



# FROM SPREADSHEETS TO SACRAMENTS

A seminarian prepares for priesthood

There are a few common questions I have received since I began telling people I was going to the seminary, such as, “What did you do before seminary? What did you study?” Invariably, when I tell them I studied finance and economics, people reply with something like, “I’m sure that will really help you as a priest.”

## VOCATIONS

In one sense, they are right. Pastors are responsible for a lot of administration at their parishes. Being a faithful steward of parish resources is an essential part of what it means to be a diocesan priest. So, too, I hope my gifts and learning will benefit my future ministry. Also, I must confess, I love spreadsheets and I’ve missed creating them while in seminary!

At the same time, however, I am reminded of a quote from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger before he became Pope Benedict XVI: “We need priests, and the more alien they become to the world of business and politics, the more we need them.” (*Dogma and Preaching*, 370) Or perhaps another quote from Cardinal Robert Sarah gets at the point: “We have taken priests’ identity away from them. We have made them think they must be businessmen, efficient workers, active and present everywhere at every minute. But the priest is fundamentally a continuation among us of the presence of Christ ... He must not be defined by what he does but by what he is. He is *ipse Christus*, Christ himself.”

I, too, have felt this pressure to do something. Having been to business

school and breathed the air of this competitiveness and performance, I get it. We live in a “what have you done for me lately” world and, because of this, people are most interested in results. But perhaps, as Pope Benedict XVI and Cardinal Sarah both state, this is why we need priests all the more in our day. The priest can point beyond results to that which truly endures, Jesus Christ, who is the same “yesterday, today, and forever.” (Heb 13:8)

In his recent columns, Father Stephen Durkee, director of priestly vocations, has focused on the various identities of the priest. For example, the priest is a spiritual father and a chaste spouse. In these identities, we see the priority of who the priest is over what he does. Furthermore, these identities are rooted in Christ. The priest gets to be called a spiritual doctor because Jesus Christ is the Divine Physician. The priest is called to be a pastor because he is to imitate the Good Shepherd.

When I write about this priority of “being” over “doing,” I am first preaching to myself. In these days leading up to ordination, for example, I have often gotten lost in the practical details of planning ordination festivities. So I must remember that what is even more important than what I do on my ordination day is who I become by the grace of God

on my ordination day. Ultimately, I hope to spend the rest of my priestly life living into the graces I receive on that day. This is the adventure that I know will take the rest of my life!

In preparing for this day, the dominant movement on my own heart is one of gratitude. I am thankful for the countless people who have invested in me and supported me over these years. I know that all I am and all I have has been received from others, and so to all of you – thank you. Obviously, I am grateful to our Lord for the great gift of his priesthood, which he (somehow!) chose me to share in. Because of Jesus’ call in my life, people will call me “Father,”

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which is a tremendous blessing and mystery.

I leave you with one final quote: “When I came to you, brothers, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” (1 Cor 2:1-2) It is my prayer that one day I may say this with St. Paul in the heavenly kingdom. Please pray for me! †



**DEACON NOAH THELEN**  
is to be ordained a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Grand Rapids on June 5.