

FEATURE

Father Paul Jarvis

An interview with the Basilica's new associate pastor

By **Johan van Parys**

Johan van Parys Father Jarvis, please tell us a bit about your life before becoming a priest.

Fr. Paul Jarvis My parents' families hail from Faribault, Minnesota. When our family moved to Indiana with my father's transfer to a 3M facility in Hartford City, I was born "in exile" within a small Catholic community in Bible-belt Indiana. When I was 8, we returned to Minnesota, living in Woodbury. Since 1976, I've lived in St. Paul and wherever my travels and overseas studies have taken me.

After not quite graduating from the then-College of St. Thomas in 1981 I went to work as an intern with the Metropolitan Council. I found my niche, I thought, in communications. After a year, I started working at B.I. Performance Services (formerly Business Incentives) where I used whatever writing skills I had as a copy writer and, later on, as a creative director.

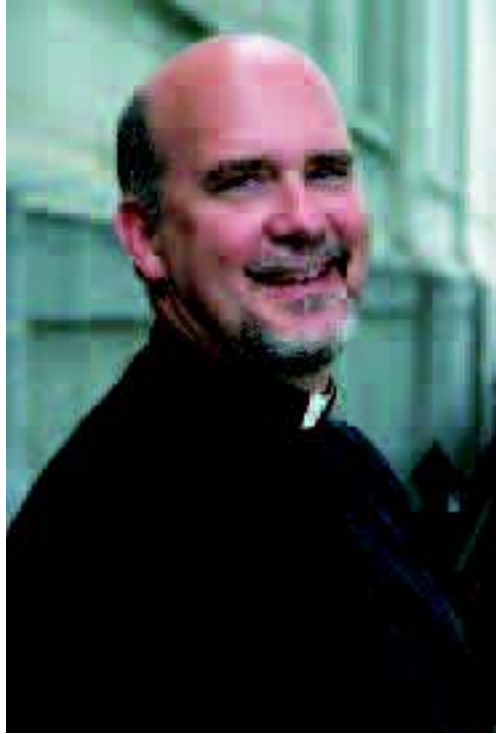
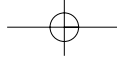
In retrospect, I figure I attempted to find and/or create personal meaning through my career. I was very much interested in colleagues' perceptions of me, feverishly seeking their appreciation and recognition. Eventually, this misplaced focus and energy helped earn our team an Oliver Award. The Oliver bills itself

sort of as the equivalent of an Oscar in the marketing communications field in this region.

I placed the Oliver on my desk. My hope was that visitors would see it and comment on it. When working late in the evening, I would typically look at the Oliver statue whenever I needed a jolt to work one more hour into the night. One night, at about 11:30 P.M., I wearily looked over at the Oliver, hoping for a jolt to keep me going, and — like an epiphany — it finally dawned on me: the thing was nothing more than a chunk of bronze. I remember the moaning cry — the yelp — I let out. All that work, all that life misspent on the wrong thing: approval and recognition. I remember just turning off my computer that night ... not even saving what I was working on. Getting up. And then walking to my car, wondering, with this dark enlightenment, "Well, now what?"

JvP Is that when you realized you were called to the priesthood?

PJ As a small child — I think around the age of eight — I had the sense I was called to serve as a priest. And yet I didn't want to become one. I remember looking up at my dad, and saying, "Please God, I don't want to become a



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path benefiting my current ministry. After leaving Macalester I went back to St. Thomas with my Macalester transcript, enrolled in some philosophy courses, and then asked if I would possibly merit a St. Thomas degree. I finally got my St. Thomas B.A. degree in 1999, 23 years after starting. That has to be a record for St. Thomas.

JvP So then you ended up in the seminary? How was that?

PJ Non-Catholic friends at Macalester College had tried to discourage me from attending a Catholic seminary because they thought the atmosphere was not open-minded nor were its seminarians. So I was pleasantly surprised to find that such was not the case. I found the seminarians at The St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity to be genuinely faith-filled,

hugely caring and very intelligent.

JvP After having been ordained over two years, what have you come to like the most about being a priest?

PJ Helping people act on their baptismal calling. I figure that if we had all 1.1 billion Catholic Christians acting on their baptismal calling as priest, prophet and leader, then we would have the world converted in short order to the Way ... the way of divine, unconditional love. We're not there ... yet. Some see a priest shortage when they look at the Church today. I see a hugely untapped reservoir of charisms within the entire Church. I think we live in very exciting, dynamic and creative times.

JvP Our times are a bit tumultuous. What, if anything can a priest contribute to our world?

PJ I see the Church as more than brick and mortar, more than institution, though it is both of these. I even see it as more than a society of people ... the People of God. I see it as the Way, a radically new and divinely revealed Way of seeing, thinking, speaking, hearing, feeling, acting, and believing. It is an even more real way of being than what is usually thought of as real. It is 'really' real living and being. It is not self-abnegation or self-destruction ... it is not even self-transcendence ... it is self-expansion: from "gods" to "God's" —

from false self to true Self — from "me" to "We".

A priest is one who is living the Way and hopefully leading others in the Way, following in the footsteps of the disciples. It is a sacramental ministry, it is a catechetical and evangelical ministry. It is also a ministry of service, and not only to the parish community at its various levels ... but also to the wider community. A servant-priest is not only giving or dispensing or loving; a servant-priest also receives. Also learns. Also grows.

The Way of Christ should and would respect other loving ways and wisdom. Disciples living the Way need to be in loving and respectful relationship with people living other ways ... for in its essence, the Way reveals the essential beauty and giftedness of each and every person. We disciples follow Christ and the awareness and Way he brought. We follow in the footsteps of the early disciples who imperfectly tried to live out this neither-conservative-nor-liberal Way.

JvP Where do you see the church going in the next 10 years?

PJ First of all, we are way, way, way overdue in reuniting the two lungs of the venerable Christian Church: the Eastern Church (Eastern Orthodoxy) and the Western Church (Roman Catholicism). It's truly a scandal, and counterproductive to the Mission, that the Christian Church remains handicapped by its current division. My hope is that every parishioner at the Basilica and at Ascension prays for Christian unity, sooner rather than later.

Second, I think we have much to learn from evangelical Christian denominations and Mormonism and certain Buddhist sects in the West. Without doing it simply as a numbers game, we Catholic Christians — all of us — need to be much stronger in evangelization and catechesis. I wholeheartedly believe that in evangelizing the unfamiliar and catechizing the familiar, the evangelist/catechist can be further evangelized and catechized ... further edified and educated ... and therefore more deeply converted.

JvP Father Jarvis, we wish you well as you minister at the Basilica. May we all come to find 'The Way.' ✚

priest. I want to be just like my dad — married, with kids, with a job." And so, in college, I jumped from major to major, later mindlessly pursuing career advancement and recognition ... finally ending up where I was always supposed to end up, in ordained ministry.

A few months after my better-late-than-never epiphany at BI, I went back to St. Thomas to see if I could complete my latest major's requirements. I was informed that I had to start all over again on another major. That meant I would have to start as a third year student again, probably graduating with more credits than any other undergrad in UST history. What got me looking elsewhere was the hugely increased tuition at St. Thomas and the lack of any break for an older, returning student just a few credits shy from graduating. I checked around, and ended up at Macalester College. I studied world religions in the Religious Studies department and had the most incredible professors.

Per a professor's advice, I took leaves of absence from Macalester and studied Tibetan culture, language and religion overseas in Nepal, for about a year, and, thanks to a Rotary Scholarship, I studied Catholic theology in Malta (south of Sicily) for about a year. I know it sounds like I wasn't exactly following the most direct of paths to my calling, but in retrospect, I see my meandering and unusual

