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Deacon Christian Galvan is interviewed at Spirit FM 90.5 Studios in April. His ordination to the priesthood is scheduled for Saturday, May 20, 2023, at the Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle in St. Petersburg. All are invited! Photo by Keishla Espinal

An Interview with Deacon Christian (and His Parents)

April 18, 2023 | Below is a partial transcript from an interview with soon-to-be ordained Deacon Christian Galvan and his parents, Fred Galvan, and Rosie Gonzalez. John Morris, Station Manager at Spirit FM, conducted the interview.

An Interview with Deacon Christian Galvan, Your Future Priest

We are right on the cusp of your ordination, what is going through your mind as we approach the big day?

Many thoughts and emotions are running through my mind as we get closer to the day of my ordination. It has been a wonderful journey up to this point, and every time I come home to the Diocese and serve at the Cathedral or my home parish of St. Stephen, everyone is so excited. Meeting people who cannot wait to celebrate with me at my Ordination has been a great gift. After six and a half years of seminary, academics, and formation, it becomes more and more real.

When did you first feel like God was calling you to the priesthood?

I think the call was always there, somewhere subconsciously. I was involved in multiple ministries at my home parish, St. Stephen, including being an altar server, lector, and choir member. When I was in my teens, people would often ask me if I had considered becoming a priest, but I had my life plan set on being a civil engineer, working in construction, and owning my own business. It wasn't until I was about 25 or 26 years old when I attended an ordination for the first time and saw the class of 2015 from our Diocese be ordained that I realized this was something I hadn't considered before, but should I even dare to consider it?

Why did you go to the Ordination Mass?

I was part of the choir at St. Stephen at the time, and we had one of the newly ordained assigned to St. Stephen as a deacon that summer, and we also knew that one of the newly ordained was coming to St. Stephen as his first assignment. So, the choir had a vested interest in sending people.

When you were there, did you get this overwhelming sense that maybe this was for you?

Absolutely. An ordination liturgy is powerful, moving, and beautiful. I could not help but acknowledge the fact that the Lord might be calling me to something different.

Were you raised Catholic?

Yes, I was born in Medford, New Jersey, and my family moved to the Tampa area when I was three. My baptism photos and everything from my home parish in New Jersey are the only memories I have of it. I was baptized as an infant and raised attending church. My family encouraged me to stay active in our church.

What were your parents' reaction when you told them, "Hey, I want to become a priest"?

They were not surprised at all. In fact, they often joked, saying, "Christian, one day you're either going to be a politician or a priest." But no, they weren't surprised. I think when I told my mom and dad, it took them some time to process, but I think that's pretty expected for any parent. When they realized it, I think they weren't surprised either. They knew in the depths of their heart.

Where did you go to college?

I went to the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. I was even a part of the Glee Club. I remember auditioning for that on my first day on campus and just thought, "I've been singing for so long. Let me give this a shot, and who knows, maybe these guys are much better than I am. They know what they're doing." But no, they took me in, and the four years singing with the Glee Club offered me so many great opportunities, traveling the country and the globe. We would do tours all over the place. Some of my fondest memories are from singing with them. I also got involved with different liturgical ministries and campus ministries. Notre Dame was a time when I really fell in love with the idea of ministering in the church.

Some people say they go to university and leave their faith, whether it's Boston College, the University of Notre Dame, or any other Catholic institution. Did you have any challenges in your faith while away at college?

Well, I would say that there are definitely challenges, of course, but having the sacramental presence on campus helped. Having all the sacraments available to us multiple times a day, Sunday Masses in the beautiful Basilica of the Sacred Heart there. The challenges still come, but to be in a place that fosters such devotion, and such love really made it very easy to stay grounded. In fact, one of the places I loved praying when things got really difficult was the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes there; it's a replica of the Grotto in France.

Was it at Notre Dame where you thought, "OK, I want to become a priest"?

The thought came up, but it was Spring 2009, right after the big recession of 2008, so all of us were kind of worrying about what future employment looked like. Engineering future hires from our class really did take a hit that year. And I think there was a time where I was even considering the priesthood through the Congregation of Holy Cross, which is the founding order of the university. I attended one of their information nights that are right there on campus. It just didn't seem like that was the call right then and there. And that would have been a different discernment altogether.

So that recession hit, and you really weren't sure what you were going to be doing?

No, in fact, only a third of my graduating class got jobs after that recession. So, there was a kind of a pull to do something different. The Congregation of Holy Cross has come-and-see weekends and vocational events that they always invite the college guys to, and I remember attending one of them, especially during this time of wondering what's my future going to look like. I did not feel the

certainty of the call to priesthood then, not in religious life or not at that particular time. It almost felt like if I would have discerned priesthood, it would have been like some backup plan to my life. I think, even though I couldn't articulate that at the time, I think in my heart of hearts, I knew that that's not what a vocation to the priesthood is. So no, I think I stayed the course and after graduation, came back home and attended University of Tampa for two years and studied full time for my MBA.

What was your work experience?

I worked as a project engineer in Tampa for two years, designing water and wastewater systems. Then, for three years, I worked for a local contractor as a project manager, building cell phone towers.

During that time, my focus was more on achieving financial independence and saving money than considering going to seminary. While I did save up some money, it was an entry-level salary, so it wasn't great.

Interestingly, many priests in our diocese have had secular careers before entering the priesthood, including our bishop. It's funny how God calls us at different times in our lives, and how our experiences can prepare us for our future vocations.

I firmly believe, John, that that there is no wasted experience that the Lord guides us through everything that has happened in our life will always serve us in the future.

As for how my background in construction, management, and civil engineering will serve me in a parish down the road, I may not be building cell towers, but I've learned a lot about managing projects and teams, and the importance of collaboration and bringing in experts when needed.

What do you look forward to most about the priesthood?

What I look forward to most about the priesthood is celebrating the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and being with the people - hearing their stories and having the privilege and honor of being in the person of Christ to hear their confessions and celebrate Mass for them. As a soon to be parochial vicar, I'm excited to assist in various aspects of parish life, such as school, finance, and pastoral care. I believe that the diverse experiences I've had will be beneficial in preparing me for these roles. Ultimately, I look forward to using the gifts and talents that God has given me wherever I am assigned.

Who will be vesting you on Ordination Day?

There will be two priests who will vest me on my Ordination Day, both of whom I love and deeply admire. The first is Msgr. John Cippel, a dear brother and friend of mine who just turned 90 years old in our diocese. The other is Father Mark Thesing, a Holy Cross priest and the rector of my dorm hall at Notre Dame. He has known me for half of my life since he met me when I was just a shy 18-year-old freshman. I am truly honored and blessed to have them by my side on such a special day.

Is there anyone you would like to acknowledge during this time?

Absolutely. First and foremost, I want to acknowledge God for calling me to this amazing life, despite my unworthiness. I also want to express my gratitude to my family, including my mom, dad, Rosie Gonzales, Fred Galvan, my brothers and sisters, and my entire extended family. Furthermore, I am grateful for the parish priests who have been a part of my life, including Monsignor Pat Irwin, Father Bill Swing, Father Dermot Dunne, Father Bob Schneider, and my brother seminarians. Although there are too many to list, I am thankful that so many of them will be with me to celebrate my Ordination Day in May.

Who is your Confirmation Saint?

My Confirmation Saint is St. Charles Garnier, one of the North American martyrs. He had passion and zeal, and ultimately died absolving someone of their sins during the French and Indian War era. I love his zeal.

Might there be someone, maybe living today, that you admire?

I mean, certainly there are a lot of priests in our diocese that I admire, but I really love the ministry that Father Mike Schmitz does, especially with his "Bible in a Year" and "Catechism in a Year" programs. This is not a plug; I'm not getting paid to say it. But if they sent me a t-shirt, I would wear it. He's doing amazing work and has such great zeal.

What are your hobbies?

I like to sing and cook.

What is your favorite sports team?

The Tampa Bay Rays.

What kind of music do you like to listen to?

I am a child of the 90s, so I love listening to 90s ballads, 90s pop, and 80s rock. I also have some Bon Jovi and Aerosmith on my playlist. I enjoy a good power ballad! In terms of modern music, I like pop music such as Shawn Mendes, Ed Sheeran, and Camila Cabello.

Finally, you're laying prostrate on the floor of the cathedral. Everyone's praying, what's going through your mind?

When I'm laying prostrate on the floor of the cathedral and everyone is praying, what's going through my mind is that this is a moment of both heavenly and earthly community. I am surrounded by so many people in the community of saints who are lifting me up. I am grateful to God for the many virtues and acts of forgiveness that have been embodied in the saints, both living and deceased. It is a privileged place to be, and I am looking forward to it.

An Interview with Deacon Christian's Parents: Fred Galvan and Rossie Gonzâlez

Rosie, as a mom of a future priest in just a few days, how are you feeling?

It's overwhelming. It's something that you just think about, "Oh, okay. He's going to be a priest," but it's not just being a priest that matters. It's the whole package of what you are embracing, his journey and my journey as a mother, and Fred's journey as a father. So, it takes a lot of acceptance, a lot of knowing that this is God's will. As a mother, I have to step aside and allow the Lord to take over.

Fred, how are you feeling that your son is about to become a priest?

It was hard to accept it at first. You know, as a parent, you always hope for grandchildren, of course. But I knew that he was bound to be a priest from early childhood. I knew he had something special. I was born a Catholic, but I haven't followed the Church as well as I should have. But it was because of Christian when he stayed with me, he always wanted to go to church. He always wanted to be a server, and I took him, and I became closer to the Church because of him. All in all, when he told us he was going to want to be a priest, I always knew that he was going to be, as did Rosie. But now we have to accept it, and I had to take a little more time to step back. That means that at one time or another, we will have to tell him, "This is as far as we can take you. From now on, you go serve the Lord and do the best you can and be the best you can be."

What was Christian like when he was younger?

He was the life of the party, all the time. He was and is a happy child, teenager, young adult, and adult.

What kind of priest do you think Christian is going to be representing the Diocese?

"Christian has tremendous charisma. He's a very charismatic person. No matter where he goes or what church he serves, he will always bring the best of it to the top. His charisma just brings it," said Fred Galvan.

"Yes, his people skills are really remarkable. But he's also a visionary, and he worked very hard to be a planner. So now he is a planner. He didn't used to be a planner; he used to wait until the last minute. But now with these seven years of formation, he has added that to his already established skills," said Rossie Gonâzlez.

Have you had the opportunity to meet other parents of priests to kind of get a feel for what that will be like? I mean, it's almost like an exclusive club you guys are in.

"I have been fortunate enough to be close to some of the parents when we go to the seminary or when we have special liturgies to celebrate. When I was there, I asked them, 'How's it going for you now that your son has been a priest for a year?' And then they say, 'It is just a magnificent gift that you can receive. It has its ups and downs because they're always working. They hardly have time for themselves or to spend with the family, but it is a gift to see them giving themselves to the Lord,'" said Rosie Gonzâles.

Picture yourself. It is the day of the ordination. The last moment you see him. What do you think you'll say to him?

"I think we have taken you as far as we can. From now on, you go and serve the Lord and do a good job at it," said Fred Galvan.

"Go and be a good Shepard," said Rossie Gonzâlez.

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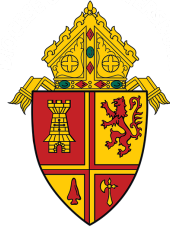


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