



Br. Kurt Kessler, C.O. Ordained a Deacon

Oratorian Brother Prepares for Priesthood Ordination in 2027

By Fr. Michael Darcy, C.O.

Last year marked the end of an impressive streak for us. 2025 was the first spring without an ordination since 2019. In May 2020, Fr. Reed was ordained a deacon. If you cannot recall that ordination, it is because, like most people, you weren't there: due to COVID shutdowns, Bishop Waltersheid celebrated the ordination with the Oratorians, members of Fr. Reed's family, and a few close friends. Also unusual was the venue: the Oratory's own chapel. Because of the shutdowns, Bishop Waltersheid was permitted to celebrate the ordination here. I suspect this will be the only ordination ever to occur in our chapel.

In 2021, Fr. Reed was ordained a priest at St. Paul Cathedral in a ceremony that also included Fr. Thomas's ordination to the diaconate. In 2022, Fr. Thomas was ordained a priest. In 2023, Fr. Leo was ordained a deacon, and in 2024, a priest. This impressive streak came to an end in 2025.

The pause ended on May 16, when Br. Kurt was ordained a deacon by Bishop Waltersheid at St. Paul Cathedral. It was a beautiful Mass featuring magnificent

music led by our director of sacred music, Mr. Nicholas Will.

The ordination of the first deacons is described in the Acts of the Apostles. The Apostles were busy spreading the Gospel, and some complained that certain widows were being neglected. Men were chosen as deacons and given the task of serving those in need (Acts 6).

The vocation of these men was to serve, and that mission was inscribed in the name of their office. "Deacon" comes from the Greek diakonos, meaning "servant" or "minister," and is related to diakonia, meaning "service" or "ministry." Service is the first work of all ordained persons, even those who are later ordained priests or bishops. I was surprised to learn – only at my own ordination, I think – that when a bishop vests for Mass, he first puts on the deacon's dalmatic and then the priest's chasuble. The symbolism impressed me: in ascending to the office of bishop, he does not leave behind the commission to serve. All authority in the Church is modeled on Christ, who said to his disciples, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27).



Bishop William Waltersheid ordains Br. Kurt a deacon by the solemn laying on of hands.

*To hold an office named
after service is one thing;
to live it is another.*

I am confident that Br. Kurt is willing and prepared to live the calling of the diaconate. As I write, he has been serving as a deacon for a few months, and the signs are promising. His homilies are well received, and he is zealous in the ministerial projects he leads.

Br. Kurt's preparation to serve as a minister of the Church extends further back than the schools and seminaries he attended. Elsewhere in this issue, he discusses his family and its importance to him. As he has shared, the death of his father, Max, was a pivotal event in his life – one that demanded a deeply personal form of Christian service.

That event also stands as a kind of intersection between our lives. I knew

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Br. Kurt following the ordination Mass with Bishop William Waltersheid, concelebrating priests, deacons, and altar servers.



Br. Kurt gives his first homily at the 11am Sunday Mass at Heinz Chapel on May 17.

Welcoming Faith to the Oratory

Faith Natzke Joins the Oratory as Administrative Coordinator

By Faith Natzke

This past April, Faith joined the staff of the Pittsburgh Oratory as our new Administrative Coordinator. In this role, she is often the first person to welcome visitors to the Oratory, answer the phone, and assist with the many administrative tasks that support the Oratorians and the ministries entrusted to them.

I grew up in a tiny town in southern Michigan. When I say tiny, I mean tiny – we're talking one blinking stoplight! I attended a Catholic elementary school and later the public high school, where I graduated with only 48 other students.

I have two older siblings, a brother and a sister. They are both married, and my sister has a daughter who's just over a year old. They live in Nashville, so there's a lot of FaceTime! Outside of my immediate family, I come from a big family. My mom is one of ten children, so I grew up surrounded by cousins on our family farm – playing yard games, swimming in the lake, sledding, and making up elaborate worlds in the woods. We also grew up making maple syrup, since my parents are maple syrup farmers. It was a lot of work, but a lot of fun, and it taught me

the importance of balancing hard work with enjoying life.

I attended Bowling Green State University in Ohio, where I studied Business with a specialization in marketing and entrepreneurship. During college I also studied abroad at EM Strasbourg in France, which gave me the opportunity to visit 15 countries and 33 cities. Travel has probably shaped me more than any other experience. My parents instilled that love of travel in me through family road trips across the United States, and I've continued it ever since. One of my

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Cor ad Cor: The Heart of Campus Ministry

The Oratory's Vision for Evangelization

By Hannah Naylor

If you have spent any time at the Pittsburgh Oratory, you have almost certainly encountered the phrase *Cor ad Cor*. Perhaps you noticed it on our crest affixed on the chapel wall, or you have seen the crest decorating our flyers, or maybe you spot the large car magnets driving through the seemingly never-ending construction of North Oakland. However you come across it, one thing is evident: *Cor ad Cor*, heart to heart, occupies a cherished place in the mission of the Oratory.

This phrase comes from the episcopal motto of Cardinal John Henry Newman adopted from another Oratorian Saint, St. Francis de Sales: *Cor ad Cor loquitur* – “heart speaks to heart”. Newman chose these words because he believed that logical arguments alone would fail in sharing the Gospel – that true religious conversion would come about through personal influence of one life upon another, through friendship and prayer; that it is the witness of one heart speaking to the heart of another that has the ability to share the truth of the Gospel effectively. Truth is not merely explained in words and apologetics, it is encountered in charity. As the Psalmist writes, “Kindness and truth shall meet.”

This motto shapes our ministry efforts here at the Oratory. We wish not to shelter students within the comfortable walls of the Newman Center. Rather, we encourage them to step confidently into their classrooms, residence halls, clubs, and friendships that make up the ordinary fabric of university life. We trust that they will not abandon their faith, nor fear living in the world, but live and grow in missionary zeal for souls – that they are to be salt of the earth, a beacon of light in the darkness, life in the culture of death. St. Paul addresses this beautifully in his first letter to the Thessalonians: “With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the Gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us.” Evangelization has always required more than just correct answers. It asks for genuine affection, patient friendship, and a heart that time and time again turns to Christ in prayer and humility.

Such a life of evangelization begins with a profound conviction: that every human person has been loved into existence by God, created for communion with Him, and destined for eternal life. Yet many of those around us have never heard this truth, or have forgotten it altogether. Some wander beneath the weight of sin without recognizing the wounds it inflicts upon the soul. If we truly believe that heaven is real, and that our friends are made for it, how could we remain indifferent? Love itself urges us to speak – not as strangers or street preachers delivering speeches, but as one heart speaking to another.

This conviction that every person loved into existence has been created for an eternal destiny in heaven cannot be manufactured by enthusiasm or sustained through sheer determination. It is born of grace from God and nourished in prayer. As we receive the



Bishop Mark Eckman joined us for Newman Night in October 2025.

Body of Christ and return daily to Him in prayer, we are gradually transformed into what we consume. We begin, however imperfectly, to love what He loves, to desire what He desires, and to pray with Him that “all may be one, just as the Father and the Son are one.”

This is the friendship with Christ to which we hope to invite every student who comes through the doors of the Newman Center. It is not a relationship intended merely for the four undergraduate years they call this Newman Center home, but one that endures for a lifetime. We hope they discover that holiness is not reserved for an exceptional few, but is the primary vocation of every Christian. We hope they come to believe that sanctity is possible, and that a life centered entirely upon Christ is not one of diminished happiness but of abundant joy.

Truth is not merely explained in words and apologetics; it is encountered in charity.

Above all, we hope they learn to spend time before the Blessed Sacrament, where every good fruit begins. And that they will do so all the way to heaven. There, heart speaks

to Heart. There, Christ calls each of us by name – beloved son, beloved daughter, beloved friend – and there He entrusts the same commission He gave to His first disciples: to go into all the world and proclaim the Good News. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”

The same invitation is extended to you. Come and sit before the Blessed Sacrament. Come to know the Lord who calls you by name. Allow Him to shape your heart until it resembles His own, your will until it seeks what He seeks, and your life until it reflects His love. Then, having encountered Christ *cor ad cor*, heart speaking to heart, go into the world with confidence. Be a light for those who walk in darkness, a hand extended to the fallen, a faithful friend to those searching for hope. Let your life become a witness that draws other hearts to His. This is the vocation of every Christian. This is the invitation of the Oratory. And, by the grace of God, this is the path to becoming a saint.



Sunday 11am Mass in Heinz Chapel.



The 2026 Undergraduate Barn Dance.



November Father's House Retreat at Rednal.



The Spring Women's Retreat at Rednal.



The Super Bowl Party at the Newman Center.



At the CMU Fall Retreat at Rednal.

Twenty Years of FOCUS at the Oratory

A Partnership Forming Students for Mission

By Fr. Peter Gruber, C.O.

In 2006, the first team of FOCUS missionaries arrived at the Pittsburgh Oratory to serve students at the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University. Led by Meghan McCartney, the team inaugurated a partnership that has shaped Catholic campus ministry in Oakland for twenty years.

Pitt had, in fact, figured in the founders’ early conversations about bringing a Catholic model of discipleship to secular universities. Founded in 1998, FOCUS – Fellowship of Catholic University Students – sends recent college graduates to university campuses, where they lead Bible studies and form students to accompany others in faith, a process known as “spiritual multiplication.”

The partnership between FOCUS and the Pittsburgh Oratory makes profound sense. Both recognize that lasting conversion ordinarily occurs through friendship, patient accompaniment, and the influence of one life upon another.

Programs alone do not bring people to Christ; persons do.

St. Philip Neri made such personal influence central to the Oratorian vocation. Rather than seeking merely to move great crowds for a moment, he worked patiently with individuals and won hearts for Christ. We might say that the Oratorian ordinarily fishes with a line rather than a net – one person, one friendship, and one soul at a time.

FOCUS extended this longstanding Oratorian work across the universities. The Oratory provided a stable sacramental and communal home, while the missionaries invited students into the Newman Center and formed them to take responsibility for the Church’s

mission. The first team served all three campuses. In 2012, a second team was added to serve CMU specifically. Now, twenty years after FOCUS arrived, the partnership continues to flourish: this year, more than 500 students participated in Bible studies at Pitt, CMU, and Chatham.

I experienced its fruits firsthand when I arrived as a freshman in 2007. The FOCUS missionaries quickly helped make the Newman Center my spiritual home. That fall’s “Catholic Rush Week” – advertised with the slogan “Why go Greek when you can go Latin?” – introduced me to students who would become lasting friends. Before long, I had joined a Bible study and entered discipleship.

During Christmas break of my freshman year, I traveled with thirty Newman Center students to a FOCUS conference in Grapevine, Texas. A talk by Fr. Mark DeBattista gave me an insight that would shape my vocational discernment: every Christian man is called to fatherhood, whether in family life or the priesthood. Instead of being paralyzed by uncertainty, I could concentrate on becoming the spiritual father God was calling me to be.

I returned to Pittsburgh with a stronger desire to spread the Gospel and with the realization that I was not alone: thousands of other students were also striving to make the Catholic faith a lived reality. Yet the inspiration of that great gathering bore fruit through individual friendships back on campus.

Two missionaries influenced me in particular. Brian O’Malley once challenged me to keep my commitment to a holy hour when I would rather have remained socializing with friends. That small sacrifice helped establish a lifelong priority: time with Our Lord in Eucharistic adoration must come first.

Jack Berard accompanied me in a different but equally important way.



Representing Pitt and CMU at the 2024 FOCUS SEEK Conference in St. Louis.

Apart from any formal program, he would have dinner with me on Wednesday evenings. He simply recognized that I needed the friendship and chose to invest his time in me. I have never forgotten it.

The great gathering and the quiet Wednesday dinner served the same mission: helping a student respond faithfully to Christ.

There is something providential in this history. FOCUS began at Benedictine College, spread across the country, and eventually arrived at the campus envisioned for it years earlier. Twenty years later, we give thanks for the missionaries who have served here,

the students who have answered their invitation, and the vocations, marriages, friendships, and works of apostolic service that have followed. The mission remains what it was at the beginning: to form students who know Christ, live their Catholic faith, and help others become His disciples.



Students at SEEK 2026 in Columbus, Ohio.



Curtis Martin speaks to our students during the Spring of 2015.



Jim and Tim’s Bible study in the Newman Center Library in September 2016.

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Together, we form saints. Together, we build a culture of faith. Together, we transform the world for Christ.

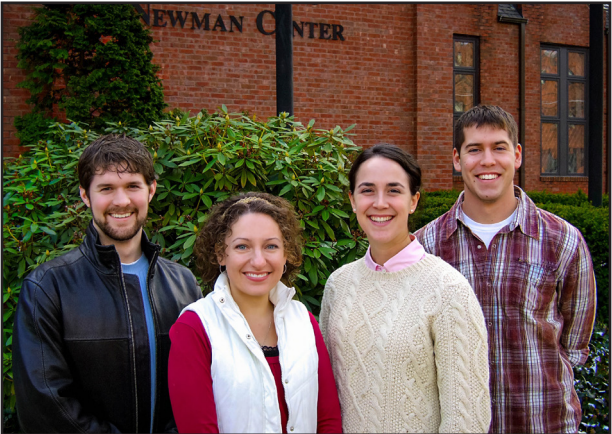
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The First Team: 2006–2007



First FOCUS Team for Pitt and CMU: Jared Smyth, Katherine Dumais, Meghan McCartney, Chad Kelsch.

Today’s Teams: 2026–2027



Pitt FOCUS: Dan and Julia Tully, Kyleigh Keane, Ava Clare Neugebauer, Maddie Fischahs, Maxwell Schwabe, Lily Bernero (not pictured).



CMU FOCUS: Ian McCarron, Cecilia Plumer, Chesie Fructuoso, James Lutz.

“The Lord Kept Calling Me Back”

A Conversation with Br. Kurt

Br. Kurt Kessler, C.O. sits down with Fr. Peter for an interview.

What was your faith like growing up?

I was blessed to grow up in a lovely Catholic family with my parents and two siblings in Ephrata, PA. My father and grandparents took special care that the faith was not just something we practiced on Sundays, but something woven into our daily life. We had a lot of fun celebrating the liturgical seasons: dyeing Easter eggs, making Fat Tuesday Fastnachts, writing letters to St. Nicholas, and having Confirmation saint parties. One of my fondest memories was dressing up as one of the Three Kings on Epiphany and processing to the Nativity scene to bestow our gifts upon Christ.

My faith was further encouraged as I attended Our Mother of Perpetual Help School in Ephrata. At home, we learned many virtues through hard work, gardening, and cutting our large yard with old manual lawn mowers. Through the example of my parents, I saw that Catholicism was not just a belief system, but a way of living and breathing.

When did you first begin discerning the priesthood?

The thought of the priesthood first came to me late in high school as I was going into my senior year. However, I was more concerned with athletics, academics, and relationships. When I went to Pitt, I drifted further away from the faith and into the college culture.

The pivotal moment came during my second semester, when a large group of seminarians from Mount St. Mary’s visited campus. Seeing joyful, normal young men in cassocks living for something greater truly shocked me. It reminded me of a call I had once heard and was now trying to avoid. This kick-started my return to becoming a practicing

Catholic and an active participant in the Catholic Newman Club at the Oratory.

My sophomore year was the most challenging time of my life, as my father was diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer. I left school and went home to take care of my dad until his passing. After the deaths of my father, grandfather, and godmother, all within the span of a year, I began inquiring about joining the Oratory.

The witness of my parents and grandparents showed me everything I needed to know about self-sacrificial love. When I fully grasped that my loved ones had sacrificed their lives for me, I knew I was being invited to give my life in return.

What drew you to the Oratory, and how did you come to recognize it as your vocation?

During my sophomore year, I joined one of the Newman Club houses, the Fratican, which played a crucial role in my beginning at the Oratory. Being a part of the Fratican surrounded me with young men also pursuing Our Lord and drew me more and more to the Oratory. Soon I began to get to know the Oratory Fathers quite well. I not only started to attend Newman events but also daily Mass, regular confession, and spiritual direction.

After the passing of my loved ones, the Oratorian priests truly became fathers to me, and the Oratory became a place of stability and peace. The life of St. Philip became such a beacon of joy in my time of sorrow. The fraternity, prayer life, and joy of the community drew me ever deeper into a relationship with Christ.

Eventually, I moved into the Oratory as a guest during my senior year at Pitt. Living the rhythm of community prayer, Mass, meals, and campus ministry clarified what had been growing in my heart. The Lord was inviting me not just to the priesthood, but to this family – the family of St. Philip Neri.



Kurt Kessler with Br. Thomas Skamai at Br. Thomas’s Diaconate Ordination in 2021.

What has your experience at Mount St. Mary’s been like, and how has it shaped your priestly formation?

Founded in 1808 by the French missionary priest Father John Dubois, the Mount is surrounded by more than 200 years of Catholic tradition and devotion. Overlooking rolling hills and peaceful valleys, the campus is home to the serene National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, one of my favorite places to pray. We also take pride in Blessed Stanley Rother, the first martyr born in the United States and the first U.S.-born priest to be beatified, who graduated from our seminary.

Mount St. Mary’s has given me the space to deepen my prayer life and to grow in interior freedom. It truly shapes generations of faithful priests.

Are there any experiences that stand out from your years at the Oratory?

Many of the greatest moments of my life have occurred because of the Pittsburgh Oratory. From retreats at Rednal and pilgrimages to Lourdes to missions at the Jamaican Oratory, the Lord has made my life an exciting adventure.

One of the most memorable moments was attending St. John Henry Newman’s canonization in St. Peter’s Square in Rome during the first year of my novitiate. From there, traveling around Italy with my Oratorian community and visiting all the holy sites associated with St. Philip’s life was a real treat. The Catacombs of San Sebastiano, the Seven Church Walk of Rome, and Gaeta all made St. Philip’s conversion truly come to life. The joy of St. Philip’s life is real, and it is contagious.

What is something you have come to appreciate about the priesthood?

I have come to appreciate that the priesthood is fundamentally about fatherhood. It is about giving your life quietly, consistently, and faithfully, often in hidden ways.

From the Oratory, I have learned the importance of joy and fraternity in priestly life. St. Philip Neri understood that holiness grows in community. The Oratory’s rhythm of common prayer, shared meals, and apostolic freedom creates priests who are both grounded and joyful. Priesthood is not about personal achievement; it is about belonging first to Christ, and then to His people.

May Crowning on Mary’s Mountain

Seminarians Honor Our Lady at Mount St. Mary’s

By Br. Kurt Kessler, C.O.

A beautiful aspect of being formed at Mount St. Mary’s in Emmitsburg, Maryland is the Marian devotion. No priest formed there leaves without an intense devotion to our Blessed Mother. Here Br. Kurt reflects on his final May Crowning at the Mount.

One of the biggest highlights of my time at Mount St. Mary’s University was participating in the annual May Crowning celebration at the National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes. The beautiful day brought together



Br. Kurt sings in the choir for the annual May Crowning.

seminarians, clergy, religious, and faithful pilgrims alike to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary through prayer, sacred music, and a cherished tradition that has been observed for generations.

As a member of the Seminary Schola, I had the privilege of singing for the outdoor Grotto Mass. Participating in the Sacred Liturgies at the Lourdes Grotto is always an awe-inspiring experience as it is perfectly nestled on a beautiful mountainside ravine. Surrounded by the beauty of creation and the devotion of the faithful, it was surreal to hear our chants and hymns echoed across the hillside, elevating our hearts toward God. It is something I will never forget.

Following Mass, the congregation gathered for a procession to the university’s iconic 25-foot gold-leafed Mary Statue. Carrying the floral crown prepared for the occasion, we processed together while singing Marian hymns.

The sight of hundreds of faithful making their way through the Grotto in prayerful song was incredibly inspiring. For me, the procession was a powerful witness to the enduring love Christians have for Our Lady and her maternal care for the Church.

Upon arriving at the statue, one of the most memorable traditions of the day took place. Each year, a giant crane is used to lift the floral crown to the top of the 100-foot bell tower, where it is carefully placed upon Mary’s head. Watching the crown ascend against the bright blue sky was a memorable sight and a vivid symbol of the honor given to the Mother of God during the month of May.

The celebration offered a meaningful opportunity to reflect on Mary’s example of faith and humility. As I prepare for my priestly ordination, I remain grateful for experiences such as this that deepen my devotion and



heighten my love for Almighty God and His children. The May Crowning at Mount St. Mary’s was not only a beautiful tradition, but also a reminder that Our Lady continually leads us closer to her Son through prayer, worship, and faithful discipleship.

News from our Fathers and Brothers in Formation

Fr. Reed Nears Completion of His Doctorate

By Fr. Reed Frey, C.O.

Many friends of the Oratory have been hearing about my education since 2014, when I moved into the Oratory as a sophomore in college, and are probably wondering when I am going to wrap things up. I promise that the end is near! I have now completed all requirements for the PhD at the University of Notre Dame except the dissertation, on which I am now hard at work. My dissertation presently has the largely uninspiring, but descriptively accurate, title of “A Christian Vision of Being and the Human Person in the Mature Works of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) in Its German Context.” My main task is to lay out the thought of Sr. Benedicta in her late works in philosophy, theology, and spirituality. I hope to interpret this teaching in the context of debates which were occurring at the time and then show the relevance of her thought in two fields in contemporary theology, namely the field called “ontology” (which studies being and the most basic structures of reality) and anthropology (which studies the human person).

For this stage of my education, I am currently living in Germany and writing my dissertation as a Visiting Researcher at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (“University of Munich”). The resources here are tremendous, and the Bavarian State Library, a few steps from my office at the University, is the largest library in Germany. It is also one of the world’s great research libraries, especially in philosophy. Having collected materials since 1558, it has all of the most important (and not-so-important!) materials for my research. I am living with the Dominican Friars at the Theatinerkirche, and they have been wonderfully hospitable, and living in a German-speaking

community in complete immersion will be a significant asset on my long path to German fluency.

I will be back to the Oratory in time for Christmas Mass, and will hopefully finish the PhD in 2027. I look forward to returning to my beloved community, family, and city in short order!



Fr. Reed Frey, C.O.

Fr. Thomas Begins Canon Law Studies

By Fr. Thomas Skamai, C.O.

Some time ago, Fr. Michael asked me to consider studying canon law. After allowing the initial shock to wear off, I gave it some serious thought and prayer, and agreed that it would be good to pursue a Licentiate in Canon Law.

Catholic University of America offers an in-person, full-time summer program, and then online and part-time during the school year. Thus, I went south for the summer, spending June and July in Washington, D.C.

A good friend of mine from seminary is a priest of the Archdiocese of Washington, and was kind enough to fix up the guest bedroom in his rectory so that I had a place to stay. It was fun to get a taste of parish life for a few weeks, to reconnect with some old friends in the area, and to make a few new friends as well.

Our classes had a lot packed into the first eight weeks of the program – from the process of selecting bishops to the

history and development of diocesan synods to essential laws of marriage, and much more in between. While some content was the stereotypical, boring canon law material that will put you to sleep, other content was – part of me hates to admit this – exhilarating. It was a good summer, but I am grateful to be back in Pittsburgh until I return next June for round two!



Fr. Thomas Skamai, C.O.

Br. Kurt Finishing Seminary at Mount St. Mary’s

By Br. Kurt Kessler, C.O.

After I finish my studies at Mount St. Mary’s this fall semester, I will be ordained to the priesthood in May! As a deacon at the Oratory, I have been able to serve my community to the fullest. It has felt like coming home, for sure. I have been in school almost my entire life, so finally stepping into the real world has been fun! The Lord has brought me through so that I will be prepared to serve His people with sincerity of heart. Looking back, I can see His providence at work through every stage of my journey, even in the moments that were difficult or uncertain. I look forward to giving myself fully to that service in the priesthood.

This summer, I have been very busy in all of our different ministries, but most especially in our sacred liturgies and with Newman Center events. The Newman Center gave me so much joy during my difficult college years, becoming a place where I encountered Christ, deepened my faith, and discovered my vocation. I have been so happy to partake in that same mission. It has been a tremendous blessing to accompany students as they ask questions, grow in their relationship with the Lord, and discover the beauty of the Catholic faith. I hope to be able to spread the peace of Christ to our college students for years to come.



Br. Kurt Kessler, C.O.

Br. Matthew Begins Seminary in Toronto

By Br. Matthew Grzybowski, C.O.

After four semesters at Franciscan University in Steubenville, I have completed the “discipleship” stage and can now advance to the “configuration” stage of priestly formation. This marks the completion of my philosophy studies and the beginning of theology proper.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Franciscan and was grateful to remain close to the community while commuting to class each week. Although I will not miss the drive, I received an outstanding philosophy education and several upper-level theology courses from professors such as Dr. Michael Waldstein and Dr. John Bergsma. I am deeply grateful to all my professors for their dedication to my formation.

This September, I will continue my formation in Toronto, Canada, beginning a three-year theology program at St. Philip’s Seminary under the care of the Toronto Oratory of St. Philip Neri. The seminary brings together Oratorian seminarians from around the world, Norbertines from

St. Michael’s Abbey in California, and local seminarians. After visiting Toronto this past February, Fr. Michael and I were confident it was the right next step, and the community agreed to move forward. Although I will miss Pittsburgh, I look forward to this new chapter and am grateful to be formed by priests who share our patron, St. Philip Neri.



Br. Matthew Grzybowski, C.O.

Br. John Enters the Novitiate

By Br. John Crawshaw

I recently started my Oratory formation after beginning my novitiate on May 26 (Saint Philip’s Day!).

Most of my time has been devoted to reading Oratory-specific works as well as the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It has been truly wonderful learning about the many wise teachings that Saint Philip, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, imparted to his congregation, as well as discovering more deeply the countless treasures that our Lord has bestowed upon His Church.

When I am not caught up in this reading, I have been busy with many projects around the Oratory, including painting, power washing, and moving heavy things all over the place. These simple tasks have been a good reminder that formation involves not only study, but also serving the community in ordinary ways.

Above all, however, the best part of my formation is the time dedicated to prayer, which serves as the foundation for everything else that I am doing.

God willing, I will begin my philosophical and theological studies next year. Until then, I will continue my formation in the Oratorian way of life. This summer has truly been a blessing, and I am so grateful for the time I have been able to spend in prayer, study, fraternity, and the hidden work of community life. I look forward with great hope to all that the Lord has in store for the rest of my novitiate.



Br. John Crawshaw

Magnifying the Lord at Rednal

The Oratory's Historic Retreat House Is Renewed

By Fr. Peter Gruber, C.O.

Rednal looks very different this summer. Portions of the familiar exterior have disappeared behind weatherproofing, new siding, construction materials, and the steady work of contractors. Inside, the kitchen has been dismantled while new heating and air-conditioning systems are installed. By the time alumni and young adults return for the Barn Dance on October 17, the retreat house should be renewed from roof to kitchen.

Rednal takes its name from the Birmingham Oratory's country house, where St. John Henry Newman and his community found prayer, rest, and fraternity away from the city. Pittsburgh's Rednal extends that Oratorian tradition to university students.

For generations of students and alumni, Rednal has been a place where life slows down enough to hear the Lord. Set amid the hills outside Ligonier, it offers what is difficult to find in university life: silence, natural beauty, prayer, and deep Christian friendship. Each year, its retreats, picnics, and Barn Dances give students time before the Blessed Sacrament, help them discern God's will, and form friendships around the kitchen table. Alumni return to reconnect with the community that formed them and welcome a new generation.

Amanda, when she was a FOCUS missionary at Pitt, described what happened during a retreat in a simple sentence: "Students shared their hearts with each other for the first time."



Rednal as it was when purchased by the Oratory in 1967.



Rednal in the midst of the exterior renovations.

Despite being more connected than ever, students often experience profound loneliness. Screens and earbuds can impede genuine encounters, leaving young people unsure how to open themselves to others. In Rednal's peace and stillness, students encounter God and begin to open their hearts to Christ and to one another.

The renovations are being funded through the Magnify the Lord Capital Campaign. After supporting major projects at the Oratory and Newman Center, the campaign has now turned to Rednal, its final major building renewal project.

The house has been improved and expanded many times during the past thirty-five years, but the work was generally completed piecemeal as particular needs arose. Rednal has never undergone a comprehensive renovation on this scale. Aging windows and mechanical systems had become increasingly difficult to maintain, and the absence of air conditioning was always felt during summer and early fall retreats.

The transformation is visible from the moment one approaches the house. The old exterior siding has been completely replaced with high-quality Everlast siding. A color close to the familiar shade was chosen, preserving Rednal's recognizable appearance while providing a far more durable exterior.

A new metal roof, intended to last as long as a century, has also been installed. All the windows have been replaced. Together, the roof, siding, and windows will protect the house from the mountain weather while improving its energy efficiency.

Inside, new heating and an entirely new air-conditioning system are being installed, along with

electrical improvements. These systems will make the house more comfortable and dependable throughout the year, especially during the warmer months when retreats and other gatherings previously had to contend with the heat.

The new kitchen is more than a practical improvement. Meals sustain retreats, but conversations during preparation and cleanup often become as important as the scheduled talks. Around the kitchen table, students linger, friendships deepen, and the graces of a retreat enter ordinary life.

Altogether, the Magnify the Lord campaign is providing \$515,000 for these renovations. This capital investment complements the annual support provided through the Rednal Benefit, which meets the continuing expenses required to keep the retreat house open, supplied, and ready to receive students.

For now, construction dumpsters remain outside and work continues inside. Yet the renewed Rednal is already emerging. The project preserves the character of a beloved house while ensuring that it can carry out its mission reliably for decades.

In Rednal's stillness, students encounter God and begin to open their hearts to Christ and to one another.

Work is scheduled to be completed in time for the Alumni and Young Adult Barn Dance on October 17. The celebration will be a fitting reopening: alumni and young adults returning to a beloved house renewed for the prayer, friendship, and encounters with Christ that take place there.

None of this would be possible without the benefactors whose pledges to Magnify the Lord are becoming visible throughout the house, or those whose annual support of the Rednal Benefit sustains its daily ministry. Thanks to their generosity, Rednal is being prepared for another generation. Stronger and more welcoming, yet unchanged in its essential character, it remains a place to rest with God, grow in friendship, and learn to magnify the Lord.



The renewed exterior, with its new roof, siding, and windows.



A Campaign for the Oratory

MAGNIFY THE LORD

CAMPAIGN ROADMAP

Thanks to your generosity, the *Magnify the Lord* Campaign continues to strengthen the Oratory's worship, facilities, and campus ministry.

SUMMER 2024

✓

COMPLETED

- ✓ Full-time Campus Minister
- ✓ Two Pitt FOCUS Missionaries
- ✓ Director of Sacred Music
- ✓ Chapel improvements
- ✓ New priest vestments
- ✓ Public restrooms
- ✓ Front security doors

WINTER 2025

✓

COMPLETED

- ✓ Choir loft construction
- ✓ Fritts Opus 52 organ installed
- ✓ Student Center renovation

SUMMER 2025–WINTER 2026

✓

COMPLETED

- ✓ New roof
- ✓ New windows
- ✓ Sacristy renovation
- ✓ Chapel lighting improvements

SUMMER 2026

CURRENTLY UNDERWAY

REDNAL RETREAT HOUSE

- ✓ New roof & siding
- ✓ Electrical upgrades
- ✓ New HVAC system
- ✓ Kitchen renovation

NEXT GOAL

★

NEXT GOAL

CHATHAM CAMPUS MINISTRY

TWO FOCUS MISSIONARIES

for Chatham University

YOUR GENEROSITY MAKES THIS MISSION POSSIBLE.

A Family Formed in Eucharistic Adoration

An Interview with Sam and Mary Rothstein

Sam and Mary Rothstein have been coming to the Oratory for Adoration and Mass for the past few years with their children. Mary serves as overnight coordinator for the Perpetual Adoration Committee. Here, Fr. Thomas sits down with them both for an interview.

Sam and Mary, thank you for taking the time for this interview and for your constant support of Eucharistic Adoration at the Oratory. Mary, how were you first introduced to Eucharistic Adoration?

I definitely can’t take the credit for finding Eucharistic Adoration, rather it was my Beloved who found me. I wasn’t exposed to daily adoration growing up. My parish had the Forty Hours devotion and I have memories of participating in benediction, but that was the extent of my knowledge of adoration.

I came across an Oratory bulletin and noticed “open hours” for adoration. I felt a tug on my heart to take the Saturday 2pm hour. I was too busy and ignored this “nudge” but this pattern repeated week after week. He wanted me... just for one hour... but I kept pushing Him aside.

After weeks of internally saying “no” and making up a million excuses, I finally said “yes” and took the Saturday 2pm hour.

To be honest I thought I was going to jump out of my skin with how quiet the chapel was. I was used to perpetual noise from kids, music, and the city. I felt naked sitting in such stillness.

Eventually, I began to look forward to my weekly hour. Then another nudge came. Seriously, a daily holy hour for the priesthood? Never. This nudge to pray for the priesthood didn’t go away either. I felt called to join a group that committed to praying a daily holy hour for the priesthood and I one day “jumped off the cliff.” I had a job, a young family, friends, but one day I just made the commitment.

Jesus was calling me toward Himself, patiently and gently, until finally I said yes. He is calling you into His love,

too. In the wise words of Saint Mother Teresa, “If you’re too busy to pray, you’re too busy.” My choice to give an hour of my day to Christ would change my family forever.

Mary, what have you learned over the years about helping children enter into adoration of the Blessed Sacrament? Do you have any advice for other parents in this regard?

Like anything we teach our kids, you have to first model it yourself. If you become a rock of prayer through the Eucharist, and bring that peace, joy, strength, and love into your homes, it will flow through your children and be something their hearts will desire too.

*“Adoration is our lifeline.”
—Mary Rothstein*

Our kids were all at different ages when we introduced them to adoration. Like us, they eventually, naturally grew to desire daily time in front of the Eucharist. This time and silence before our Creator has helped our kids to “hear” what God is asking of them. As one of our kids says, “The second greatest thing you can do is go to adoration; the first is go to Mass.”

Sam, it was a joy to see you get baptized at the Easter Vigil last year. Did Adoration play any part in helping you make the decision to enter the Church?

Eucharistic Adoration played a central part in helping me grow to know and love Christ’s Church. In many ways, my journey to Christ began in the Oratory chapel while I was still a practicing Conservative Jew. I started by subbing an hour here or there for my wife, and I found that the silence, the peace of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, was something I deeply craved.

Silent prayer and contemplation of the Almighty had been part of my

religious life in my youth, before graduate school, marriage, and raising a family. In adoration, I realized how much I had missed that stillness. I began taking on more hours, seeking out that quiet, and allowing it to reveal what was really going on in my heart.

Over time, adoration helped me come to know myself more honestly, and to recognize how much I wanted to be fully and formally following Jesus. My Baptism at the Easter Vigil last year was, in many ways, the outward sign of a commitment and love that had already been growing in me through Eucharistic Adoration.

Sam and Mary, how has Eucharistic Adoration impacted you and your family?

Eucharistic Adoration has transformed our relationship with Christ. Christ jumped off the page and was no longer simply words we heard at Mass or read in the Bible, nor just a set of external motions we went through week after week. He revealed His infinite love, consoled us, rejoiced with us and in turn, slowly, has reshaped our hearts so we could better be Christ for others.

Marriage and family life are beautiful, but also messy. Moments of exhaustion

and misunderstandings. Adoration is our lifeline. It opens our eyes to our shortcomings, moves us to turn towards Him for help, and fills us with courage and strength to change and grow. More than once, in silence we have been gifted the perfect answer to the problem we are struggling with, even if it’s simply to get out of the way (and let God act).

Sam and Mary, do you have any advice or words of wisdom for someone who is thinking about adding Eucharistic Adoration to their spiritual practices?

Our advice is simple: Go. Commit to an hour or more each week. Keep going when it’s inconvenient, distracting, boring, imperfect or dry. Bring Him your heart, sit in silence, and let Him do the rest.

Eucharistic Adoration is essential. During our holy hours, we learn who God created us to be. The grace from your hour can also be offered for your family, priests, vocations, the sick, the dying, those who have lost their faith... the list is endless. One of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves, our families, and the world is time spent loving Jesus in the Eucharist.



SPEND AN HOUR WITH

Him

Eucharistic Adoration is the heart of our Oratory. He is always here, waiting for you.



SIGN UP FOR A HOLY HOUR at the Oratory

COME • ADORE • BE TRANSFORMED

Welcoming Faith to the Oratory

Continued from page 1

favorite experiences was living for a time in Catania, Sicily, where I loved attending Mass despite not speaking Italian. It reminded me that worship isn’t about what I “get out of it,” but simply about loving the Lord.

Although I just joined the Oratory as an employee, I’ve actually been around for several years. My best friend from Bowling Green, Lucia Boulous, joined FOCUS after college and was assigned to Carnegie Mellon, so I often visited her in Pittsburgh. When I was looking for a job, I always wanted to find a place where I can make a real difference in people’s lives. The bonus is when I can do that in a Catholic setting. As a lifelong Catholic, serving the Church has always been important to me.

Looking back, it’s amazing to see how God has prepared me for this

role. Over the past few years I’ve owned an online business, taught high school English, served as a high school librarian, worked as an admissions counselor at Seton Hill University, and now have the privilege of serving here at the Oratory. My background in communications, along with my experience working with high school and college students, has been a wonderful preparation.

One of the things I love most about the Oratory is perpetual Adoration. It’s incredible to see how many people come here simply to spend time with Our Lord. I’m also looking forward to meeting people and chatting with them in the lobby. When I was a librarian, my favorite part of the day was getting to know students, and I’m excited to have that same opportunity here.

My Catholic faith has shaped every part of my life. I grew up Catholic, but in college I truly said “yes” to Jesus, and my life has never been the same. There is nothing that compares to the love, peace, and joy that a life lived for Christ brings. That relationship continues to shape my work, my friendships, and my hopes for the future.

St. Joan of Arc has been a constant inspiration ever since I chose her as my Confirmation saint. I also love the Song of Songs for its beautiful poetry and for the reminder that our lives are ultimately part of God’s love story with us. Since my grandmother passed away in 2024, I’ve begun praying the Rosary frequently – usually during my drive to work – inspired by her deep faith and confidence in the power of prayer.

When people walk through the doors of the Oratory, I hope they experience

the joy that God has to offer, whether that’s through a friendly conversation, the Mass, or time spent in Adoration.

Outside of work, I’m a hobby gal through and through! I love reading, writing, hiking, swimming, pickleball, traveling, puzzles, board games, and spending time with the people I love.

One thing people might be surprised to learn is that I’m currently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Writing Popular Fiction – a fancy way to say I’m a writer! Right now I’m working on the third draft of a treasure-hunt romance.

As for some fun facts: I’m a tea drinker (my favorite is a chai latte with almond milk), Noodlehead is my favorite Pittsburgh restaurant and, thanks to my sports-loving boyfriend, I’ve become a fan of cheering on the Steelers, Pirates, and Penguins in person.

Br. Kurt Ordained a Deacon

Continued from page 1

Br. Kurt before his father’s illness became a crisis, but I came to know him far better as he considered leaving school to care for his father. When Max died, we Oratorians attended his funeral, where I first encountered Kurt’s close-knit family.

My earliest memories of Kurt were formed during this time. I remember with admiration the courage and cheerfulness he displayed amid that sad loss. He never seemed frustrated or resentful about the great sacrifices his father’s illness and death required of him. Instead, he seemed to give willingly.



Br. Kurt seated with family at the beginning of the ordination Mass.



Br. Kurt elevates the chalice during the doxology at his ordination Mass.

After his father’s death, Br. Kurt’s faith deepened and matured, as did his association with the Oratory. His heroic service to his father – and the grace he experienced through it – oriented him toward the ordained ministry he now undertakes.

Br. Kurt is now well on his way as a deacon. He will spend another semester at seminary this fall, and in May, Bishop Mario Avilés, C.O. will, God willing, ordain him to the priesthood. In that new office, Br. Kurt’s service to the Church will be magnified through his celebration of the Eucharist, in which the Lord, through his priests, continues to stand in the midst of his Church and serve.



Br. Kurt lies prostrate during the Litany of the Saints.

From the Newman Center to the Priesthood

Four Alumni Ordained as Diocesan Priests

By Fr. Peter Gruber, C.O.

The Diocese of Pittsburgh ordained five men to the priesthood on June 27. Remarkably, of those five new priests, three have deep ties to the Pittsburgh Oratory and its campus ministry.

Fr. Nick Wytiaz was active at the Newman Center while studying pharmacy at the University of Pittsburgh from 2007 to 2012. After seven years as a pharmacist, he entered the seminary.

Fr. Erik Pintar graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in 2016. He remained close to the Newman Center after graduation, entered the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil in 2018, and later discerned a call to the priesthood.

Fr. Matt Selzer graduated from Pitt in 2019. During his senior year, he lectured regularly at the Oratory and entered the seminary shortly after graduation. I recall our first conversation on the Cathedral of Learning lawn, where we discussed marching band and the possibility of priesthood.

A fourth alumnus, Fr. Alex Cross, Pitt '19, was ordained for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia on May 17 at the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul.

More than fifty Newman Center alumni have pursued priestly or religious vocations. Their witness reminds us that the Newman Center is not simply a place where students practice their faith during college. It is also a place where vocations are discovered and nurtured and, by God’s grace, bear fruit for the Church.



Newly ordained priests for the Diocese of Pittsburgh: Fr. Loc Tran, Fr. Erik Pintar, Fr. Brian Myler, Fr. Nick Wytiaz, Fr. Matt Selzer.

What Is the Cause of Your Joy?

A New Deacon’s Homily on the Solemnity of St. Philip Neri

By Br. Kurt Kessler, C.O.

What makes you happy?

If I had to guess, many of us would answer with something like a big bowl of ice cream or sitting on the beach with a cold margarita. Those are simple pleasures. Others might think of something more substantial: good health, success, a meaningful career, or time spent with family and friends. All of these are genuine goods – some higher than others – but they all have one thing in common: they are created goods.

The only problem is that every created good inevitably fades away. The excitement of something new quickly wears off. The pleasure passes. A wonderful vacation eventually comes to an end. Great achievements lose their shine, and the heart begins searching once again.

Sooner or later, we discover that true joy cannot be attained through any created good.

When asked, “What is real, solid joy?” St. Philip Neri answered: “Real, solid inner joy of the heart is only a gift from God.”

Joy is a gift. It is not manufactured, purchased, or achieved. It is received.

St. Philip teaches that this gift is received through three things: a good conscience, detachment from external things, and the contemplation of what is most profound.

Our Holy Father Philip understood something the world so often forgets: a person can possess everything the world has to offer and still be miserable. On

the other hand, a person can possess very little and still radiate joy.

Why?

Because joy is not the same thing as comfort. Joy runs much deeper. It comes from knowing that you are loved by God. It comes from living in friendship with Him who loves you. It comes from contemplating the Most High, who is Joy Himself.

This is why the saints were able to give themselves away completely and still remain joyful.

St. Philip also reminds us that this joy “does not actually banish grief, but rather it is the end product of that grief which stems from penance for sin and interior piety.”

Christian joy is not fake happiness. It is not pretending that everything is fine, nor is it superficial cheerfulness. Christian joy can exist with tears, in tears, and even through tears. Beneath our tears is hope. Beneath our suffering is trust. Beneath the Cross is the certainty that Christ has conquered.

St. Philip says there is only one true enemy of joy: sin.

Sin promises happiness, but it slowly steals our joy. Pride steals joy. Greed steals joy. Jealousy steals joy. Bitterness steals joy.

The humble soul, however, remains joyful because it knows that God is enough.

The saints were joyful because they were truly free: free from needing the world’s approval, free from slavery to pleasure, and free from constant

anxiety over status and success. Their treasure was in heaven.

This is why St. Philip Neri could laugh so freely, smile so easily, and radiate warmth to everyone around him. His joy flowed from holiness.

“Real, solid inner joy of the heart is only a gift from God.”
—St. Philip Neri

The world often imagines holiness as gloomy or severe. But authentic holiness produces joy – not shallow

amusement, but deep joy: the joy of a clean conscience, the joy of being forgiven, and the joy of knowing that you belong to God.

So today our beloved Philip asks each one of us: What is the cause of your joy?

Is our happiness built only upon things that fade away, or is our joy rooted in God, the One who is eternal bliss?

The world can offer pleasure, but only Christ can offer lasting joy. The world can distract the heart, but only God can satisfy it.



St. Philip Neri invites children to venerate the Madonna. Painting by Liberale Cozza, 1811.