Fr. Christopher: Pastoral Vicar and Contemplative Christian

WRITTEN BY EMMA GABRIEL

Fr. Christopher Wetzel, O.P., joins St. Dominic’s following his ordination as a priest on June 22. Joining the Western Dominican Province as a novice in 2009, he currently serves as Pastoral Vicar, years after he also once served as a deacon for St. Dominic’s. He fills the role vacated by Fr. Augustine Highlander, who is now in Salt Lake City, Utah.

He’s happy to be back at St. Dominic’s and describes the fundamental role of religious life as contemplative. As a Dominican, however, he sees great value in engaging the world by preaching and engaging the laity. This helps explain Fr. Christopher’s devotion to St. Joseph, part of the Holy Family and described as helping with challenges and purity. He also tells us what St. Thomas Aquinas says about being contemplative or active.

“Life as a contemplative Christian is the highest form of living because, like beholding Christ in heaven, contemplating God in this life sets us upon the highest possible gain to be won for us,” he said. Fr. Christopher earned a degree in applied, computational mathematics and economics from the California Institute of Technology in 2006. After that, he worked for a defense contractor for two years. However, at some point, he felt a need to do more. He asked himself, “Why don’t I work for God?”

Fr. Christopher warns us not to think our human competence and technical achievements better than God’s wisdom.

“There may be awesome iPhones and lots of technological distractions out there, but he tells us that God is the source of our strength and freedom. He is also what strengthens our social relationships in Christ,” he said. “This grace that God gives us on earth is much more powerful and effective than our own human, physical efforts. With the freedom to make our choices, we must remember that it is God’s grace that makes all good things possible. If technology presents itself as a solution to somebody’s problems, we have to remember our calling to Christ and the real freedom he gives us from the languid world.”

What about modern science and theological truth? Fr. Christopher points out that regarding human meaning, we often look at questions of knowledge, skill, integration, respect, value, and efficiency. We may ask: Is there a clear understanding between theology and the growing knowledge of the world? How is it.

“Science can help with these questions,” Fr. Christopher says. “Scientists imbued with a reverence for the scientific method are necessarily humble. In this humility, the scientific mind is prepared to be surprised and to wonder. Of course, investigating the natural world lends us inspiration toward the beauty and ordered goodness in creation.”

Fr. Christopher often ponders the meaning of Matthew 11:30, in which Jesus states, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

“Jesus really did die on the cross for us. There is a real purpose to our suffering. There will be a greater good brought about through God. We’ve won the inheritance of heaven, which is infinite,” he said. “God’s grace is therefore more efficacious and better than our own. That’s what makes the burden of our faith and walk as Christians light, even lighter than the world.”
Bishop Robert Christian Returns Home to St. Dominic’s

It’s been over 100 years since a Dominican has served as a bishop in California. But that all changed on June 5, 2018, when the Most Rev. Robert Francis Christian, O.P., was ordained as the Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco.

In a beautiful liturgy at the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption, the Most Rev. Robert was consecrated by Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco. The process all began on March 24, when he informed that Pope Francis was appointing him as the Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco. “I have trepidation because it’s a whole new field of work,” he said. “It’s a vaster scale than I’m used to, with 421,000 Catholics in the Archdiocese, but I’ve been supported by a lot of people.”

Bishop Robert is happy to be coming home to San Francisco, where he was born and raised. Growing up in the neighborhood of Pacific Heights, he attended St. Brendan and St. Vincent de Paul grammar schools and St. Ignatius High School, receiving his elementary education from Dominican Sisters. While in college at Santa Clara University, he went on a year abroad program and studied in Italy, where he began discerning religious life with the Order of Preachers.

“I thrive in Dominican community with its rhythms of prayer, recreation, shared decision-making, and shared commitment to preaching the Truth.”

After professing vows in 1971, he was ordained to the presbyterate five years later, and has now faithfully served the Church as a Dominican priest for over 40 years, with one of his longest assignments at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome, also known as the Angelicum. In his ministry as a professor there, he taught students from various countries, helping them to see the place of their local communities in the universal Church.

“It’s hoped that I will build bridges in the Archdiocese, and there’s a lot of need for that…not just bridges between people, but bridges between Jesus Christ and the people he died for,” Bishop Robert said.
Contemporary Choir Provides Prayerful Melodies

WRITTEN BY MARGARITA VARGAS

At 5:30 p.m. mass, the service always starts off in the same way with Mark Lizama, the contemporary choir director, welcoming everyone home.

“I always say “Welcome to St. Dominic’s”, basically saying welcome home, welcome to your spiritual home” Mark said. “It is important for everyone to come together as a congregation.”

Shortly thereafter, the melodious contemporary choir begins, grounding parishioners to the mass about to be celebrated. And the connection that is felt with the music, the scripture and the homily throughout the mass is intentional.

For the last 15 years, Mark has taken care that the music selected is very much in tune with the scripture that is being read and proclaimed on Sunday. The process begins with the liturgy planning guides provided by the Organ Catholic Press (OCP) and GIA, the music publishers used at St. Dominic’s. These guidelines correspond to the particular scripture on Sunday. He combines these guidelines and the suggestions from choir members to make the final song selections. Following this method, the song selections build a strong foundation for the amazing music program at St. Dominic’s.

“We are very blessed to have wonderful preaching and to have the music connect to scripture and the homily makes the experience at St. Dominic’s that much more special and impactful,” Mark said.

In the late 80’s, Mark moved to San Francisco and became a parishioner of St. Dominic’s. During this period, the 5:30 p.m. choir did not have an official name.

“[For a while] we were the Young Adults Choir because there was a group of young adults,” he said. “But there were other members that were not young adults so it made sense to change the name to be the contemporary choir.” And, the name has stayed. What also has remained constant is that this is a volunteer choir. Rachel Mustain, a committed choir member, has been a part of the contemporary choir since she first moved to San Francisco.

“I hope that our music can be a vehicle of prayer and a way for [parishioners] to connect deeply with a God who loves them beyond comprehension” said Rachel. What makes the contemporary choir strong is the diversity, the talent, and the commitment of the members. But, it is also the congregation. “I’ve had friends and family visit and remark that our congregations actually sings,” Mark said. “That means we are doing our job. We want to make sure that it is a prayerful experience for everyone and something that will uplift them through the week.” For Rachel, this is exactly what drew her to join the contemporary choir. “I love the contemporary choir and contemporary church music because you don’t have to be a professional or even read music to join in” she said. “Anyone can do it!”

The contemporary choir meets in the main choir room on Tuesdays from 7:30 – 8:30 p.m. and on Sundays from 4:15 p.m. to the start of the 5:30 p.m. mass. Anyone is invited to join!
We are pleased to announce that nine young men entered the Western Dominican Novitiate in September at St. Dominic Priory. All of them will be clerical novices preparing for priesthood in the Order of Preachers. We give thanks to God for this novitiate class, the largest one in 16 years!

**Andres Barrero**
Andres Barrero is from Rancho Cucamonga, California. He graduated in May 2018 with a B.A. in Theology & Religious Studies from the Catholic University of America.

**Dominic Hernandez**
Dominic Hernandez is from El Monte, California. He earned a B.A. in History from the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he was an active member of St. Mark’s University Parish. He teaches 5th grade at a Catholic elementary school.

**Koa Bartsch**
Koa Bartsch is from Kapaau, Hawaii. He graduated in May 2018 with a B.A. in Theology from the University of Portland, where he entered the Church through their campus ministry program.

**Eric Lee**
Eric Lee is from Cleveland, Ohio, and grew up in Clearwater, Florida. He earned a B.S. in Chemical Engineering and a B.A. in German from the University of Pennsylvania. A graduate of Duke University School of Medicine, he is a pediatric radiologist.

**Noe Carrasco**
Noe Carrasco is from Alpine, Texas. He earned a B.A. in Philosophy from Franciscan University of Steubenville where he was part of the Priestly Discernment Program.

**Christopher Nabhan**
Christopher Nabhan is from El Paso, Texas. He earned a B.S. in Mathematics from the University of Texas at El Paso and works as a high school math teacher.

**Benjamin Frost**
Benjamin Frost is from Salt Lake City, Utah. He graduated in May 2018 with a B.A. in English and Religious Studies from the University of Utah. He was a resident and active member of the St. Catherine of Siena Newman Center.

**Don Nguyen**
Don Nguyen is from Portland, Oregon, and was raised in Sacramento, California. He graduated in May 2018 with a B.A. in Liberal Arts from Thomas Aquinas College. He is a clerical novice for the Vietnamese Vicariate of St. Vincent Liem.

**Jeffrey Gerlomes**
Jeffrey Gerlomes is from Napa, California. He earned a B.A. in History and Film, Television & Theatre from the University of Notre Dame and an M.S. in Comparative Politics from the London School of Economics. Since graduation, he has worked for nonprofit associations of educational institutions in Washington, D.C.

**David Woo**
David Woo is from Fullerton, California. He earned a B.S. in Psychology from the University of California, San Diego, where he was active in the UCSD Newman Center.