

'You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.' – John 8:32



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Interest in the priesthood grew to vocation

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By Tanya Connor | The Catholic Free Press

Dinosaurs.

A church hundreds of years old.

Recess reflection.

These are all in the life of Father Alan J. Martineau, ordained June 23 in St. Paul Cathedral. He shared the following about how he got there.

Son of Jeffrey and Lynne Martineau, Alan J. Martineau was born May 23, 1991 in Springfield and baptized at St. Joseph Parish in North Brookfield (his mother's home parish).



He was brought up in Spencer, at St. Mary Parish, called Mary, Queen of the Rosary after a merger with Our Lady of the Rosary. He found “something to do besides sit in the pew” by being an altar server with his brothers, Joel and Eric.

His first experience of the priesthood being interesting – though not for him – was watching his pastor, Father James F. Hoey, read notes before Mass, then deliver a homily from memory, he said.

“Public speaking was not something I was particularly keen on,” he said. He wondered, “Could I ever do it if the situation required it?”

Priests didn’t make money, he figured, and he wanted to – so his parents wouldn’t have to work and he could live comfortably.

“I would watch documentaries,” he said. “My favorite would be the ones about dinosaurs. That’s what I wanted to do – go out digging in the dirt, finding things that are millions of years old.”

Paleontology is still a hobby of his, he said. Being knowledgeable about science can help one evangelize. He spoke of “being able to say to people, faith is ... essential to their lives” and understanding that faith and science each play a role.

Pope John Paul II’s 1998 encyclical “Fides et Ratio” (Faith and Reason) “made me realize, to be scientific does not mean to be faithless,” he said. “If you do science right, it’s something that should open you up to wonder and awe, and ultimately to faith itself. You can’t approach faith properly if you approach it (as): ‘There’s nothing greater than me.’”

Speaking of career interests, Father Martineau said, “I shifted from paleontology to thinking about politics, to being a lawyer, then being a judge.” But he changed his mind upon learning a judge has to be a lawyer and do much paperwork and reading.

Now, he says, “God has the final laugh.” After serving as associate pastor of St. Anne Parish in Shrewsbury this summer, he returns to Rome for two more years of canon law studies at Pontifical Gregorian University. He started the licentiate program last fall. This wasn’t Father Martineau’s introduction to Europe. That happened after seventh grade at Knox Trail Junior High School, when he was a People to People student ambassador. It was, he said, “my first recognizable encounter with something that had to do with the faith beyond Mary, Queen of the Rosary.

“I realized, going into Notre Dame in Paris: ‘This has been here almost 800 years,’” he

said. That resonated with his interest in history and his experience of Mass in his parish.

"I finally had a connection with the people who were responsible for me having that gift of faith, my parents being the immediate ones in having me baptized," he said. People from hundreds of years ago had passed on that faith.

"Everyone came together to build what would be the dwelling place for God's presence, because everyone, from the king and queen down, contributed something," he said of Notre Dame.

"That's true ... in my own parish – the things people sacrificed ... to ensure that the faith was fostered and propagated."

Visiting St. Peter's Basilica he realized, "I was one part of this great whole. That was the first time this made sense to me. And so, from that point on, I wanted to know more about the faith: about how it came about, how it was passed down, the challenges that it overcame."

At recess one day in eighth grade, he saw his parish's church buildings.

"I was thinking ... 'I wonder what Father Jim is up to,'" he said. "I had no idea what a priest did all day." He just knew Father Hoey celebrated Mass and taught.

"I wondered if I could see myself doing that ... and then was immediately repulsed, because that didn't fit with my plan" to be a history professor, Father Martineau said.

But in 2006, when he was a freshman at St. John High School in Shrewsbury, he heard a talk by Father James S. Mazzone, director of the diocesan Office for Vocations, who invited students to a retreat.

"I was still questioning it; I wasn't pursuing it," Father Martineau said of his vocation.

"But I couldn't pass up a free lunch."

What Bishop McManus shared with retreatants about his youth "resonated with what my father used to talk about – growing up in St. Francis in Fitchburg," Father Martineau recalled. Priests' lives sounded rewarding, involving sacrifices, like his parents made. He sensed that goodness came from sacrifice.

While still a freshman, he attended a vocations retreat for adults. There he saw the video "Fishers of Men," experienced eucharistic adoration, and felt a need to pursue a priestly vocation. He began frequenting Father Mazzone's suppers for men like him.

Joining a trip to seminaries which the Father Mazzone organized, “I got a better sense for ... the rhythm to the day – the prayer, the instruction,” Father Martineau said. “The Church actually takes great care ... to make sure that her priests are formed properly.” He realized priesthood was “something I had to be conformed to, not just, ‘I want this, therefore I should have it.’”

Given the clergy sexual abuse scandal, some fellow students said, “You’re signing up to be a pedophile,” he said, and others, including guidance counselors, tried to talk him out of priesthood. He said St. John’s prides itself on having students selected for out-of-state colleges, and he hoped to attend Assumption College in Worcester and receive formation for the priesthood at Holy Name of Jesus House of Studies.

His fourth semester at Assumption, he studied in Paris. The next fall he entered the three-year Basselin Scholars Program at Theological College at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. It’s for seminarians who “demonstrate personal maturity and above-average potential for academic success,” says the website theologicalcollege.catholic.edu. In 2013 he got his bachelor’s, and in 2014 his licentiate, both in philosophy, from Catholic University, he said.

Then he went to Rome, receiving his bachelor’s in theology from Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in 2017 and priestly formation at Pontifical North American College there. He was ordained a transitional deacon at St. Peter Basilica Sept. 28, 2017.

His local parish assignments were at St. Bernadette in Northborough, St. Anne in Southborough, St. Mary in Uxbridge and Holy Family in Worcester, some of which involved interaction with schools.

“Catholic education has always been near and dear to my heart,” he said.