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Saving grace

Wayne man called to Capuchin Franciscan order

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Editor

It took a long time for Dan MacDonald to find his calling.

The Wayne resident is in Wisconsin, now, in the early portion of the postulants program with the Capuchin Franciscan friars. He first felt the inkling to join the priesthood, though, when he graduated from high school.

That was 28 years ago.

"I had a sense of the vocation way back when I was 17," said the 46-year-old, who has lived in the City of Wayne since 1971. "I knew I wasn't quite ready to make that decision. I hadn't experienced life."

MacDonald said he was instead attracted by the 'party lifestyle,' embraced by his friends. He worked in a variety of warehouse positions through the years, most recently at the Nailco Group in Farmington Hills.

God was a constant in his life through that time, he said, but he had never really made a true commitment.

"It just got tiring," he said. "I felt like my life had a higher purpose. It made me re-evaluate my life."

He gives some credit to his long-time pastor, Father Jack Baker, who served for the past 11 years at St Mary in Wayne, in helping him to realize that God had 'won.'

"I couldn't ignore my vocation any more," said MacDonald. "I started to take a serious look at the different orders."

At first, that didn't bear fruit. Most Franciscan orders have a cut off that applies to those who want to enter the study. It varies depending on the order, but most won't accept new students older than 30 or 35. Then he came across the Capuchins, who accept newcomers up until the age of 50.

"All I knew about them came from the Capuchin Soup Kitchen in Detroit," said MacDonald. "But it fell in line with the things I like, giving back to the community." In addition to helping to feed the needy, the order helps take people off the streets, works with addicts to kick their

addictions and provides them with job skills so they can become productive members of society.

From there it was a round of testing—both academic and psychological—to see if MacDonald would be a good fit with the new vocation.

Then it was off to Milwaukee to start his training.

The Capuchin postulants program includes ministry work and formation studies as the candidates discern their vocational choice. After one year as a postulant, candidates continue their studies and discernment process through training as a novice, which is also one year in duration. The novice year focuses on classes, personal and communal prayer, silence, and spiritual direction. Novitiate ends with the first profession of temporary vows.

“It is a carefully structured program that is aimed to deepen the individual’s faith and to assist in the exploration of vocational choices,” said Friar William Hugo, the director of the Capuchin Postulancy program.

MacDonald has concentrated on teaching. He currently serves at the Messmer Catholic School St. Rose and St. Leo elementary/middle school, a charter school near Milwaukee, as a teacher’s assistant. He also teaches religion to the fourth graders.

“It’s one of the things I’ve always thought about when I thought about my vocation,” he said. “It’s really worked out well. When I’m up in front of the class they’re all silent and their eyes are glued on me—they soak it up.

“You just have to care about them and treat them like people and they respond to that so quick,” he added.

He said he’s enjoying his time and looking forward to continuing his education—and service.

“God wants us to be responsive to the common good and there are so many ways to do it,” he said.

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