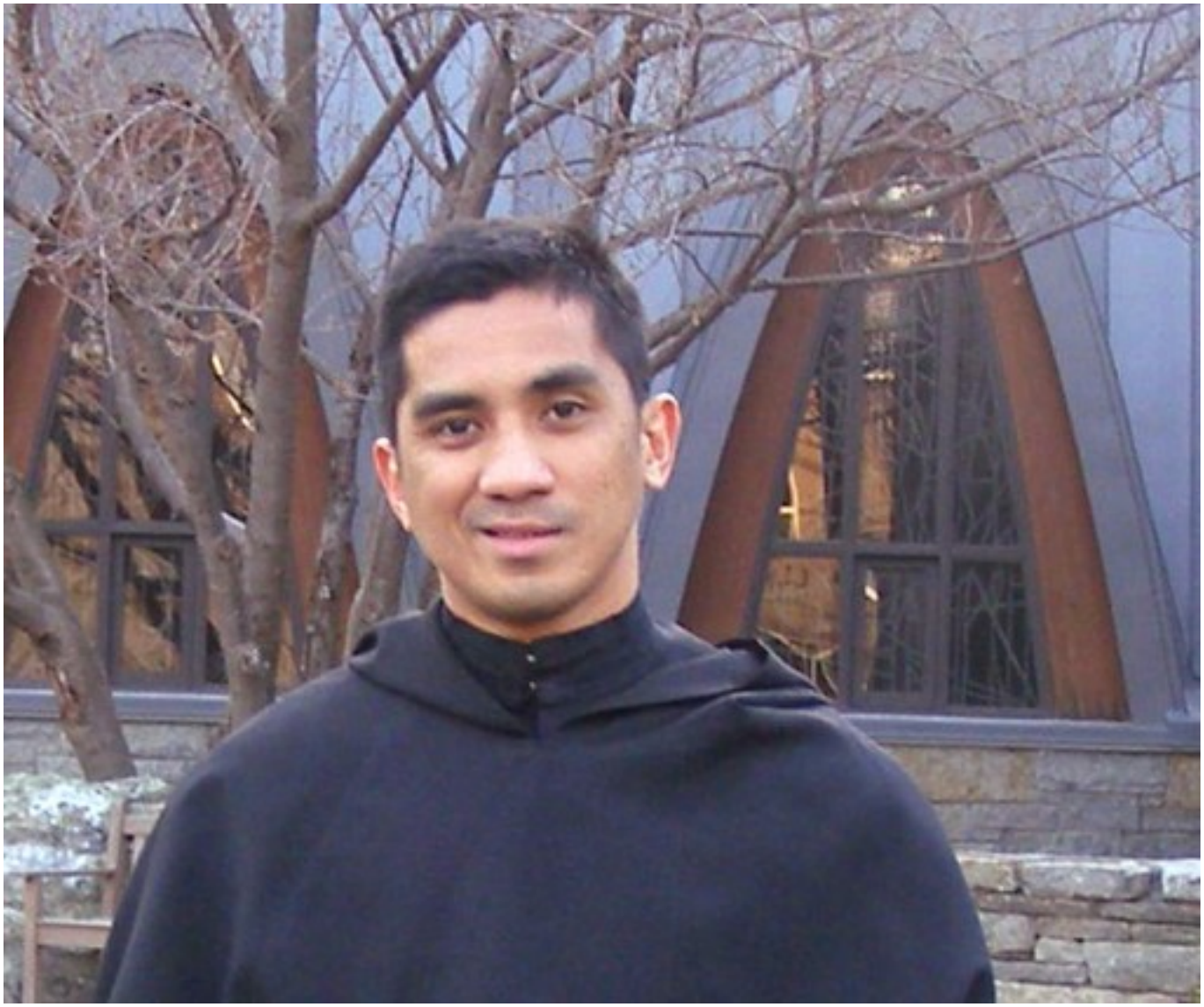


It is with great joy that I announce my upcoming Ordination to the Diaconate with nine other men by Bishop Robert McManus on Saturday, May 31st at St. Paul's Cathedral in Worcester. I want to express my deepest gratitude to my family in the Philippines, my Assumption family both religious and lay, the Filipino community and all those who have so generously and prayerfully supported me over the years. I ask for your prayers as I continue my journey toward priesthood, for my ministries as Campus Minister at Assumption College and Director of Vocations and for an increase of Assumptionist vocations.

Brother Ronald Sibugan, A.A.

A journey from the Philippines to religious life at Assumption College

By Tanya Connor, Catholic Free Press

A campus minister at Assumption College hopes to “create a vocation culture” there helping students discern their own life paths by considering all types of vocations, including priestly, religious and married life.

Brother Ronald Sibugan’s call to religious life is an example from which they can learn about one way to serve God.

“Being a religious is life-giving,” Brother Ronald said. “It’s not boring at all. It’s exciting, exciting in the sense that God is the one who’s leading you. It’s exciting in the sense that you meet people and you see how God worked in a mysterious way. God’s greatness and love are exciting things.”

Working with the poor and with youth helped Brother Ronald feel a call to religious life and priesthood. He now reaps the benefits of community as a religious brother as he anticipates ordination.

He shared his journey story.

He was born to Alberto and Aida Sibugan in Pasay City in the Philippines Oct. 6, 1978, and was brought up in Manila.

When he was in high school he told his mother he wanted to be a priest, but she discouraged him, wanting him to get a college degree. He majored in computer engineering and worked in that field for a year in the Philippines and a year in Taiwan.

“There was some sense that I was drawn to religious life,” he said. In Taiwan he was involved in music ministry and met priests with the Society of Verbum Dei, who helped him with discernment.

“I felt that I was drawn to serve the people of God as a priest,” he said. “I wanted to serve also the immigrants in Taiwan.” He didn’t do much ministry with them, however, and after a year in Taiwan, he returned to the Philippines to continue his discernment.

“I didn’t know the difference between priesthood and religious life,” he said. “I discerned with different congregations, but those were not appealing to me.”

His college Catholic charismatic youth group, “Flames of Fire for Jesus,” invited him to be a missionary for them to the Aeta indigenous people in Porac, Pampanga, in the Philippines. He did that for six months, teaching catechism classes, adult literacy and high school math. There was no running water or electricity there.

“And that’s where I was drawn into religious life, because I sensed that there is a need for people to care for those who are outcast,” he said.

“Also there I had a conversion moment. I was to give a reflection about the Prodigal Son. Early in the morning, when I read the Gospel reading, I was crying for 30 minutes because I sensed the love of God is very overwhelming and I was the Prodigal Son. That’s where I decided to open myself to God. I just prayed and said, ‘Wherever God wants me, I’ll go.’ So after three days I met the diocesan seminarians who were doing ministry there.”

One, a friend, asked him to go to a vocation discernment weekend with the Augustinians of the Assumption. It was the first time he had heard of them.

“I said, ‘Sure; maybe this is a sign,’” he recalled. He met Assumptionist Father Peter Precourt, who was then a vocation director visiting from the Worcester Diocese. (Father Precourt is now

the delegate of the Provincial Superior to the Assumptionists' United States Territory. He is also pastor of St. Anne and St. Patrick in Sturbridge.)

"They showed me the pictures of Assumption's (College) chapel" Brother Ronald said. "It's a sense of being at home. And the 'Until Christ be formed in you' I wanted." (The college's motto is "Until Christ be formed in you.")

Brother Ronald said he got to know the Assumptionists through one of their sister congregations, the Religious of the Assumption, in the Philippines, while keeping in touch with Father Precourt via e-mail. (The Assumptionists had not yet started their foundation in the Philippines.)

During this discernment year he spent six months in ministry to various colleges in Manila for Flames of Fire, he said. He said he wanted to serve young people, and he thought this was also a preparation for coming to Assumption College in Worcester.

"Do not be afraid," an elderly woman, who did not know about his discernment process, told him when praying over him for Flames of Fire. "God will lead you to a place you've never been and you will do great things there."

"That's the affirmation I was called to come here in the United States and pursue formation as an Assumptionist," Brother Ronald says now.

Father John L. Franck, then provincial of the Assumptionists' North American Province and now an assistant general in Rome, interviewed him and told him he was accepted to come to the United States, which he did in August 2004.

He did formation with the Assumptionists, got his bachelor's in philosophy and did his first year of Theology at St. John's Seminary in Brighton. In 2012 he got his master's of divinity and in 2013 his master's in theology, with a concentration in spirituality and culture, both from Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

“I think one thing that draws me to Assumption is Father d’Alzon’s commitment to transform the society, and the sense of community which I was drawn into,” Brother Ronald says of the Assumptionists and their founder, Father Emmanuel d’Alzon. “Community’s so important for me. I feel called to live in a community that’s centered in Christ, journeying together, and trying to be the person that God wants me to be.”

Assumptionist Father Roger Corriveau, professor of theology at Assumption College, helped him understand what it means to live in a fraternal community by telling him they are all brothers; there is no difference with age, race or formation, he said.

“The community helped me in my weaknesses, at the same time allowing me to use all my gifts and talents for the sake of the Kingdom, not losing my identity as a Filipino who is very welcoming, hospitable and very family-oriented,” Brother Ronald said.

He said the Assumptionists helped him discern God’s plan for him – through spiritual direction, mentoring and formators who guided him in his journey toward wholeness and happiness. He also praised the support the Filipino Catholic community, based at St. John Parish in Worcester, gives the Filipinos discerning an Assumptionist vocation.

Brother Ronald made his first vows as an Assumptionist Aug. 28, 2007 at St. Anne’s in Sturbridge. He renewed his vows four times before making final vows last April.

He said that making his final vows are a sign of his readiness to live the life of chastity, poverty and obedience - “the life of the Assumptionists, for the rest of my life. ” Brother Ronald said, “It was a wonderful feeling for me, surrounded by all the people who shared my journey with me.” He felt a sense of God’s love through the community that believes in him and continues to journey with him.

He is also a member of the Assumptionists’ vocation committee and is in the process of seeking ordination to the priesthood.