



Leffler ordained a priest



TAYLOR LEFFLER was one of three Transitional Deacons who were ordained as priests by Archbishop George J. Lucas on June 2 at St. Cecilia Cathedral in Omaha. Leffler is a 2009 graduate of Guardian Angels Central Catholic.

Photo by Kylie Kai of K & Camera



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Fr. Taylor Leffler prays the Doxology during his first Mass as a priest at St. Mary's Church, his hometown parish, on Sunday, June 3. Leffler was a 2009 graduate of Guardian Angels Central Catholic.

Open heart to the Lord

Leffler finds answer to 'what God wants of me,' is ordained into priesthood

All it takes is one thought, one single question, to trigger change into a person's life. For West Point native Taylor Leffler, it was one specific question, and an open heart to the Lord, that sent him down a life-changing path.

That journey led Leffler to his calling in life.

On June 2, Leffler's life was forever changed as Archbishop George J. Lucas ordained him a priest at St. Cecilia Cathedral in Omaha.

And it was one question that triggered Taylor's call into the priesthood: "What does God want

of me?"

Leffler had his life all figured out, or so he thought...

Taylor was going to attend the University of Nebraska-Omaha where he was going to study Aviation. He was going to become a pilot, and eventually work for Southwest Airlines.

Taylor was going to get married, start a family and have "beautiful, well-behaved" children. Leffler was going to travel the world. His plan all sounded so great.

"Even when he was little, his dream was always to fly planes," Taylor's dad, Dana Leffler said.

Leffler soon would find out that

life is full of curveballs, and no one throws a better curveball than God.

After one year of college, Taylor knew his calling was elsewhere. And in a world that's all about 'me,' and 'what do I want,' Leffler's 'what does God want of me' question was rather out-of-the-ordinary.

"I thought that I had to plan out my whole life so that I could be successful. And then I came across Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord,"" Leffler said.

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“That struck me for the first time. I never really thought about God having a plan for my life. If God has a plan for my life, it’d probably be a good idea to ask him what that plan is.”

From that moment, Leffler began to pray upon that and ask God to reveal His plan.

A vision of what God wanted from Taylor wasn’t immediately revealed. However, during his time of contemplation, through prayer and reflection, Leffler said different signs started to surface. One of the biggest signs appeared on a Sunday Mass during Vocations week.

All the questions about the priesthood would be answered in a 10-minute homily.

“One Sunday, I was singing in the high school choir. I remember Fr. Gerry Gonderinger got up and said, ‘Today is vocation awareness Sunday.’ My ears perked up,” Leffler said.

“He said, ‘Instead of giving a typical homily, I just want to talk about what my life is like as a priest, and what got me to the priesthood.’ I didn’t know at the moment I was being called to be a priest. But I knew God was really laboring for me to join the seminary.”

Deep in his heart, Taylor knew God was starting to reveal the answer to his question: “What does God want of me?”

A TON OF TEARS SHED

Never before in Taylor Leffler’s life had the newly ordained priest ever seen as many tears shed as he did during his special weekend.

At his ordination. At his reception. During his first Mass as a priest at St. Mary’s Parish, his hometown parish.

All weekend long, the waterworks were flowing.

“I’ve been to lots of funerals. I have been to concerts. I’ve been to moving talks. All sorts of stuff. But never have I seen so many tears. People just wept. They just cried and for lots of different reasons,”



Photo by Kylie Kai of K & Camera

Fr. Taylor Leffler is pictured with his parents, Diane and Dana Leffler, following his first Mass.

Leffler said.

“What that shows me is a lot of people from West Point, Nebraska had a really powerful encounter with Jesus.”

With Jesus in their hearts, some of those tears may have been due to pride, joy or simply appreciation. Regardless of the reason, Leffler felt the support of many.

And, of course, felt the love from the two most special people in his life, his parents, Dana and Diane Leffler, who called Taylor’s first Mass, “overwhelming” and “sur-real.”

“I knew it was going to be grand, but not to that level,” Dana said about the Mass.

One of the most emotional scenes from Leffler’s ordination weekend took place at the end of his Sunday Mass when Taylor presented gifts to his parents.

At that moment, there wasn’t a

dry eye in church.

“At the very beginning, I got choked up, but the Holy Spirit took over. The Holy Spirit gave me the strength to make such a powerful offering to my parents,” Leffler said.

“The first thing that I said is, ‘It’s hard to know how to thank the two people who gave you life, but I’ll try.’”

Leffler proceeded to present two special gifts.

Taylor presented Diane with a white linen cloth. During ordination, that cloth was used to wipe Taylor’s hands after being anointed with sacred chrism.

Leffler went on to explain: “When a mother of a priest dies, this cloth is tucked into her hands as she lies in her casket as a symbol for when she meets Jesus face-

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to-face in heaven. She can hold the cloth out to him and say, 'I gave you my son as a priest.'

"There is a sacrifice there. They won't have grandkids from me. They won't have a daughter-in-law from me. And the Leffler name will not be carried into the future from me. The offering that a priest's parents make will not go unrewarded."

Dana was presented a purple stole, which Taylor wore around his neck while hearing his first confession as a priest. The stole is a symbol of mercy and forgiveness.

"A lot of times, our dads are the ones who show us mercy and forgiveness," Leffler said. "That too will be tucked into his hands when he dies."

As parents of a priest, there really aren't words that can adequately describe the pride they have for their son.

"You just can't find words to how proud both of us are. It goes beyond description," Dana Leffler said. "Lots and lots of people helped form Taylor into what he is today."

Diane added, "There's just an immense amount of pride. For us as parents, we were like 'are we worthy of having a son as a priest?' But God who started all this, saw it through."

"It was so awesome to see how he was like a son of the community. Everyone who helped celebrate was equally proud. We just really realized so many people played a part in this. Words can't describe the love and pride we felt."

FIRST MASS MOMENTS

Other than presenting gifts to his parents, Fr. Leffler vividly remembers two other parts of his very first Mass – the homily and the Eucharist.

Included in Leffler's homily was talk about the beautiful artwork found in St. Mary's Church, and the three species of birds found within that artwork.

There's the Phoenix, a mystical bird that rises from the ashes. The



Photo by Kylie Kai of K & Camera

Fr. Taylor Leffler preaches his first homily as a priest to a packed-house at St. Mary's Church.

White Dove. And then the Pelican.

For Taylor, the depiction of the Pelican is fascinating. When there's nothing left to feed its young, the mother will peck at its breast until blood pours out. That flesh and blood provides her babies with life.

Why is this significant? As a priest, Fr. Leffler gives all that he has to the Lord and the people he serves.

Another moment of significance for Taylor during Mass was Holy Communion.

"The Eucharist is what makes us Catholic. Through the hands of a priest, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ," Leffler said. "I can't put into words what it's like to turn the bread of Christ into the flesh of Jesus with my own hands."

CALL TO SERVE IS HEARD

For eight years, Taylor Leffler

embarked upon a life-changing journey. Regardless if he became a priest or not, Taylor's life was going to be significantly impacted with his time in the Seminary.

Leffler never really had any doubts about his desire to become a priest. What kind of priest he was called to be, however, was a question Taylor had to tackle.

To answer that question, Leffler turned to the wisdom of Mother Teresa, who served the poorest of the poor. It was Mother Teresa would said, over and over, that America is the poorest country she has seen.

"Here, they are not hungry for bread. They are hungry for love," Leffler said. "People here are starving spiritually. They have all the material things they could want, but they feel lonely and unloved. And that is a much deeper

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poverty.”

That was a sign to Leffler. Taylor knew that was the poverty he wanted to serve.

Leffler fulfilled his journey to becoming a parish priest at his ordination June 2 at St. Cecilia Cathedral in Omaha. This is how Fr. Leffler explained his ordination experience:

“My heart was really at peace. I got to the Cathedral an hour early to spend in silent prayer. It was beautiful. I just had this sense while I was praying, and all throughout ordination, that I was about to die to myself so I can live totally, 100 percent, 24 hours a day, for Jesus; to be totally available to Him, and to be available to His people as their spiritual father.

“There’s this gesture during the ordination, all of us that are about to be ordained priests lay face down on the marble floor of the sanctuary. That is an image of death. We’re dying to ourselves. We are dying to all of our own plans, and our own desires, so that we can live for Jesus, and His plans and His desires.

“When we get up, we go to the Bishop and he ordains us. So for me, it was a death of my old self and a rising to a new life. Beginning a new life of fatherhood to God’s people. With ordination to the priesthood, I’m no longer trying to be ‘like Jesus.’ My heart is literally conformed to the heart of Jesus. I stand at the altar as a person of Jesus.

“I’m still Taylor. I’m still very human. I still have my personality, desires and hopes. But Jesus did something new in my heart that I will continue to unpack for the rest of my life.”

The amazing part of Taylor joining the priestly brotherhood is being part of an unbroken line of apostolic succession. Since Jesus ordained the first 12 Apostles, there has been an unbroken line of priests who serve as Jesus.

Rev. Leffler is now among that group. Taylor’s words and hands now serve as Jesus.



Photo by Kylie Kai of K & Camera

At the altar, Fr. Taylor Leffler elevates the chalice during the Eucharistic Prayer. The chalice was originally Msgr. Andrew Meister’s. Taylor’s parents, Dana and Diane Leffler, had it refurbished for him.

LEFFLER’S HOPE: MORE PRIESTS

Taylor Leffler’s ordination was an historic event.

Rev. Leffler is the first priest who grew up in West Point, and attended school here, to be ordained into the Archdiocese in 41 years. The last to do so was Rev. Harry Buse in 1977.

“We don’t need to wait another 40

years to ordain the next priest from West Point. And I don’t think Jesus wants that either,” Leffler said. “There are so many good things happening in this town, and such a strong faith. If I can do it, a lot of men can do it.”

Taylor went on to say, “As a

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teenager I struggled with my faith. I kind of thought it was all made up. There's this big guy that lives in the sky, but you can't see him. He wants you to be nice so you can go to heaven when you're dead. It almost seemed like Santa Claus to me."

What changed? What got Leffler to the priesthood? Jesus.

"The things that started to happen in my life were so perfectly aligned for my heart to change," Leffler said. "Jesus had set up this master plan to change my life, and it worked so well."

People such as Lisa Hunke, Lisa

Manley and the Kirwan family had a huge impact early in Taylor's spiritual journey.

"Those people really showed me what an authentic life of faith looked like," Leffler said.

So much so that Fr. Leffler celebrated his first Mass in honor of Sam Kirwan, who was killed due to a tragic work accident.

"It was a small gift I could give to them for inspiring faith into my heart," Leffler said.

The first step is having an open heart to Jesus.

Leffler explained, "Time in the seminary is not wasted time. My brother [Spencer] is a prime example of that. He was in the semi-

nary for three years, and he'll tell you, those three years absolutely changed his life for the better."

Spencer is not going to be a priest. He is getting married in November, and Taylor is celebrating the wedding at St. Mary's, the same altar where Leffler celebrated his first Mass.

Leffler's first assignment as a priest will be an associate pastor at St. Wenceslaus in Omaha. It's the second largest parish in the Archdiocese. Leffler reports June 30.

"The priesthood is going to get busy, real busy. This isn't a job. It's a vocation. It's an identity," Leffler said. "I just want to grow even closer to Jesus."

Alumni of GACC with vocations to religious life, ordained life



Fr. Paul Ortmeier
Ordained: 1972



Fr. Harry Buse
Ordained: 1977



Fr. Thomas Lux
Ordained: 1985



Fr. Thomas Wordekemper
Ordained: 1994



Fr. Jeff Lorig
Ordained: 2004



Fr. Taylor Leffler
Ordained: 2018

According to our alumni records, there have been 30 men and women who have graduated from Guardian Angels or Central Catholic who have responded to a vocation in consecrated religious life, the permanent diaconate or the ordained priesthood. In an attempt to continue to promote vocations to consecrated religious life, the permanent diaconate and the priesthood we would like to create a public display of our alumni who have responded to these vocations, but we need your help.

While photos of more recent graduates are more easily accessible, we may need help securing photos of our alumni from some of the earliest classes. We are also looking for information regarding the Communities or Orders to which many of the Sisters belonged. Of course, if the following list is missing the name of a graduate from Guardian Angels, Central Catholic or Guardian Angels Central Catholic who is a member of religious life, a permanent deacon or a priest, please let us know.

Sr. Victorine Schlickbernd 1927, Sr. Cecile Stalp 1930, Sr. M. Rosita Goebel RSM and Sr. Thaddeus Stratman 1939, Sr. Agnes Ann Drueke 1945, Br. Leonard Reeson CSC 1950, Sr. M. Veronica Lubbert 1951, Sr. Stephen Marie Lubbert 1952, Sr. Doris Jurgenson and Sr. Marilyn Uhing 1954, Sr. Clarice Gentrup and Sr. Rita Mae Suhr 1955, Sr. Carmelyn Gentrup, Sr. Mary Beth Prinz and Sr. Judanne Stratman 1956, Deacon Richard Drueke and Sr. Karen Suhr 1961, Deacon Ken Batenhorst 1963, Deacon Vince Maly and Fr. Paul Ortmeier 1964, Br. Bernard Stratman SM 1965, Sr. Ann Wiesen 1967, Fr. Harold Buse 1969, Deacon Francis Meiergerd 1971, Sr. Marcia Baumert 1975, Fr. Thomas Wordekemper OSB 1975, Fr. Thomas Lux 1977, Deacon Leon Gentrup 1981, Fr. Jeff Lorig 1995, Fr. Taylor Leffler 2009.

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