



THE ST. ANTHONY COMPANION

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2

One Friar's Journey Through Formation



Fr. Nader Ata (back row, second from right) with college friends on the campus of The Catholic University of America, where he first heard his calling to the priesthood and to live in community with the Franciscan Friars Conventual.

It is said that the Lord works in mysterious ways and this can be especially true when it comes to religious vocations.

For Father Nader Ata, OFM Conv., who was ordained to the priesthood earlier this year, the seed was planted in a random stairwell on the campus of the Catholic University of America (CUA).

"I was headed toward a Praise and Worship Adoration event. As I was walking up the stairs to Caldwell Chapel, I saw my first

friar," recalled Fr. Nader, who grew up in East Windsor, New Jersey. "The friar was Father Brad Heckathorne. He was engaging with some students when one of them tied his cord to the chapel banister as a prank. I was waiting for Fr. Brad to start yelling, but he was a good sport. He just pointed his finger and said, 'I will get back at you, I will get back at you.'"

That positive first impression of the Franciscans stuck with Fr. Nader and, as he con-

tinued to observe them at CUA, his calling was starting to develop.

"What attracted me was the community life and witness of

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An avid marathoner, Fr. Nader finds running to be a “great way to connect to God.” It is also symbolic of the long and difficult race of formation which Fr. Nader ran and conquered.

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the friars at CUA,” said Fr. Nader. “There were three very different friars each with their own unique personality traits, yet all three of them lived together and worked together for the same cause, helping the faith life of college students to grow.”

In Fr. Nader’s sophomore year he listened intently when Friar Michael Duffy, who was the East Coast vocation director of the Franciscan Friars Conventual, at that time, spoke at Mass about vocations to religious life and the priesthood.

As he inched closer to answering God’s call, Father Nader attended a retreat where an older friar was asked, “Father, how do you know where to go?”

The friar responded, “Grow where you have been planted.

The people or place with which your faith has been most fostered is where you should go.”

It then became clear to Father Nader that his path would be with the friars.

After his sophomore year of college, Father Nader, an accomplished marathon runner, entered the order and began his formation journey, which lasted 12 years. The road, like the races he runs, was long and full of challenges.

“I worried if I made the right decision. Did I enter too soon and should I have finished my degree first,” he said. “During my formation journey I dealt with trusting the process of formation. I remember writing a long letter during my first months to my formation directors about all of

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The Franciscan Education Burse Program

Have you ever heard of the Franciscan Education Burse Program?

Originally setup to assist with costs of educating young friars studying at the Franciscans’ seminaries in Granby, Massachusetts and Rensselaer, New York, the Education Burse Fund (EBF) has evolved into an incredible way of remembering Friars, family, and loved ones who have passed on to the Glory of God.

The EBF is not an endowment for a particular College, as other schools have. As a program of the Our Lady of the Angels Province, the Burse program creates capital funds where each gift is restricted, enabling the Burse Fund to grow and produce interest.

When a Friar or loved one dies, parishioners or family can establish a burse with a promise to give \$5,000 or more, over a span of time. Gifts can

come from many different individuals and sources and when the burse is fully funded, it is completed and named.

Only the interest from the Fund can be used and solely for the education and formation of our friars completing their education.

The word Burse is a term from the Middle Ages indicating the type of bag that a traveler or pilgrim would carry. Today, it serves as vessel for holding funds to educate the next generation of Franciscan Friars.

For more information or to make a donation, contact us toll free at 844-782-6846 or email us at info@companionsofstanthony.org.



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the things they were doing wrong. I was ready to pack up my stuff and go back to CUA.

“I was counseled to slow down and trust the process. I was encouraged to go home for Thanksgiving break and spend time with family and friends. During that Thanksgiving break, all of the things I thought we were doing wrong in formation did not matter. I was ready to go back to the formation program. It is where I felt at home, but I had to learn to let go of my expectations and trust the process of formation not just then but throughout all the years.”

With his journey to the priesthood complete, Fr. Nader, who is currently an Associate Pastor at Assumption Church in Syracuse, New York, has had many proud reflections.

“The joy I have experienced following my ordination and knowing that I answered and followed through in my calling is indescribable. I entered the Franciscan Friars Conventual to be a priest, but I stayed with the community to be a friar. When I entered I had all of these lofty ideas of priesthood and saying Mass. And over time those lofty ideas disappeared in light of reality and I fell in love with being a friar first and foremost. Today, my priesthood would seem incomplete without me being a friar first.

“I often say I took the scenic route to ordination. I can now say that God was at work in every moment of my formation life, but it was difficult to see that

when I was in the thick of things. Even now, God is at work in every moment of my life. With life being so busy with Sunday Masses, funerals, weddings, and confessions, I at times have to stop and remind myself, ‘You are doing exactly what God made me to do.’”

Fr. Nader credits his parents for instilling many of the qualities which inspired his vocation and allowed him to persevere through the doubts and tough moments he endured.

“My parents taught me how to be generous not just with money, but with my time, my talents, and my presence with people,” concluded Fr. Nader, who, in addition to his running, enjoys making puzzles, cooking, listening to music and photography. “My parents taught me that life is not always easy, but you make the best of it. I was taught to know that no matter what was dealt to you, God was in charge every step of the way.”



Fr. Nader Ata (second from left) and Fr. Nick Spano (far right) following their joint Ordination Mass at Assumption Church in Syracuse, New York on May 27, 2017. The pair posed with Fr. James McCurry, OFM Conv. (far left) and Bishop Robert Cunningham of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse. (Photo courtesy of John Oles Photography)

Fidelity: The Key to Everlasting Life

By Fr. Richard-Jacob Forcier, OFM Conv.

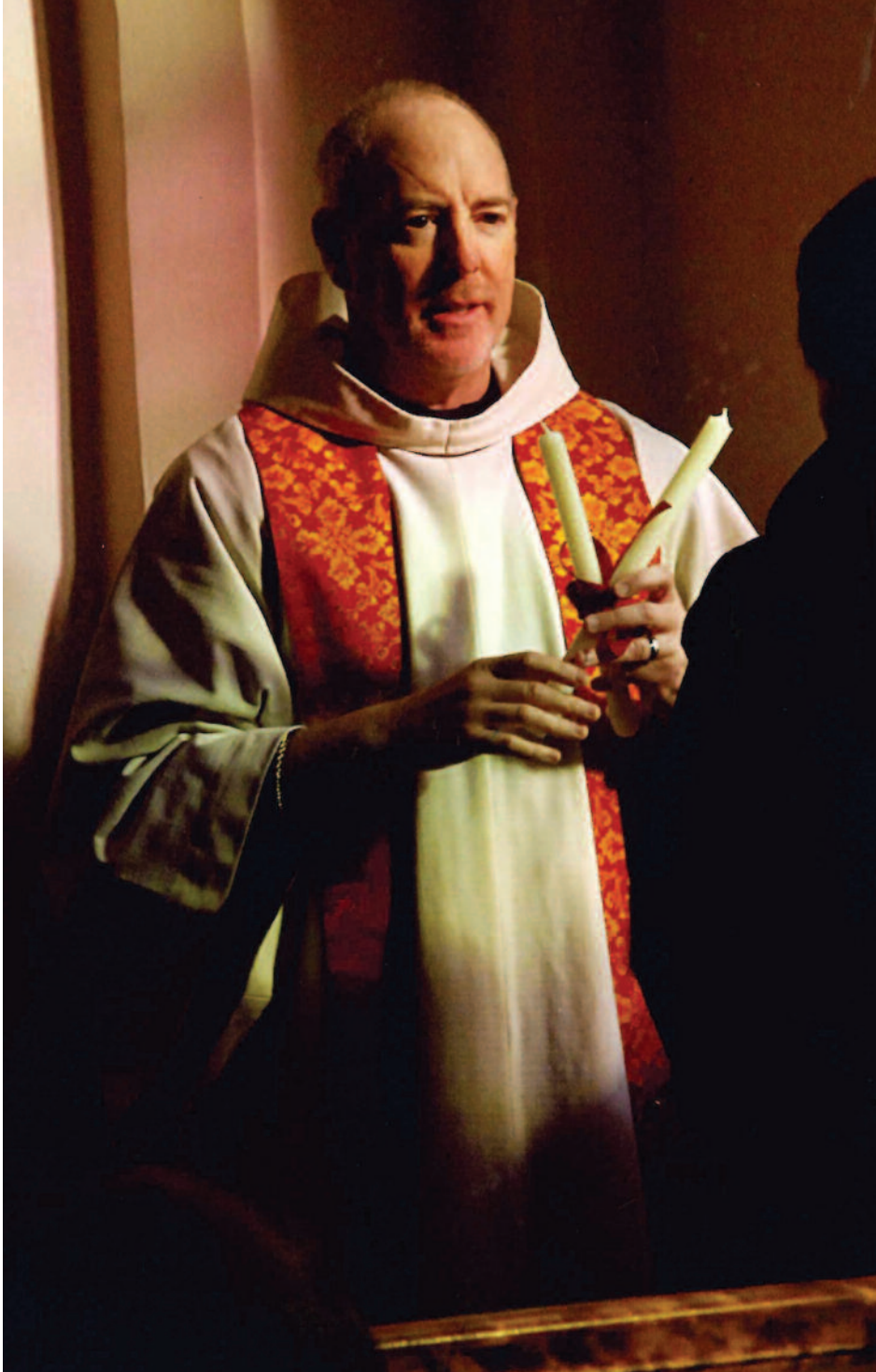
This year marks my 40th year as a professed friar. Thirteen of those years I lived as a

student, a teaching brother, and a student once again as I requested study for the priest-

hood. My ministries have ranged from teaching in our high schools, our college-seminary, and serving in parishes. These last seven years I have been doing internal ministry in our Province as Province Secretary and Spiritual Guardian of the Companions of St. Anthony.

When I think of religious profession of our vows (poverty, chastity, and obedience), the heart-of-the matter is fidelity. Jesus reminds us that once we have put our hands to the plow we should not take them away. St. Theresa of Calcutta is quoted as saying, "God does not require that we be successful; only that we be faithful." This really takes the edge off since we can only do one thing well at a time. For me, being faithful is the key.

Many times, I say at the end of a homily that God is good. I truly believe that. It must come from my French-Canadian upbringing at home and parish where often it was said, "*Il est bon de Bon Dieu.*" It is because of God's goodness to me, in offering me this vocation that I can want to remain faithful. God is always present. This was brought clear to me in a little book that I read during my Novitiate Year, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence.



Fr. Richard-Jacob in a prayerful moment, during a baptism, at St. Edward the Confessor Church, Stafford Springs, Connecticut.

Trying to find God's presence in my everyday life has assisted me in remaining faithful and not to lose hope (never give up as my brother Al reminds me in all his emails). One of the most challenging things that has occurred to me over the course of my religious life is that I have been diagnosed with recurring brain tumors (meningioma). These are non-malignant, found on the brain and not in the brain. They have caused me several dangerous seizures for which I remain medicated. These tumors have necessitated that in the space of seven years I have had three craniotomies to remove these tumors. After my last surgery, I had a course of radiation, which was preventative. I must have an MRI every six months to ascertain my continued health.

As I write this, I am scheduled for my next MRI in two days. Laying on the table and sliding into the MRI chamber I often think of Jesus in the tomb for those three days. The presence of God is with me during those agonizing minutes that don't seem to end. God is good. Jesus brought forth the new life of the Resurrection after those dark days, I have to trust that God, who has been so good to me, will not and has not abandoned me. God is good at all moments of our life.

Think back on the story of your own life experiences. Where have you experienced someone being faithful? Sitting with you while you were ill. Having that one dear friend whom you have known since childhood still be present to you now. Sometimes we even take our own faithfulness, or fidelity, for granted.

How many nights did you help your son with his homework? How many soccer games did you watch your grandchildren play regardless of the weather? How many times have you listened to the same story told to you by someone with Alzheimer's and you simply hold their hand and smile lovingly? God is there in all those moments of your faithfulness.

Although I shared with you faithfulness through the prism of my own medical condition, I think that everyone is challenged in their faithfulness in their own ways and by their own expe-

"It is because of God's goodness to me, in offering me this vocation that I can want to remain faithful"

riences and choices. In whatever comes our way, God is with every one of us. I believe it because I have felt it. I trust it. God, who has never let go of me, deserves that I be as faithful as I can.

When a friar professes his vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience into the hands of the Minister Provincial, the Minister accepts his vows with these heartfelt words: "And I, on the part of the Church, if you do these things, promise you everlasting life." With such a promise made to me forty years ago, I have even more reason to be as faithful as I am able with what God give me. God has promised you everlasting life as well. God is good.

About Friar Richard-Jacob



Fr. Richard-Jacob Forcier, OFM Conv. currently serves as the Province Secretary for the Our Lady of the Angels Province and is the Spiritual Guardian of the Companions of St. Anthony. Fr. Richard-Jacob grew up in Chicopee, Massachusetts, professed his first vows to Franciscan life in 1977, and was ordained a priest in 1986. He enjoys walking, cruises, and binge-watching The Big Bang Theory (and some of the Food Network, too).

One family's sacrifice for Saint Lucy

"If only I can see, I would believe."

Have you ever heard someone say this? God teaches us to have faith, but our human weaknesses often stretch our resolve and push us to seek more tangible proof. The problem is, however, we are often too distracted to even see the proof when it is right in front of us.

Rose Raimondi, an Italian woman born in Palermo, Sicily around 1870, was not too distracted to see. In fact, her view of God and her faith only grew stronger when she lost her vision as a young woman.

There appeared to be no medical remedies for Rose's blindness so this deeply religious woman turned to prayer and specifically to Saint Lucy, a Christian martyr who lived in Sicily, between 283 and 304 AD.

Known during her time as Lucia of Syracuse, St. Lucy was martyred during the persecution

of Christians within the Roman Empire, in 304.

Lucia was born of noble parents, but she was consecrated for pledging her virginity to God and seeking to distribute her dowry to the poor. Prior to her execution, Lucia was tortured and had her eyes gouged out. Because of this, she became known as the Patron Saint of Sight following her canonization. Her feast day is December 13th.

In her prayers to St. Lucy, Rose, who did not yet have children, made a very specific promise. If St. Lucy would help restore her sight, Rose vowed that she, her children and her children's children would never again eat flour (*a staple in nearly every facet of the Italian diet*) on St. Lucy's feast day. Rose kept up her prayers to St. Lucy faithfully and, miraculously, when she woke up on the following Dec. 13th, her sight was restored.

Rose, who immigrated to the United States after the turn of the century, made good on her promise and never again ate flour on St. Lucy's feast day.

John Bilello, Rose's great grandson, stated that the tradition remains cherished by the family.

"Each year, prior to St. Lucy's Feast Day, everyone in the family reminds each other to keep the promise of not eating flour," said Bilello. "We all make sure



to call our children and grandchildren, so that we can all help keep the promise."

St. Lucy's Feast remains a major celebration in many regions of Italy and, ironically, it is marked by the consuming of large quantities of flour, including traditional feasts of home made pasta and various Italian dishes. Scandinavian countries, where winters are long and dark, mark the feast with festivals of light.

In the United States, the Santa Lucia Festival in Omaha, Nebraska, has been celebrated since 1925. Members of the ethnic Italian community process with a statue of Saint Lucy through the streets of downtown Omaha, carrying also a first-class relic of Saint Lucy.

The story of Rose and her faith in God, through St. Lucy, teaches us that we need not always see to believe. If we believe, however, we shall certainly see.



Rose Raimondi (seated, center), pictured with two of her children, had her eye sight restored through her faith in St. Lucy.

“God Gave Us Brothers...”

Franciscan Vocation News

Ordination of Deacons



On Sunday, June 25, 2017, in the Chapel of the Shrine of St. Anthony in Ellicott City, Maryland, our Friars celebrated Mass together, including the Rite of Ordination of Deacons with our own Friar Bishop, the Most Rev. Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv., Bishop of Savannah. Friar Moises Maximilian Avila, OFM Conv. (Friar Max) and Friar Emanuel Ventura Vasconcelos, OFM Conv. (Friar Manny) were joined by a multitude of family and friends, as well as their brother Friars, as they were Ordained Deacons. Pictured here, Friar Max and Friar Manny kneel during their Ordination.

Novitiate Class of 2017



On Wednesday, July 19, 2017, the Ministers Provincial from the four Provinces of North America welcomed the Novitiate Class of 2017 to the St. Francis of Assisi Friary Interprovincial Novitiate in Arroyo Grande, CA. The newly Invested Novices of our province are pictured with our Vocation Director, Fr. Russell Governale, OFM Conv. (far right) Pictured left to right: friar Richard Rome, OFM Conv., friar Fabian Adderley, OFM Conv., friar Mario Camarillo, OFM Conv., friar Joseph Cannon, OFM Conv. and friar Steven Arias Mosquera, OFM Conv.

Friar Jason DeMartini Professes Simple Vows



On July 24, 2017, Our Lady of the Angels Province Friars joyfully celebrated the Profession of Simple Vows of friar Jason DeMartini, OFM Conv., as a Franciscan Friars Conventual. The Mass took place in the Chapel of our Shrine of St. Anthony, in Ellicott City, MD. Pictured here, the Very Reverend Fr. James McCurry, OFM Conv., Minister Provincial of the Our Lady of the Angels Province, accepts the Simple Vows of poverty, chastity and obedience professed by friar Jason DeMartini. Friar Jason's profession of vows was witnessed by Fr. Giles Zakowicz, OFM Conv., former Director of the Novitiate, and Fr. Russell Governale, OFM Conv., Province Vocation Director.

THE ST. ANTHONY COMPANION

is a publication of
the Companions of St. Anthony

12290 Folly Quarter Road
Ellicott City, Maryland 21042

410-531-9200

Visit us online at
www.companionsofstanthony.org

Remember the Companions 70-1/2 IRA Distribution

As you may already know, the IRS requires everyone to take a Required Minimum Distribution from their qualified retirement accounts at 70-1/2.

To lessen the impact of these distributions on your taxable income, you can take advantage of charitable IRA rollover to make a meaningful gift to the Companions of St. Anthony.

At 70-1/2 or older, you can transfer up to \$100,000 a year from your IRA to a qualified charity. If your spouse has a separate IRA, he/she can also make charitable IRA rollover gift. The amount of the transfer will not be included in your taxable income and the transfer amount can count toward the IRA's required minimum distribution.

For an individual with a traditional IRA, with a required minimum distribution of \$30,000, such a distribution would be taxable at a marginal

tax rate of 35 percent. Using a charitable IRA rollover, however, this person could instruct his or her plan administrator to transfer \$30,000 to the Companions of St. Anthony, and the \$30,000 will no longer be included in his or her taxable income. This individual could also choose to direct a portion of the required minimum distribution, or a greater amount, not to exceed \$100,000, to the Companions.

IS THE CHARITABLE IRA ROLLOVER FOR YOU?

The charitable IRA rollover may be particularly appealing if:

- You want to make an outright gift to the Companions of St. Anthony that will have an immediate impact.
- You have a required minimum distribution, but do not need additional taxable income. A charitable IRA rollover can sat-

Charitable IRA Rollover

Who: Individuals 70-1/2 and older

What: Transfers come from traditional IRA accounts directly to the Companions of St. Anthony. Retirement assets in a 401(k) and 403(b) must first be rolled into a traditional IRA before contributing them to the Companions of St. Anthony.

Amount: Up to \$100,000 per year

Advantages: Immediate impact on the ministries of the Franciscan Friars supported by the Companions of St. Anthony. The distribution counts toward some or all of the required minimum distribution, and the transfer is excluded from your taxable income.

isfy the requirement with a direct transfer.

• You have maxed out your charitable income tax deductions. An IRA distribution operates separately from tax rules that limit the tax benefit of individual charitable giving.

• You do not itemize your income tax deductions. If your IRA distribution goes directly to the Companions of St. Anthony, the amount of your distribution is never considered taxable income to you in the first place.

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