 seconds with each of them before blessing them with the Eucharist.

"Many students meet the Lord very personally and make a real connection between the living God and the Sacrament of the Eucharist," he says.

The Newman Center chapel is open for Adoration weekday afternoons during the fall and spring semesters. Father Anderson hopes to be open 12 hours a day eventually, providing students with more access to the Lord, in the silence.

"We teach the students that *Eucharist* means thanksgiving, encouraging them to express gratitude for



all the good things that otherwise might go right past them," he says. "Spending time in Adoration cultivates a habit of prayer and a Eucharistic culture that really is its own formation."

## FRUITS OF THE FAITHFUL

Companions of Christ priests across the Archdiocese are investing time, energy, and dollars to encourage Adoration because it makes a difference in the lives of parishioners and parishes.

"The Adoration chapel is like the engine room of the parish," says Father Brian Park, pastor at St. Michael Catholic Church and School in St. Michael. "All our strength comes from prayer, and people praying with Jesus around the clock powers all the ministries that support our mission. It's also like a spiritual greenhouse: Adoration helps a soul grow tremendously in a shorter period of time."

St. Michael's chapel is open nearly 24-7. The Adoration schedule at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Watertown and St. Boniface Catholic Church in St. Bonifacius is more restricted, but the fruits are no less profound.





**On these pages: The beautifully renovated Adoration Chapel at Saint Rose of Lima Catholic Church in Roseville attracts parishioners and neighbors alike. Photos courtesy of Fr. Marc Pavaglio.**

“When parishioners come to adore Jesus, they also tend to be more engaged at Mass, since they recognize their Love present at the altar,” says Father Peter Hughes, pastor of the two parishes. “When they take the time to pray before Jesus, they are more attentive to Him when He speaks to them throughout the rest of the week as well. This allows grace to flow more freely in their lives, and thus to also flow more freely within the parish.”

#### **OPEN DOORS, OPEN HEARTS**

Saint Rose of Lima Catholic Church and School in Roseville boasts one of the longest running Perpetual Adoration chapels in the Archdiocese. When Father Marc Pavaglio arrived as pastor in 2018, he discovered that most of the “pillars” of the parish community were regular adorers—and that the chapel itself had not been updated in 30 years.

With a capital campaign underway, the time was right to make the chapel “a lush, comfortable, noble space that reflects and honors the One in front of us,” says Father Pavaglio. In 2019, he began working with designer and artist Nicholas Vasko to renovate the space, which had been a simple convent chapel for the nuns who taught at the school.

Adoration was suspended during the height of the pandemic, and they kept the chapel closed while the renovation was completed. The adobe walls, rich colors,

wood, and wrought iron of the new space would make their patron proud.

“Our challenge now is recruiting adorers,” says Father Pavaglio. “We are encouraging past adorers to return and inviting new adorers to join us. We hope to have an open house soon—invite people to stroll through after Mass, learn about the artwork, and get to know the space.”

Although Adoration seems particularly Catholic, Father Pavaglio says it’s a great way to evangelize non-Catholics and even non-Christians. The parish young adults group hosts a monthly Adoration night with Confessions and praise and worship music. The renovation and the pandemic pushed these events into the main worship space. When the doors are open to the street, passersby get a clear view of the monstrance on the altar.


“We are trying to be that sign of God’s love to the world,” he says. “I’ve met people who aren’t parishioners, who aren’t Catholic, who have discovered the chapel and are coming to pray.”

“Providing a refuge of silence with the Lord and freedom from sin and shame seemed like the best things we could do for people. Parishioners are bringing their petitions, their intercessions, their hearts to Jesus. They really want God to renew our parish and our city, and they are growing in faith.”

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# PRAY FOR VOCATIONS



Please join us in praying for more vocations to priesthood, religious life, and the diaconate for the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis—and for all priests and seminarians discerning the Companions of Christ. **God bless you!**