



"It's a great feeling for us to have two Jesuit priests in the family," says Bill O'Brien Sr., of the ordination of his brother and son.

The extended O'Brien family: Bridgett O'Brien, Bill O'Brien, SJ, Colleen O'Brien, Tom O'Brien, SJ, Blanche O'Brien, Bill O'Brien Sr., Patrick O'Brien, John O'Brien, and Mike O'Brien. Bill Sr., Tom, Mike and John are brothers. Colleen and Bill are Bill and Blanche's children, and Patrick is the son of Mike and Bridgett.

ORDINATION 2002

THE DIRECTION OF A FAMILY

by George Kearney

"Nothing is beneath you, if it is in the direction of your life; nothing is great or desirable if it is off from that," said Ralph Waldo Emerson in *The Conduct of Life*.

It's almost as if he were speaking about Bill O'Brien, SJ, and his uncle, Tom O'Brien, SJ, as they prostrated themselves on the floor at Madonna della Strada on Saturday, June 8, 2002, when together they were ordained Catholic priests. During the Litany of Saints, as they lay prostrate before the altar among the People of God, they symbolically and formally directed their lives to



"I see in Bill a passion for the priesthood and the Society," Fr. Tom O'Brien says of his nephew. They are pictured here during their ordination with Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla, SJ.





Dorothy Dwight, BVM, and James Wood served as cantors during the stirring ordination ceremony at Madonna della Strada.

“Karen has supported me in my vocation for many years. Her own commitment to Ignatian spirituality continues to inspire me,” says Bill O’Brien of Karen Clauser, a religion teacher at Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory in Indianapolis. Karen, who served as a lector at ordination, will make the 30-day Spiritual Exercises with Bill this summer at Milford Spiritual Center.



...serving others, something they’ve both been doing since they joined the Jesuits. The lives and ministries of these two Jesuits, an uncle and nephew, who had knowingly and unknowingly helped direct one another to the Society, intersected in a ceremony that further united them as brothers in Christ ordained for priestly ministry.

Bill O’Brien Sr., Bill’s father and Tom’s brother, begins to explain the significance of this ordination when he says, “It’s a great feeling for us to have two Jesuit priests in the family. Both my wife and I are very pleased.” Mr. O’Brien graduated from University of Scranton, a Jesuit school in Scranton, PA, and has remained an energetic partner of the Jesuits since then. “The Jesuits walk the walk. They don’t need to do much talking,” he says, and today his brother and son are walking the walk with compassion, candor, and honesty.

Years ago, the direction of young Bill O’Brien’s life wasn’t always pointed towards the priesthood. Bill grew up in Roanoke, VA, before moving, with his family, to the Akron, OH, area where he attended high school. Though he could have attended Walsh Jesuit High School in Cuyahoga Falls, OH, Bill instead opted for Hudson High because he thought he would have more educational and extracurricular opportunities at the larger, co-educational school.

After graduating from Hudson High, Bill began his college education at Miami University in Oxford, OH, where he majored in English and philosophy. During his years in high school and college, says Bill “I sort of drifted away from the church. I was more interested in cultivating relationships with friends and I neglected my family and my faith.” He belonged to a social fraternity and took readily to life on campus, frequently attending parties, and playing Ultimate Frisbee on the spacious quads at Miami. At one point, after a string of noisy gatherings in their residence hall, Bill and his friends were

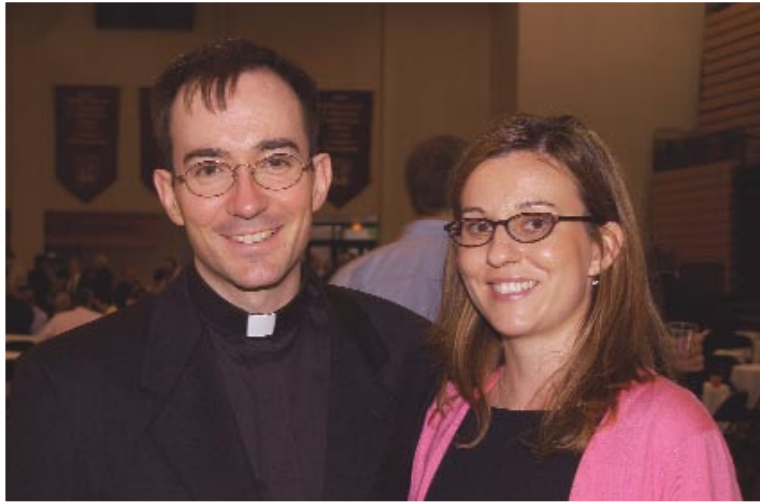


“The major moment for me was the laying of hands on Bill and Tom. What a moment in time,” says Erin O’Brien. Here Dan Hartnett, SJ (back left), and Fred Zagone, SJ (back right), bless Bill (left) and Tom O’Brien (right) during the laying of hands.



A Sister's Perspective

by Colleen O'Brien



"Bill didn't just get a hobby or have a mere affection for something. He lived and breathed it. He had passion, real passion for the things he cared about," says Colleen O'Brien, Bill O'Brien's younger sister, of the passion which she believes will make her brother an excellent teacher and priest. Colleen served as a lector at the ordination (below).

My brother and I are really close in age (he's two years older to be exact), so we grew up together, running in the same circles as kids, riding our bikes down the same streets, and playing the same games like "ghosts in the graveyard" until late into the summer evenings. But Bill was always a lot different from me. How can I describe him? He is intense. Bill didn't just get a hobby or have a mere affection for something. He lives and breaths it. He has passion, real passion for the things he cares about. I can remember when he first started drawing. He didn't just start drawing. He took things much more seriously than that. He got an easel, charcoal, stencils and pencils, art paper, the works, and he threw his whole self into it. And he is good. He once drew a picture of Notre Dame Cathedral—free hand. It was truly amazing.



There were other passions too. Bill began coin collecting, woodburning, calligraphy, hiking, camping. And regardless of what it was, he lived and breathed it. It was also infectious. You could really feel how much he cared about whatever it was he was doing by the way he could talk about it, expressing every fine detail of his work. Even when it was something sort of weird—like the time he used his wood burning tool kit to etch the names of animals on small placards of wood for my mother's outdoor garden. Strange, yes. But Bill's enthusiasm for life was always apparent. Bill has a sort of energy inside of him that not only inspires him and his work, but also inspires others in the process. I think that's when I first

realized Bill would make an excellent teacher, regardless of how he chose to apply this gift to his life.

He was always pretty religious, too. When we were younger, he became involved in the church as an altar boy and even played priest at home, making me sit through countless hours of pretend masses by blackmailing me the way that brothers and sisters do when their biggest fear in life is still being grounded from the TV. When he first called from college describing his decision to go into religious life I was not surprised. I could tell from the way he talked about his desire to be a priest, to devote his life to Christ and His teachings, that Bill was passionate about this. As I described earlier, you can always tell when Bill is passionate about something because you can sense it.

For Bill, I imagine that this ordination signifies his commitment to this passion—his passion to be a priest and devote his life to serving others. It signifies struggles and triumphs, all of the places he's been and people he's met along the way. For me it signifies a physical representation of Bill's spirit and devotion to something he truly loves. It signifies a long road—ten years—that Bill has traveled with, no doubt, the energy and commitment that are truly unique to him.

Anyone that knows Bill well knows a person who is outrageously funny—he can literally leave you in stitches with some of his quick-witted satirical comments—but also someone loyal and kind, who loves life and all that comes with it, and who has a very special quality or zeal that permeates everything he does. I'm truly so proud and happy for Bill for reaching this point along his life path, and I know that he'll bring his unique gifts and passion to this devotion. ■





Bishop Sevilla anoints Bill's hands with oil while acolytes Jeremiah Lynch, SJ (left), and Bernie McAniff, SJ (second from right) look on.

approached by what he referred to as "the God Squad," a group of active Christian evangelicals who took exception to the typically loud student music, as well as the refreshments served at the parties. "We never really took them too seriously though," Bill says.

In September, 1989, at the beginning of his junior year, Bill's roommate announced that he had become a born-again Evangelical Christian over the summer. "My initial reaction was, 'Come on. Not this. We've already got the God Squad,'" Bill says. But only days later, standing in the swirl of a fraternity party amongst some of his closest friends, he realized that his friends, the people standing beside him at that moment, would not be there for him in the future the way he needed them



Charles Rodriguez, SJ, Bill O'Brien, Sr., Blanche O'Brien, Amy Marcum, Joseph Finn, and Peter Nguyen, SJ, served as Eucharistic ministers during the ordination ceremony.



to be. “I didn’t dislike them for it,” he says, “I just realized it. It was very clear to me at that moment.” He left the party and returned to his room. “There was an evangelical prayer tract on my desk,” Bill says. “I picked it up and read through it. It was all about how to be saved. It sounds like an after school-special,” he quips, “but that’s when I accepted Jesus into my life again. I prayed then and there that Jesus would be with me and be in my life.”

In the wake of this conversion, Bill decided he wanted to put his new enthusiasm to work. He visited the pastor at St. Mary’s, the Catholic Church in Oxford, to explore volunteer opportunities in the Church. He received two books, one on various lay volunteer programs around the world, and one on religious vocations. He knew as soon as he opened the second book that he wanted to become a priest. Looking back, Bill says, “What happened in college was big. But in hindsight I can see that it was part of a much longer conversion process. My parents and their faith had formed me, but what happened in my room was the beginning of an explicit relationship with the Lord. Since then I have tried to share that relationship with others.”

Bill’s father says that once he and his wife, Blanche, became aware of Bill’s religious calling, they suggested he speak with Jesuits. Ever since Mr. O’Brien’s graduation from University of Scranton, he’d had great respect for the Jesuits. So Bill took his advice and sought out a Jesuit spiritual director, Fr. Bill Verbryke, SJ, (see inside front cover) who was then at St. Xavier Jesuit High School in Cincinnati. “Those conversations with Fr. Verbryke helped clarify just what God had in store for me,” Bill says, looking back fondly on his first experience with spiritual direction.

Bill’s parents too were grateful for Fr. Verbryke’s presence in their son’s life. “The guidance Bill received from the Jesuits was just what we were hoping for—sound Christian, Catholic teachings presented in a nurtur-



“As much as Bill enjoys eating, I think he enjoys preparing a meal for others even more. And that’s indicative of how he lives his life—with a real concern for others and an eagerness to serve,” says Chuck Kempf, one of Bill’s closest friends, pictured above receiving the Eucharist from Bill’s mother, Blanche.

ing manner that still allowed Bill to make the final decision,” Mr. O’Brien says.

During his junior year in college, Bill also turned to his uncle Tom for direction. Tom had entered the Society of Jesus in 1967 and left in 1981. “Bill peppered me with questions. I shared my experiences with him, 99% of which were extremely positive. That day was a starting point for us and over the years since then our relationship has deepened considerably,” Tom says of his dialogue with Bill.

“He’s direct,” Bill says of Tom. “I found his candor and experience valuable. The most important thing I learned from that conversation, though, was that the Society has a very human side. Tom first gave me a sense that the Jesuits are regular people struggling in some ways and blessed and graced in some ways. They’ve received a lot from God. Like others, they have a calling, and are eager to follow it.”

During his senior year, Bill fundamentally redirected his life and decided to enter the Jesuits. He graduated from college in May, 1991, and

in August he began life as a Jesuit at Loyola House, the Society’s novitiate in Berkley, MI, where he was afforded the opportunity to study the Society, complete the Spiritual Exercises, and learn to pray.

Chuck Kempf, Bill’s freshman year college roommate and dearest friend, has remained close to Bill since college. Chuck and his wife, Susie, have gathered for dinner with Bill many times both in college and in later years. “As much as Bill enjoys eating, I think he enjoys preparing a meal for others even more. And that’s so indicative of how he lives his life—with a real concern for others and an eagerness to serve,” Chuck says.

Bill’s eleven years in the Society have been marked by both service and study. After the novitiate, Bill studied for three years at Loyola University Chicago where he completed the Jesuit First Studies Program, and earned an MA in Philosophy. He was then assigned by the Provincial to teach Spanish at Brebeuf Jesuit Prep in Indianapolis, where he also worked with the chess players and helped



coach the cross country team.

In the fall of 1999, Bill enrolled at Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, CA, (JSTB), where he has just completed his M.Div or Master of Divinity. During his summers in the Society, Bill taught in a summer school program at St. Ignatius Loyola Academy in Baltimore, ministered at Sacred Heart Church, a Jesuit parish, in El Paso, TX, and completed his practice teaching at Bellarmine Prep, a Jesuit high school in San Jose, CA. He also completed Spanish language training in Peru, Mexico, and Spain. This summer, Bill, along with scholastic Jesuit physician, David DeMarco, SJ, will help direct the thirty-day Spiritual Exercises under the supervision of Fr. Bill Creed, SJ, at the Milford Spiritual Center. Next fall he'll return to JSTB where he'll work towards another degree that he hopes to use to teach in a seminary or on the faculty of a Pontifical Institute.

After completing an internship in spiritual direction at Berkeley in 2000, and leading a series of three eight-day retreats at El Retiro in Los

Altos, CA, Bill knew what he wanted to do: "Spirituality. That's what I was interested in doing. That's what I'd like to keep doing. I'd love to train spiritual directors." Bill suggests his motivation comes from the great relationships he's had with his own spiritual directors, one of whom is Sr. Jane Ferndon, OP. Bill speaks glowingly of her, "She's helped me to a much deeper understanding of the activity of God in my life and in the lives of other people."

Bill hopes to share the wonder and power of this type of "spiritual direction" with others, so they can share it with others, and on, and on. "My mission as a Christian is to respond to God's call to discipleship and service in the Church," Bill says, and he sees spiritual direction as one among many possible ways to do that.

Erin O'Brien (no relation), a friend of the Jesuits, says that completing the 19th annotation version of the Spiritual Exercises "was one of the highlights of my life." She be-



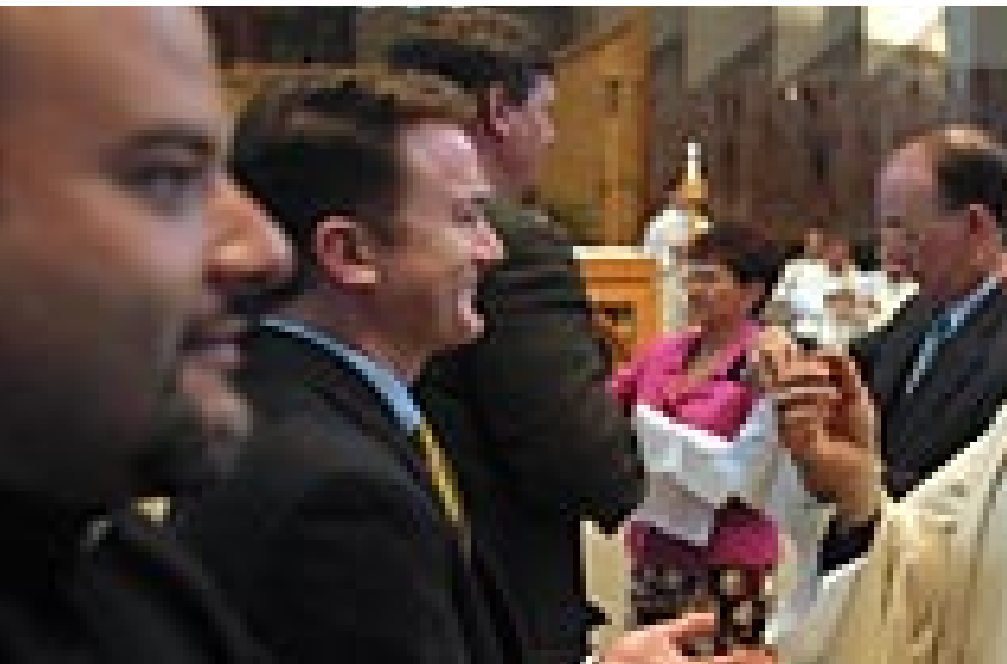
"Bill is an extremely caring and spirited person who'll be a great asset to the Church and Society," says Frank Covey, a Loyola University Professor of Law, of Bill O'Brien, pictured here with Mary Anne Farrell during the reception following ordination.

lieves "Bill will be great at this type of ministry. He brings youth and enthusiasm and interest and a sense of calling, all the tools he'll need to do very well in spiritual direction."

Marilyn Antonik, who has also made the 30-day Spiritual Exercises, echoed those sentiments: "I'm so excited that Bill has chosen this ministry. There is great value in working with the Spiritual Exercises." She adds that "Bill seems very in touch with real issues. He wants to look at all of society and help make the Spiritual Exercises available for them."

Marilyn's husband, Joe Antonik, who along with his wife has met with Bill, also commented on Bill's desire to work with spirituality: "He wants to make spiritual direction and the Spiritual Exercises real for a larger population of people."

Before Bill felt called towards spiritual direction, he was unknowingly offering direction to his uncle Tom, who, after leaving the Jesuits, had taken a job as director of music at St. Francis De Sales Parish in Parma, Ohio. Tom says his time outside the Society was, in a word, "wonderful. It was a time of great learning, and I had the opportunity to meet some tremendous people."



"Having my family and friends involved in both the ordination ceremony and the first mass the following day reminded me of how much they have to do with my vocation. In this sense I very much see my call as tied up in their lives, and thank them for their continued support and encouragement," says Bill O'Brien, pictured here offering the Eucharist to Rob Watson, a friend from college.



He settled readily into the rhythms of parish life at St. Francis. Then his nephew entered the Jesuits. “Bill’s decision to enter was a catalyst for me. Bill’s talking about it was a little tug from God to encourage me to reconsider the vocation. God’s work in our lives is a maze of mystery, but Bill’s entering the Society was definitely a big influence for me.”

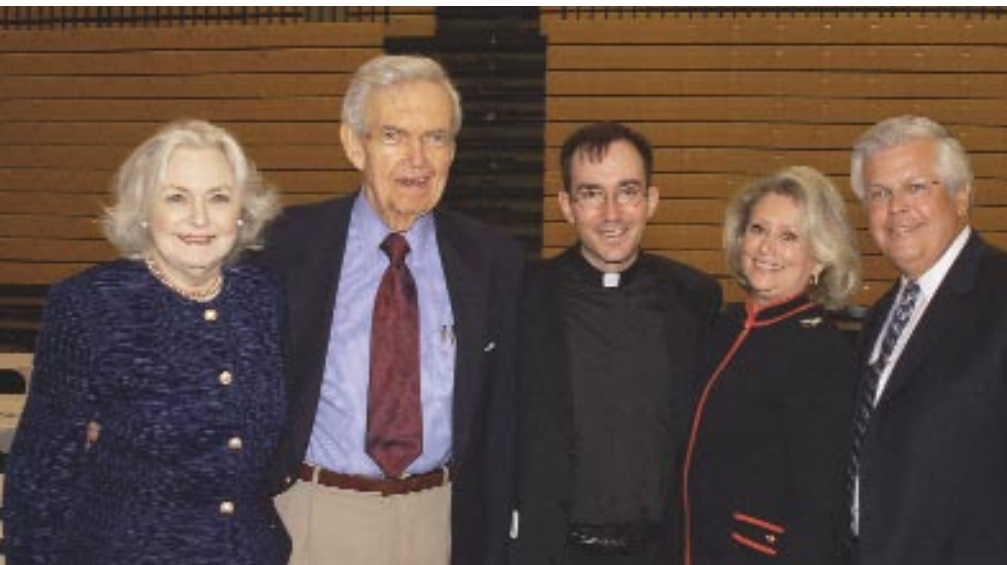
Tom found parishioners at St. Francis repeatedly telling him that he’d make a great priest. Bill was doing very well in the Society and Tom found himself called again to a life in the Society. In 1997, with the support of St. Francis’ pastor and parishioners, he made the unusual move of reentering the Jesuits. After his previous 14 years in the Society, Tom’s preparation for the priesthood this time has been shorter than most, though he repeated the novitiate and the Jesuit



“It’s hard to put into words,” says Bert Hoffman, a long-time friend of the Jesuits, of this year’s ordination. “It’s just so moving to see them lying there so humbly. They’re dedicating themselves completely to a life of simplicity and sacrifice, a life of spreading the Gospel.” Above, Bill and Tom O’Brien lay prostrate before the People of God.



Jesuits Mike Dorler and Lou Lipps applaud the ordination of Bill and Tom O’Brien with Ray and Chris Sweeney, close friends of the O’Brien family, who traveled from Roanoke, VA, to witness the ordination.



“Bishop Sevilla’s homily, coupled with the ordination service, and the wonderful music made this one of the most inspiring liturgical services I’ve ever witnessed,” says Jim Czech (right), a friend of the Jesuits, pictured here with his wife, Diane, and Mary Ann and Joe Feeney (left) at the reception with Bill.



“Bill and Tom are each men of many talents,” says Bishop Sevilla. This summer Bill will use his talents to help direct the 30-day Spiritual Exercises and Tom will employ his as an associate pastor at Holy Rosary/St. John Parish in Columbus, OH.

First Studies Program at Loyola University Chicago.

Looking ahead to his future ministry at Holy Rosary/St. John, a parish in Columbus, OH, Tom says “Right now I’m most excited about beginning my work. I’m extremely grateful for the long-range training I’ve received and because of it I’m confident about what I’m going to be doing. The Society’s benefactors really help make all that training possible, and at our liturgies we often give thanks for our wealth of resources. Our competence is a direct result of God’s providence and other people’s generosity.”

Of his uncle and fellow ordinand, Bill O’Brien says, “Tom is a sensitive, insightful, courageous man who believes in God and the goodness in people. He has no illusions about his own limitations or the sinfulness of the world, yet he seems to have a deep sense that something better can happen through faith and our own efforts.”

Tom echoes some of the same sentiments when he speaks about his nephew, “I see in Bill a passion for the priesthood and the Society in both its intellectual and pastoral apostolates. Bill wants to be in both worlds and I admire him for that desire.”

Looking back on the many events leading up to his ordination, Bill says “I’m grateful for my parents and their example and I’m grateful as well for all of the conversations with my spiritual directors.” He adds that his ordination was made possible, in large part, by the generosity of others. “I’m where I am today because of Jesus, but also because of the generosity of benefactors. The face of God in the world is in the people who support us so generously.”

Today, these two new priests seem to be headed in somewhat different directions. Fr. Tom will begin work at his new parish and Fr. Bill will finish directing his first thirty-day retreat. From here on, however, they’ll both always be headed in the same general direction: serving others for the greater glory of God. ■

