



Bishop Francis J. Kane (third from right) ordained three new Jesuit priests: David Meconi, SJ (third from left), Jeremiah Lynch, SJ (second from right), and Bernie McAniff, SJ (far right). They're shown here with ordination concelebrants Provincial Dick Baumann, SJ (left), and Rick McGurn, SJ (provincial's assistant formation).

A MILESTONE ORDINATION

CHICAGO PROVINCE ORDAINS THREE PRIESTS AND CELEBRATES 75TH ANNIVERSARY

by George Kearney

On Saturday June 14, 2003, Bishop Francis J. Kane ordained Chicago Province Jesuits Jeremiah W. Lynch, Bernard F. McAniff, and David V. Meconi, to priestly ministry before a church full of family, friends, and benefactors at Madonna della Strada Chapel on the campus of Loyola University Chicago.

This year's ordination was particularly significant because it took place during the Chicago Province's 75th anniversary, at a time when the Province is both looking back to where it's been, and looking ahead to where it's going. Over the course of the last 75 years, the Province has ordained hundreds of Jesuits who've gone on to serve as priests, teachers, scholars, writers, researchers, mis-

sionaries, mentors, confessors, doctors, scientists, retreat directors, artists, community organizers, spiritual directors, presidents, principals, rectors, filmmakers, publishers, campus ministers, counselors, and archivists. Though they've engaged in diverse and sometimes solitary ministries, often in far-flung places, these Jesuits have always been united by the desire to serve others.

“Our province’s 75th anniversary highlights our Jesuits’ service over the decades to the wider church,” says Provincial Richard J. Baumann, SJ. “The new priests ordained continue that service in fresh and vital ways. Our life and mission live on.”

And they will certainly live on in fresh and vital ways in the lives of the three new priests, who come to the Society of Jesus from different backgrounds with diverse skills and

experiences. One ran his own law office, one was a long-time employee of Eastman-Kodak, and one thought about the possibility of joining his family in running the vineyard his grandfather began in the early 1900’s. Instead, they became Jesuits. Now they’re bound by their commitment to serve. And it’s precisely this commitment that will carry the Chicago Province through the next 25 years to its 100th anniversary and beyond.

Fr. Jeremiah Lynch, SJ
Anything God wants

Nancy Martin, a criminal defense attorney from Willowbrook, IL, recalls being pleased when she learned her close friend Jeremiah Lynch had entered the Jesuits. “I thought it was long overdue,” she says. “It was good that he finally had the official title instead of playing the wannabe. I think a priest is what he was always meant to be.”

It’s funny, really. Jeremiah waited until he was 44 to enter the Jesuits, and yet, as Nancy suggests, it’s almost as if he was born to be a priest. His father Daniel, a retired City of Chicago Fire Department Chief Officer, remembers Jeremiah saying “make-believe” Mass as a boy. “He had his box, and he’d set a towel on the box and pretend to be saying Mass. It sounds like Hollywood, but it’s true.”

His mother Frances and his father are both children of Irish immigrants. Jeremiah, the oldest of their eight children, was born on the west side of Chicago in 1950 and recalls being buoyed by the faith of his grandparents throughout his childhood. “I’m here today because of my grandparents and the faith life they created for us. They left Ireland because of hunger. They had to leave. There was no other way. They came here with the shirts on their back and the faith. It’s very powerful. Their whole world was the faith. It’s a lot different than our generation; we’ve compartmentalized it much more.”

Jeremiah’s sister, Margaret Lynch, an emergency room surgeon in Lake Forest, thinks her parents’ dedication to service also influenced her brother. “He’s always been a compassionate person. And some of that may come from our parents. As we were growing up they always used to say, ‘It’s great to have an occupation where you make a living, but you also have to be serving other people’. That’s what Jeremiah has always wanted to do, what he’s always done. Ordination completes the circle for him.”



Jesuits from around the province and around the world gathered to celebrate this year’s ordination, which coincided with celebrations of the province’s 75th anniversary.



David, Bernie, and Jeremiah received a rousing applause when Bishop Kane presented them to the congregation at Madonna della Strada Chapel.

Jeremiah's family moved to the north side when he was a boy, and he enrolled at Quigley North for high school. At the time, Quigley was a minor seminary. Following graduation in 1968, one of his teachers, Fr. Ed Maloney, invited him to join a group of Quigley teachers and students traveling to Mexico to spend part of the summer teaching sacraments and doing health care work in mountain villages in the Mexican Sierras. "Nothing was the same for me after I returned from Mexico," Jeremiah recalls. "That experience is a huge part of why I'm here today."

After returning from Mexico he enrolled in the diocesan seminary at Loyola University Chicago but withdrew after a semester and entered the general degree program, where he completed a BA with majors in history and political science. In 1972, following his graduation from Loyola, he entered the major seminary at St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, but, again, stayed for only a year. After leaving, he took a

job at Maryville, the largest residential child-care facility in Illinois. In the evenings he attended graduate level classes in education and soon earned certification as a teacher. He spent the next two years teaching at Maryville, before contracting with the State of Illinois to run one of Maryville's group homes.

During that time Jeremiah became the de facto foster father of Emiliano "Mejo" Hernandez, whose father had placed his sons at Maryville after their mother died for fear they would find trouble in their neighborhood and end up in gangs. When Emiliano was in 8th grade he moved into Jeremiah's group home. Jeremiah, who was teaching and attending law school at the time, eventually removed himself from the role of house parent, but gave Emiliano the option to stay. He did. He lived with Jeremiah throughout four years of high school at Maine East, where he won an Illinois State championship in wrestling and set four national records. He had more scholar-

ship offers than he could count, but Jeremiah encouraged him to go to a junior college to refine his academic skills. Mejo did, eventually earning a scholarship to Washington State University, from which he graduated with a degree in physical education and history, as well as a teaching certificate. He's now a special education and physical education teacher at his alma mater, Maine East, and the head wrestling and gymnastics coach. He's also pursuing a Masters degree at Northeastern Illinois University. He's married, with children, and has recently adopted two of his sister's children.

Mejo says he was motivated to care for his sister's children because "I've always had an inkling that someone was looking out for me. Someone put Jeremiah in my life. I try to always keep that in mind." Of his relationship with Jeremiah, he says, "I love the man. He came into my life at a time when it was really important that I had an adult mentor. My two oldest brothers are dead. They were in the gangs and that's where I was going. He had a lot of discipline in the home. He laid down the law. I had to follow every one of his rules. I didn't always like it, but I trusted his judgment. He's one of the biggest reasons I'm where I am now. He was always there, no matter what. Even in my adult life, being married. He's been a huge part of it."

Jeremiah completed his law degree at DePaul University in 1979, left the child care field, and took a job in the office of the Illinois State's Attorney. That's where he met Nancy Martin. "Jeremiah was a very good attorney," she recalls. "He was super charged; a very focused, very driven attorney. He'd work a case to death. There was nothing that could get him off track." He climbed the ladder at the State's Attorney Office, eventually landing in the felony trial division. In 1980 he argued a case before the United States Supreme Court, and won.

In 1987 he left the State's Attorney Office and opened a private



Jeremiah says his family's faith is central to his life as a priest. He's pictured here with his immediate family: (front row) aunt Sr. Virginia McGee, RSM, father Daniel Lynch, mother Frances Lynch, aunt Sr. Catherine McGee, RSM, and (second row) his many siblings and in-laws: Joan Lynch, Mary Lynch, Catherine Dore, Mary Nichol, Margaret Lynch Whittelsey, Maureen Lynch, Kim Lynch, (back row) James Lynch, Thomas Lynch, Thomas Dore, Jeremiah Lynch, SJ, Mark Whittelsey, and Daniel Lynch.



“The generosity of others is a tremendous gift,” says Jeremiah, who’s pictured here with Keith and Mary Armato, friends of the Chicago Province. “Without them, we Jesuits couldn’t do this. They help us serve. They’re key.”

practice in Logan Square, a largely Latino neighborhood on the north side of Chicago. Jeremiah had lived in the neighborhood for years, and the practice seemed a natural fit. He’d harbored great respect and affection for the Latino community since his initial visit to Mexico and he spoke fluent Spanish.

“He thrived in that environment,” Nancy says. “He became an advocate for people, and he was an advocate in the truest sense of the word.”

His practice was successful—booming really. In the whirlwind that was his life at the time, Jeremiah continued to think about becoming a priest. “I thought about it every day,” he says. He even made time to drive to the seminary in Mundelein every two or three weeks just to walk around. “As a defense attorney it grew even more intense,” he recalls. “I’d been dealing with drugs, gangs, killings. I worked with prisoners, and talking to them I saw there was a deep spiritual hunger. Everybody was looking for God. It was the missing piece, like it is in all our lives.”

And then one day in 1994, in the midst of a trial, Jeremiah finally decided it was time. Later in the day he called Fr. Brian Paulson, SJ, then the vocations director for the Chicago Province, and told him he wanted to enter the Society. “I’ve been bending

toward that end all along,” Jeremiah says. “It’s been my trajectory. Where I was headed. I sensed it all along.”

The “bending” went way beyond the shift from prosecution to defense in Jeremiah’s life. He also became more and more involved in the community when he opened his own



GRATITUDE

from Fr. Jeremiah Lynch, SJ

Gratitude is the currency of

spiritual life and remains the only genuine lasting debt as well. I give gratitude to God for everything at this moment in my life. The list could begin with the most basic thing, that I’m here at this moment today. It would then include everything that I have been given, especially my family and the Faith rooted there, and everything that has happened to me, from the most beautiful to the most painful. When I look back through my life and remember the many wonderful people along the way, I sense that God has been there, affirming me all along, and leading me, even dragging me when necessary, toward what is life-giving for myself and others. To help others lift up their eyes to their true image and its Maker, to an awareness of their only real selves, is something that I hope God will now give me the graces to do. God means for everyone to stand up. All is gift. Gratias Agamus Domino Deo Nostro! Dignum et Justum Est!

practice. “A lot of it was legal advice,” he recalls, “and then people started to say, ‘hey, if you’ve got a problem, go see Lynch.’” And so he became a counselor to many in the neighborhood, fielding questions about drugs, gangs, relationships, and myriad other topics.

“Jeremiah has done a lot of things in his life where he was basically trying to help people,” Nancy says. “He’s been a mentor and a counselor. He’s helped kids get through school. He’s like a father for lost causes.”

Jeremiah told his dad he’d decided to enter the Jesuits on a park bench in Chicago’s Humboldt Park. His dad Daniel says “Jeremiah was talking about what a beautiful day it was, blue sky, beautiful trees, the lagoon. And then he says, ‘Dad, I’m going to become a Jesuit.’ You’ve got to remember, he’s already had all kinds of careers, so I said, ‘What in the world are you going to do in the Jesuits?’ and he answered right away, ‘whatever God wants.’”

In the fall of 1994 Jeremiah arrived at Loyola House, the Jesuit novitiate in Berkley, MI and began his life as a Jesuit. The years in the novitiate were, he says, a true gift. “I had an opportunity to pull the plugs out of the wall and examine where my life had been going, where I’d been, who I was. You can’t just do that if you’ve got to go work and pay the bills. It was an incredible opportunity.” And for Jeremiah, the time to slow down and reflect was invaluable. He came to the Jesuits later than most. He was 44. And anyone who knows him says he’s usually stuck in fast forward, getting more done than seems humanly possible and lighting up rooms full of people along with the way with his sharp wit and brilliant sense of humor.

The same summer Jeremiah entered the novitiate, thousands of Cuban “rafters” were granted amnesty and allowed into the United States. Somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000 Cubans had left the island nation and taken to the seas on makeshift rafts months earlier after



According to his father, Jeremiah used to hold “make believe mass” in their home. Here he stands on the altar for the first time as a priest.

Fidel Castro opened the door for them to depart. Few of them made it to the U.S. Most were rescued by the Coast Guard, however, and taken to Guantanamo Bay, though thousands remain missing, presumably lost at sea. The U.S. agreed, after some deliberation, to admit the Cubans incrementally, 500–1,000 per week over the course of a year. Groups of them were sent to various cities around the United States. One such group landed in Detroit, not far from the Jesuit novitiate. Jeremiah’s ministry in the novitiate involved ministering to these newly arrived people. He worked with 16 new Cuban refugees as they struggled to learn English, find jobs, and adjust to life in the United States.

Fr. Gary Wright, SJ, now director of University Ministry at University of Detroit Mercy, was Jeremiah’s novitiate director for two years and recalls a comment Jeremiah made after a novitiate experiment which involved him working in prison ministry. “He told me about how his attitudes and feelings toward those who had run afoul of the law had changed

through the different stages in his life, as he worked first as an attorney in the Prosecutor’s office in Chicago, then in the Public Defender’s office, and finally in prison ministry. He said at first he had prosecuted these people as if they were his enemy, then he defended them and began to know their difficult lives, now he was visiting them as a minister and seeing their spiritual need. Finally, he had realized his common humanity with them. ‘I know now, I am one of them,’ he said.”

After completing the novitiate, Jeremiah went to Loyola University’s Jesuit First Studies Program in Chicago. While there he continued his ministry to the Cuban rafters, working with a group who’d been placed in Chicago. He continued this ministry, too, during his theology studies in Cambridge, MA, often visiting Cuba to deliver videotaped messages to the families of the rafters. “It was like they’d come home,” he says of these meetings. “Their families would throw parties and hold celebrations and every one would gather around the TV to watch the videos.”

Due to the extensive graduate work Jeremiah had already completed, he spent only one year at Loyola before beginning his regency in Piura, Peru, where he taught English and Philosophy for two years at St. Ignatius High School. He spent the third year of regency at St. Xavier High School in Cincinnati, teaching a community service class and working in the school's community service office. From Cincinnati, Jeremiah enrolled at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, MA, where he studied for three years, and earned an M.Div, Masters of Divinity degree.

Jeremiah says he feels "tremendous gratitude" toward his family, friends, and the many benefactors of the Society of Jesus. "I was running a business," he says. "I had to pay bills, pay employees, and then all of that comes out of the wall and I get nine years of education and formation to develop my faith and reasoning abilities, and I get to serve in Latin America. The generosity of others is a tremendous gift. I've met many of our benefactors. I pray for them. Without them, we Jesuits couldn't do this. They help us serve. They're key."

After his ordination, Jeremiah will continue his work with the Hispanic population at St. Procopius Parish in Chicago. Jim Collins, SJ, a Jesuit scholastic who recently completed his first year of studies at Weston, met Jeremiah in the novitiate. "I really admire how Jeremiah has handled the discernment process for his new assignment. St. Ignatius would be proud of his disponability. He's said to me, 'I'll do whatever is for the greater good,'" and, Jim says, Jeremiah has "a great passion to serve people who are voiceless in one way or another."

Fr. Michael Cooper, SJ, assistant to the president for university ministry and director of Catholic Jewish studies at St. Leo University in St. Leo, FL, was superior at Loyola University's Gonzaga House when Jeremiah was in First Studies there. "I think he'll be an excellent priest," Fr. Cooper says.



Becoming a priest fit "hand in glove" with Bernie's family traditions. He's pictured here with his family: Kent and Kathy Oliver, his brother-in-law and sister, Sheila, his sister, and his mother Marcella.

"He's healthy. He's very concerned with others. He's not self serving. He's a man of total integrity who's willing to stand up for others. I've seen him do it. In Ignatian language, he 'did not count the cost.' He has great concern for the poor, for the immigrants, for the underdog. I think those things point to a guy who brings a compassion and quality to his ministry, because of the quality person he is."

It is his compassion and passion to serve that unites him with the past, with his Jesuit brothers. It's also a passion that will carry him into the future.

Fr. Bernie McAniff, SJ
A Compassionate and Caring Brother

"It fit hand in glove with many of my family's traditions," says Bernie McAniff, SJ, of his decision to enter the Society. Two of his uncles had been diocesan priests and education had long been a priority in the McAniff house. Though religious life seemed a perfect fit, it ultimately took Bernie almost 40 years to join the Society.

Bernie was born in Rochester, NY, in 1954, the youngest child of Marcella and Bernard F. McAniff. He was, according to his mother, "a likable child: sociable, friendly, and good in school." His older sister, Kathy Oliver, an assistant state superintendent of schools in Maryland, recalls him being "a typical little brother, always underfoot when boyfriends were around," but goes on to say he was also wise beyond his years, and blessed with a beautiful voice. Music was very much a part of Bernie's childhood. It seemed always to be playing in the house. Every Saturday, his father, an accountant, tuned in to the opera. And while Bernie played hockey and other sports as a boy, he was most attracted to music. Throughout his four years at Bishop Kearney High School in Rochester, he continued to pursue his musical interests, singing with a number of different choral groups.

During Bernie's senior year of high school, his father passed away after a long battle with lung cancer. Kathy remembers every one in the family struggling with his death, but



Bernie receives from the bishop a chalice of wine and a paten of bread, symbolic of those he will use in celebrating Mass

for Bernie it was especially difficult. He was the only son, and was living at home with his mother and older sister, Sheila, who is mentally disabled. Kathy says Bernie was always wonderful to Sheila. “He was a wonderful brother to her, very caring. They’re very close in age. I imagine it was tough having a sister so close in age who was different and required an awful lot of Bernie’s attention. Yet he’s always made an extra effort to include her and she adores him.” Kathy had just graduated from college and was living in Baltimore when their father died. “My dad’s death forced Bernie into the role of adult as an 18-year-old kid. He stepped in as the provider for my mom and my sister.”

He also finished high school and was accepted at Georgetown University, where he entered as a freshman in 1973. During his sophomore year, his mother was also diagnosed with cancer, and the doctors said it had metastasized to the lung. “Her impending death was fraught with dread for me,” says Bernie. He withdrew from Georgetown, returned to Rochester to “mind the store” as he

puts it, caring, as much as he could, for his mother and sister.

During these years he held down a number of jobs. He worked as a picture framer before taking a job working at the Genesee brewery—“a scurvy job,” he recalls. He worked nights filling kegs and sending them on their way. “Oddly enough,” he says, “a number of spiritual conversations transpired there—including one which led to my deepening conversion as a Christian. In 1977 I underwent a spiritual experience that shook my roots and made me think realistically about a vocation for the first time. The austerities of the night shift in a brew house overlooking the falls of the Genesee River proved a backdrop for God’s creative meddling in my life. I get choked up thinking about those days. I read C.S. Lewis till the cows came home. I began to relish Mass with a greater gusto.”

Still, it would be 15 years before Bernie would pursue this call. He eventually quit the brewery and took a job working in photographic research at Eastman Kodak, the largest employer in Rochester. All the while,

he continued to live at home, read voraciously, and care for his family. His mother’s cancer, seemingly miraculously, went into remission.

He would continue to work at Kodak, in various capacities, until he entered religious life, but far more important than his work at Kodak, he says, was the young adult choir at Old St. Mary’s Church, which he joined in 1979. The choir gave Bernie an opportunity to sing, to once again participate in the beauty of music. It was also, he says, a life-giving experience. “In the choir I was part of a fairly tight group of young Catholics. That was a good way for me to live out my faith at the time.” Bernie’s choir members factor significantly into his decision to pursue a religious vocation. “Vocations often come out of small groups of committed people,” he says, “and this group was always affirming toward other people’s career plans.”

Julie Weidman, a close friend of Bernie’s who also sang in the choir at St. Mary’s, says that during those years she came to know him “as an intuitive man who’s a good listener. He connects. He makes a quick connection with people. He’s funny. He’s bright. He has a great sense of humor. He’s always worked toward learning more. He’s always been devout.” She goes on to say, “I think he made the right choice entering the Jesuits. We, the people who know him, will be better for it. So, too, will the people he’ll be working with in his ministry, be better for it.”

In the late ‘80s Bernie began taking classes at Nazareth College in Rochester. He graduated in 1989, and once again found himself seriously contemplating religious life. He soon entered the Congregation of St. Basil, a teaching order in the United States and Canada. From 1989–1990, Bernie taught at St. Thomas High School in Houston, TX. The following year he taught at Andrean High School in Gary, IN.

A.J. Lychy was a candidate for the Basilians at the same time as Bernie and they became close friends. A.J.,

who has left religious life and now lives with his wife in Ontario, Canada, wasn't at all surprised when Bernie joined the Jesuits. "He knew the Basilians weren't the right order for him. Then he almost joined an abbey outside of Boston. He almost became a monk. But he decided he wanted to be a Jesuit. He wanted to be in the world working with people."

Ironically it was Bernie's Basilian assignment in Gary, IN, that turned him on to the Chicago Province and the wider Society of Jesus. While he'd first come in contact with the Jesuits during his freshman year at Georgetown, he got to know them better through Fr. Tom Widner, SJ, who was assigned to the spiritual life center in Hammond, IN, at that time. Bernie came to Fr. Widner for spiritual direction and found that he liked a lot about the Society of Jesus.



GRATITUDE

from Fr. Bernie McAniff, SJ

In terms of gratitude, I think of the Easter Vigil. We are led out of darkness into God's wonderful light. And led by someone. So many have guided me. I loved Sister Lucetta, SSND, my eighth grade teacher. So much wisdom behind her brown eyes. Her loving gaze will stay with me always. At Georgetown, having advisor Michael Foley proved a blessing. He could provoke, and he could cajole. He died young of a heart attack. Mike urged me to make something of my life. Equally influential was a musician, Thomas Donohue of Eastman. He directed our choir. He served as spiritual father as much as director. Windows of opportunity that evoke thanks, too. The Society invites us to ever deepening integrity, beginning with the novitiate. And that quest, however sketchy at the outset, takes shape through direction and other venues. And finally good times: meeting complete strangers with Meconi in Oxford and St. Andrew's; joking with Jeremiah Lynch; being competitive in a healthy way; seeing who can outdo the other in making friends and giving cheer. Deo gratias.

"Jesuits have a school of spirituality, a particular way of proceeding," Bernie says. "It was given as a gift to Ignatius, has been developed, and passed down through the Society. It enlivens and undergirds Jesuit life. I think it's great to share an approach to the interior life." In the Jesuits he found just that, and in 1992 he became a Jesuit when he entered the novitiate in Berkley, MI, with David Meconi, also one of this year's ordinands.

Years later, Fr. Widner, now director of communications at the United States Jesuit Conference, says, "Bernie believes in himself, in the people with whom he associates, in the Church, and in the Society. He will make a good priest."

The novitiate was a "sacred place and time" for Bernie. After two years there, he went to Loyola University Chicago, where he spent three years studying philosophy and theology in the Jesuit First Studies Program. Every Jesuit engaged in studies is also expected to fulfill ministerial commitments. For all three years of the program, Bernie served at Misericordia, a residential care facility for people challenged by physical and mental disabilities. Bernie, who'd also spent a few months working at Misericordia during the novitiate, says "I think I can enter their world a little more easily because of my family background." He spent a great deal of time at Misericordia; often-times just hanging out with resi-



"I'm awed as I get closer to priesthood," Bernie said just before his ordination, "and consoled when I'm able to take communion to people." He's shown here with David and other Jesuits distributing the Eucharist.

dents, watching TV, going bowling, or playing basketball. Bernie sees his sister, Sheila, whenever he goes home, but says, in a way, he was serving her through his work at Misericordia. "She'll always be my sister. Wherever I am, I live out part of my duties to her, particularly in the way I interact with others."

After completing First Studies, Bernie moved on to St. Xavier High School in Cincinnati for his regency. He taught freshman and sophomore English all three years and also served as moderator of the mock trial team. Donnell Kelly was a freshman in Bernie's English class in the 1998-1999 school year. He recalls Bernie being "a great teacher. He was soft-spoken, but he was a really good teacher and always made an effort to include everyone in what he was doing."

Every student at St. X participates in an interview some time between his sophomore and junior years. The interviews are designed to give the student time to reflect on how he's been moving toward the Jesuit educational ideals. Bernie offered to do Donnell's interview when he learned it had somehow slipped through the cracks over the summer. "He came down to my neighborhood, Over-the-Rhine," Donnell recalls. "It's one of the worst neighborhoods in Cincinnati. He didn't seem scared. He didn't smirk about where I lived either. I was nervous about him coming down to my area and seeing where I lived. But we did the interview. He met my grandmother for the first time and she really enjoyed him." Donnell goes on to say that Bernie is going to make an "excellent priest because he's a very sincere, caring and genuine person." Donnell says he, too, hopes to one day teach. He's just finished his sophomore year at Oberlin College where he majors in religion and French.

Dotti Wagner, whose son John also studied under Bernie, echoed Donnell's sentiments. She says he was a marvelous teacher and believes he'll make a good priest because "he's a



"Bernie is a very kind and gentle person. He's a very good listener. He always listened to me as a parent," says Dotti Wagner, shown here congratulating Bernie after ordination. Dotti's son, John (pictured in the background with Cindy Fazio, St. X's mock trial attorney), was one of Bernie's students at St. Xavier High School.

very kind and gentle person. He's a very good listener. He always listened to me as a parent. He listens to the boys. He listens, and goes through the information he hears, and makes good decisions because of it. It's a really good trait to have. You get an awful lot of knowledge that way."

Fr. Bill Verbryke, SJ, who was president at St. X High School when Bernie was a regent there, adds that "Bernie has a true interest in people. He remembers things about them. He has a great sense of humor. These qualities will translate directly to his ministry."

After completing his regency Bernie traveled to Israel to study scripture for the summer at Ecole Biblique. Earlier in his formation he traveled to Peru with other novices, and also traveled to China during First Studies to teach English. Reflecting on these opportunities and the course of his formation he says, "As I look back on 11 years of formation, I can't say enough in the way of gratitude to people who have funded my day-to-day living, education, and the trips to Peru, Israel, and

China that have made me a broader minded person."

After studies in Israel, Bernie moved to Cambridge, MA, and Weston Jesuit School of Theology, where he spent three years and earned an M. Div. He also preached and worked at St. Ann's Parish in Quincy, MA. "I'm awed as I get closer to priesthood," Bernie said just before his ordination, "and consoled when I'm able to take communion to people. I look forward to the day when I can celebrate other sacraments, notably Eucharist, and reconciliation."

Marcella, Bernie's mom, says she is "proud, proud, proud," of her son. "Bernie is happy and when a son is happy, a mother is happy." She adds that Bernie "enjoys the fundamental thoughtfulness of the Jesuits. He has a great belief in God and he enjoys fostering education. That's right up his alley."

In the fall Bernie will begin working for an M.Ed. in school administration at Harvard. It won't be long, though, before he's serving in a Jesuit school, where he already seems to fit like a glove.

Fr. David Meconi, SJ
Making Human Contacts

He was a good little kid," says Phyllis Braganini, mother of David Meconi, SJ. David's older sister, Anne Brancheau, takes it a step further, "He was a great kid, extraordinary if you ask me." She goes on to say that David is a wonderful uncle to her three children, Ben, Samuel, and Sarah. "They love him. He's crazy Uncle Dave. Whenever he calls, they all crowd around the phone to hear what he's saying, even if he's just shouting German words at them."

As David neared ordination, people everywhere, his family, friends, and fellow Jesuits all said "he'll make a great priest." While he's a tremendously gifted scholar, who will study next year at Oxford University and has already published articles in numerous scholarly journals, it's not the academics people are talking about. Rather it's his ability to relate to people, to make connections with students, his nieces and nephews, his mother, the many lay people he encounters in his ministry, and fellow Jesuits from the U.S. and around the world.

Fr. Peter Ryan, SJ, an associate professor of theology at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, MD, and a good friend of David's, says with "unmixed enthusiasm" that "we need priests who can connect on the human level with typical lay people, and David is a natural at that. He's a steady, well-integrated man whom people look up to. And he has a great zeal for souls. This was evident during his time in regency at Xavier University, when with the help of Fr. Matt Gamber, SJ, he invited students to participate in Mass, penance, and Eucharistic Adoration. The student response was quite remarkable. Indeed, stunning. One reason was surely that the students understandably looked up to Dave. They were attracted to him because he is so personable, joyful, and zealous. But Dave is not interested in adulation. He used his gifts to attract students not to him-

self but to the Lord Jesus Christ and his holy Catholic Church."

David grew up in Paw Paw, a small town in Western Michigan, where his family still runs the St. Julian Winery. Even as a boy who loved cracking people up with practical jokes, David demonstrated a desire to serve others, to help other people. "When he was in school, my mom would get mad at him because he was always giving his things away," recalls his sister Anne. "There were some kids around Paw Paw that didn't have much. If Dave thought they didn't have a winter jacket, he'd give them his. There was one boy he sort of adopted. He just brought him over to the house, opened his closet doors and said 'take whatever you need.'"

David shoveled sidewalks and mowed the lawns of elderly neighbors very often for little, if any, money. He and one of his closest friends in high school set up an intramural sports league for Paw Paw grade schoolers because they didn't think the kids had much to do. The

league continues today. David was well liked by his peers. He played football and baseball, finished very near the top of his class and was voted homecoming king his senior year.

In 1983 he enrolled at Hope College in Holland, MI. Three and a half years later, he graduated with a degree in economics and a minor in religious studies. Thoughts of a religious vocation crossed David's mind from time to time in college. At one point, his mother says, he returned from school and said matter of factly, "I'm going to be a priest."

After graduation, though, he moved to Chicago and clerked for S&P 500 futures trading at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. "It was the late 80s. Reagan was president. Things with the economy were good," David says, recalling the time he spent at the "Merc." Even though he was making what his sister Anne describes as "really good money," David wasn't excited about what he was doing.



"The students understandably looked up to Dave," says Peter Ryan, SJ, of David, shown here with many of the students with whom he worked at Xavier University. "He used his gifts to attract students not to himself but to the Lord Jesus Christ and his holy Catholic Church."

(Front row) Gretchen Lieb, Christian Waugh with daughter Celeste Marie, Rebecca Johnson; (standing) Arica Little, Mark Niswonger, Pete Schmid, Sarah Dorff, Steve Parfatt, David Meconi, SJ; (middle row right) Lisa Leyendecker, Cailin Hogan, John Leyendecker; (back row right) Chad Engelland, Jennifer Waugh, and David Endres.

“I liked it there,” he says, “but not for the right reasons.” In what may have been the first concrete step towards a religious vocation, David found himself drawn to the Church and began attending daily Mass at the Cathedral in Chicago. “I felt like Moses,” David says: “Today I set before you life and death.’ There was comfort, money, and wealth at the Merc. Then when I was at Mass I saw all these people who wouldn’t even be allowed on the observation deck at the Merc, much less on the floor: the homeless, the poor, the old, and the stinky. I knew one could become a saint working on the floor of the Merc but I also knew I wasn’t one of them.”

He left his job in 1987 and began work on an MA in theology at Yale University. In the spring semester he transferred to Notre Dame University. In the fall of 1988, he transferred again, this time to Marquette University, where he soon met Fr. Donald J. Keefe, SJ, a professor of theology. “He was the first Catholic intellectual I’d ever met, a man who was available for students and knew the tradition



David is pictured here with his family, who traveled from Paw Paw to celebrate his ordination: nephew Vincent Meconi, mother Phyllis Braganini, brother Mark Meconi, niece Sarah Brancheau, sister Anne Brancheau, nephew Samuel Brancheau, brother-in-law John Brancheau, niece Aubrey Meconi and nephew Benjamin Brancheau.

backwards and forwards. He took his life seriously as a priest and as an academic. I’d never seen a priest who didn’t have a parish,” David recalls. “That life was attractive to me. He was a tremendous influence.”

Under the guidance of Fr. Keefe, David poured himself into his studies. He was amazed by the breadth of knowledge displayed by his classmates. He worked side by side with them during the day. After class he’d go see Fr. Keefe. “He caught me up on 2,000 years of philosophy. I had to read every night to catch up with the other guys.” Fr. Keefe also became a close friend of David’s and his spiritual director.

“I’ll remain eternally grateful to him,” David says of Fr. Keefe, who is now professor emeritus of theology at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, MI. In fact, in a gesture of gratitude and respect, David asked Fr. Keefe to vest him during the ordination liturgy. Some of David’s gratitude no doubt comes from an encounter which took place just after he’d finished his degree at Marquette. “I was thinking about religious life,” David says, “but I had a full ride to go to the University of Toronto for a Ph.D. in theology. I had my bags

packed, the car loaded up, and I was literally pulling out of town, when I stopped by to see Fr. Keefe. ‘Why are you going to lock yourself into a program for six years?’ he asked me. ‘If you’re serious about the priesthood, then don’t go somewhere you can’t think about it for six years.’” Fr. Keefe suggested instead that David go study for a year in Rome.

“Rome?”

He had his bags packed to go to Toronto. But Fr. Keefe told him he could help him find classes to take at the various theology schools in Rome. And David had family in Faleria, a town not far from Rome. Two weeks later he was on a plane. To Europe, not Toronto.

One of the first people David met there was Fr. Peter Ryan, who was also studying theology at the time. “He put me over the edge,” David says of Fr. Ryan. “Talking to him about who the Jesuits were, and my own prayer life. He was convincing.” He also became David’s spiritual director. “It’s amazing,” David recalls, “you’re looking, you’re looking, and then God just puts the right people in your life.”

He spent a year in Rome and then came back to the States, where he



Jesuits Walter Deye, Bill Verbryke, and Fran Daly lay their hands on the heads of Bernie, Jeremiah, and David.

studied for one more year before entering the Jesuit novitiate, Loyola House, in 1992. In his second year there, David was assigned to St. Ignatius College Prep in Chicago for his “long experiment”. He helped teach Greek and Latin there. The experience was, for him, a powerful one. David worked closely with Frank Raispis, a long-time classics teacher at the school. He found in Frank a powerful affirmation of his own vocation. “He was really the one that convinced me this is what I wanted to do with my life: spend it teaching kids in the Jesuit tradition. He was doing exactly what I wanted to do.”

After completing the novitiate and taking first vows, David moved on to the Jesuit First Studies Program at Loyola University Chicago, where, because of the many classes he’d taken prior to entering the Society, he was able to continue teaching at St. Ignatius while working on a further philosophy degree with Fr. Leo Sweeney, SJ, a now deceased Loyola University philosophy professor.

David completed the First Studies Program in two years and then began a four-year regency teaching undergraduate philosophy, Latin, and Greek at Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH. “I didn’t want to go at first,” he says, “but after a semester I was hooked. I loved it. The ability to engage students more earnestly in terms of their life choices appealed to me. Everyone has to go to high school, but once people get to college you can start to ask them more serious questions. ‘Why are you here? Who are you gonna marry? Why? When?’”

Joe Mordente, a theology teacher and track coach at Montini Catholic High School in Lombard, IL, met David at Marquette. They became close friends and Joe, who says he was “overjoyed” when he learned that David had decided to become a priest, later visited Xavier University while David was completing his regency. He says that while teaching a full load of philosophy courses, David had also helped organize

weekly mass and confession because he wanted to set the students “hearts on fire with the Catholic faith.” Joe goes on to say that during his visit “there must have been 60 kids who attended Holy Mass at 9:00 P.M. on a Thursday night and a dozen or more who went to confession. Everywhere we walked on campus that weekend students would either hail Dave from afar or come running over to say hello, wanting to be in his company even for a moment. How they loved him. It was like seeing a modern day re-enactment of John 10: 1-21. I thought, ‘he is to them—in a certain sense—their ‘good shepherd’.”

During his regency, David connected with Fr. Richard Tomasek, SJ, director of spiritual formation of the seminarians in the theology school of the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, OH, who became his spiritual director. Fr. Tomasek says David is “bright, and funny, committed to the faith, and committed to the Society of Jesus.” But the reason he’ll make a

“great priest,” according to Fr. Tomasek is “because he can meet people both in their strengths and joys and in their weaknesses and sorrows, and also because he loves the Lord and is zealous to help people know and follow the Lord. It helps that he is a great teacher and preacher besides.”

During summer 2000, David traveled to Berlin, where he studied German for “28 hours a day.” He was preparing for theology studies, which he was slated to begin in the fall at Jesuitenkolleg, a Jesuit theology school in Innsbruck Austria. In three years in Innsbruck, David completed an S.T.L., the licentiate in sacred theology, and also published a number of scholarly articles.

The experience in Innsbruck was profound. David says he was blessed to be part of an extremely prayerful community. “We had daily Mass, and daily prayer. Every couple months we did a weekend of silence. It was a real highlight for me to live with guys from Romania, Hungary, and Poland, guys who



GRATITUDE

from Fr. David Meconi, SJ

“You see, a good burp is to the rumbling stomach what praise is to the satisfied heart!” St. Augustine’s comparison here (Sermon 255) captures not only the “earthiness” of late antiquity but a timeless truth as well: When we take care to notice how God has filled our days with his goodness, we will do nothing other than praise and thank him. For all earthly beings are invitations to divine friendship and when I look at my life, I am astounded to see how God has blessed me with his fidelity, with so many incredibly beautiful friends, and with a Jesuit vocation which allows me to serve the Lord and his family in so many ways. Priestly ordination is a time to look at one’s life, and I can’t help but smile and thank Jesus Christ for deigning to need us and to rely on us to bring him to others.



"He was really the one that convinced me this is what I wanted to do with my life," says David of long-time St. Ignatius College Prep teacher Frank Raispis, "spend it teaching kids in the Jesuit tradition. He was doing exactly what I wanted to do."

know what it's like to be beaten up for the faith."

"Since arriving in Innsbruck," he says, "I've been explicitly praying for benefactors. Being there was such a great opportunity. I've only grown in my gratitude. In adolescence you very often don't know where food comes from. You just expect it to be there. As you get older, you learn to appreciate where things come from. Benefactors and supporters have become more and more important as time has passed and I've become more attentive and thankful."

During fall 2002, David's mom Phyllis, his sister Anne, and his brother Mark, traveled to Innsbruck for his ordination to the diaconate. Anne says she was struck by the genuine kindness of David's Jesuit brothers in Austria. "Everyone was so friendly and welcoming. The Jesuits are a great bunch of people."

His mother echoes the same sentiments. "The Jesuits seem to be the finest people; so dedicated, so holy, so happy to serve. I can't think of any better place for Dave."

David will spend this summer serving at St. Xavier Parish in Cincinnati, OH, before once again heading overseas, this time to Oxford, Eng-

land, where he'll pursue a Ph.D. in theology. His specialty is the fourth century and he's already working on a book about an obscure form of Christian poetry. "We're so proud of him," his mother says.

David, for his part, is excited about his ordination. Throughout formation, he says, the greatest grace has

been "the ability to serve others. To be known and identified as a Jesuit opens doors in other people's lives. It's a privilege. People ask for prayers and spiritual direction. They ask you to help them see God. There's not much better than that." Since his ordination to the diaconate in October, he's done a few baptisms. "I've gotten a taste of what it's like, people asking you to assist in what's probably the most important event up to that point in their lives and I hope the priesthood will be a continuation of those experiences and even more significant experiences."

On June 14, 2003, as David, Bernie, and Jeremiah, lay prostrate before the altar, they gave themselves fully to their lives of service in the Society of Jesus. Each of them has already served greatly, both as Jesuit and layman. Now they're priests. Their service will continue, and expand, and grow. Their ordination marks the beginning of a new era for the Chicago Province, which will, like its three new priests, continue and expand its service to the People of God in the years to come. ■



As a gesture of gratitude and respect David chose Donald Keefe, SJ, to vest him during the ordination ceremony. Bernie (third from left) chose Bill Verbryke, SJ, and Jeremiah (who is not pictured) chose Michael Cooper, SJ.