

Meet Fr. John Johnson

A Letter for the Parish from our New Pastor

I was born and raised in Augusta, GA. My family and I are members of the Alleluia Community. I am the oldest of four boys, the sons of Keith and Martha Johnson. During my high school years—much to the credit of my dear friends Fr. Brett Brannen and Fr. Doug Clark—I began to think about the priesthood and felt a call to ministry by the time I graduated from high school in 1998. (A fun fact: Fr. Tim McKeown, another dear friend and former Pastor of St. Matthew Parish, was my fourth grade teacher!)

I began an official period of discernment and studies in philosophy at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio as part of a group of other young men doing the same. However, this did not last very long. Indeed, almost as soon as I began my college years, I became very restless, vacillating back and forth in my mind and heart about my call to the priesthood, which seemed increasingly dim and unlikely. With a view to the future, I began to incorporate pre-med classes into my academic program and set my sights on medical school—another dream that I had entertained since childhood. After graduating from the Franciscan University in 2002, I thought that I was destined for marriage and planned on applying to medical school. Like so many other “plans” I have made in the course of my life, God would show me a path that was vastly different from my original intentions.

After moving back to Augusta, GA, I began the application process for medical school. It was during this time that my life would change forever. Very late one night, I was reading a book and having difficulty falling asleep. Without warning and beyond my choosing, God began to speak to me in the quiet hours of that night. He was speaking to me not audibly, but intensely and clearly. The whole experience was like a lightning bolt out of a clear sky. It was unexpected, unsolicited, and unmerited. I was going my own way, but the Lord wanted me to go another way. This experience lasted no more than an hour. It is difficult for me to describe, but everything had changed—my perspective, my feelings, and my desires. My heart was flooded with peace; a spiritual calm came over me. I realized that God was close—that He had always been close. I then understood the meaning of St. Augustine’s prayer: “You were more inward to me than my most inward part and higher than my highest.”

The upshot of this experience was that I felt “certain” that God wanted me to enter formation for the priesthood. This aspect of “certainty”, relative to what God had done and what He was asking of me is something that never faded with time, nor was I ever again to question the path that I felt had been laid out for me. He spoke through my deafness and came back to me. I felt His love and experienced this event as a profound act of mercy on God’s part. It had nothing to do with me, my own designs, or what I was thinking in those moments before the Lord began to speak to me in the depths of my heart.



Fearing that my experience would be doubted and ill-received by my friends, I kept it to myself. Even I knew that the whole thing sounded crazy and erratic, but I had difficulty keeping it a secret. The memory of the event would cause me to weep spontaneously—sometimes embarrassingly—in all kinds of situations. In very short order, my fear lessened, and I found it easy to surrender myself to the Lord and what I felt He was asking me to do. I entered formation for the priesthood in 2003.

In 2007, I was ordained to the priesthood in Savannah, GA; it has been the joy of my life. My first assignment was at Sacred Heart Parish in Warner Robins, GA. Two years later, the bishop asked me to go on for further studies at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in Washington, D.C. There I began my work toward a degree known as a Sacred Licentiate in Theology (STL). My research was focused on modern technology and bioethics. I returned to the Diocese of Savannah in 2012. After two years as a Parochial Vicar at St. Teresa Parish in Grovetown, I was named Pastor of St. Christopher Catholic Church in Claxton, and its mission parishes in Pembroke (Holy Cross), Glennville (St. Jude), and Sandhill (Our Lady of Guadalupe). For the last two years, I have also been serving as the Catholic Campus Ministry Chaplain at Georgia Southern University.

This summer I received a call from Bishop Gregory Hartmayer. He informed me that I had been named Pastor of St. Matthew Catholic Church, effective August 1, 2019. I was excited to hear this news. I look forward to serving the community of St. Matthew in the coming days and years. Please pray for me and know that I am already praying for you!



— Fr. John Johnson

Welcome Reception

Sunday, August 4, 2019
after the 8 am AND 10:30 am Masses.

Saturday, August 10, 2019
after the 5 pm Spanish Mass.

**Please sign up in the Narthex or online if you plan to attend.
Each parish family is asked to bring a finger food item to share.
The parish will provide drinks.**