

# It's No Joke: One-time Comedian Feels Called to Priesthood

By John Shaughnessy

The feeling overwhelmed Jake Martin - even far more than on those nights when he once believed there could be no better sensation than having audiences cheering and laughing as he performed improvisational comedy on a stage in Chicago.

Back then, Martin (CHG) dreamed of riding the same rocket to fame that had taken fellow Improv Olympic talents Mike Myers, Vince Vaughn and Tina Fey to stardom in movies and TV shows like Saturday Night Live.

Yet, just as scenes can change quickly in improvisational comedy, so can the same changes come in life. At least they did for Martin, who gave up the stage and his dream of being a star to follow a calling to the priesthood that led to the most incredible moment he has ever experienced.

That moment came shortly after he started working at a home for the dying poor in Cleveland as a Jesuit novice.

"I had only been there about two weeks," Martin recalled as he relaxed at Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School in Indianapolis, where he now teaches. "One of the women really didn't talk to the staff, but she liked me. We started saying the rosary together every day. I went in one day, and she was in tremendous pain and fading fast.

"She was in so much pain she couldn't continue the rosary. I held her

hand and she squeezed my hand so hard because of the pain. It was the most incredible moment of my life. I realized the importance of being with someone at that moment in their life. It was amazing."

When Martin returned to her room the next time, he found her bed empty and freshly made, with a rose on top of the sheets - a symbol that the woman had died.

"The greatest thing I've learned in all my experiences is the power of prayer," he said.

That's one of the lessons Martin has tried to share as he teaches at Brebeuf this semester - part of his preparation to become a Jesuit priest.

One of the courses he's teaching is a non-credit class in improvisational comedy, a subject he believes can give students another glimpse into their relationship with God.

"You find God in the truth, and improv, at its best, is the truth," Martin said. "You go up on stage, you be yourself and be true to yourself. It's the same way in life. When I allow myself to be myself, that's where I find God. I feel completely secure and happy with who I am and all my imperfections."

Martin acknowledges that his journey of faith took time and a few detours.

"I was 24 when I started doing improv," said Martin, who's now 31. "I was terrified. I didn't know an actual audience would laugh at me. It was definitely a rush. It was the thing I really enjoyed - the interaction between the crowd and myself.

"But the lifestyle of improv didn't necessarily agree with me that much. It's a tough life. You have to do a lot of auditions. You get rejected a lot and do crummy jobs, like waiting on tables. After one audition, I actually thought there was something else for me. It became clear that these gifts I had and the tools I learned were for something else."

That "something else" became clear to Martin when he took a two-month break from doing improv in 2003.

"I opened myself to the possibility of a vocation," he recalled. "I met with some priests in Chicago, and recognized how happy they were and how peaceful they were - which I didn't have. That opened the door a little more.

"I met with the Jesuits that fall of 2003. I just felt comfortable with them right off the bat. It was the feeling of being home that stuck with me, and the feeling of finding God in all things."

Brebeuf students have felt that influence from Martin.



Jake Martin leads an improv class at Brebeuf Jesuit Prep.

"He brings a total fire to everything he does," said Austin Morris, a junior from Carmel, Ind., who is the president of Brebeuf's drama club. "You can sense he really loves what he does. It has a snowball effect on all the kids."

The improvisational class reflects Martin's personality, according to Susan Taylor, a sophomore, from Fishers, Ind.

"It's a lot of fun, and he's extremely personable," she said. "He's a member of our family. He seems to want to get to know all us students."

Martin said he's just reached the stage where he wants to be.

"At one time, the goal was to be a big movie star," he said. "I wasn't entirely delusional. I had a lot of support. But God said, 'You know, kid, that's not where I want you to be. That's not where I want to use you.'

"The goal now is to do whatever is put before me and do it for the greater glory of God. I want to be the best Christian I can be, the best Catholic I can be."

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