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## The Calling To Be A Priest Seminarian Inspired by Desire to Serve the People of God

Over the past few months, you might have noticed a new face around St. Matthew. I'm talking about Gerald Okoli, a seminarian who has been given the assignment to work with our parish's RCIA program.

### Call to Serve Began as a Youth

Gerald's story begins in Nigeria. He was born and lived in that central African nation until 1993. Contrary to what a lot of people might think, he explains there are actually a lot of Catholics in Africa. Religion is something that comes naturally to Gerald, who says, "I always thought about being a priest since I was a young boy. I always admired our parish's priest and was a Mass server." During his time in Nigeria, Gerald served as a high school teacher for three years. However, he says the education system in his home country was not what it is here... mainly because of strikes.

Gerald made the decision to leave his home country in order to study at a Catholic university in Belgium for two years. After that, it was on to the United States. In August 1995, he began working as a chaplain at the Oregon State Hospital in Salem. Gerald says, "I really enjoyed providing pastoral counseling to patients there."

Following his time there, Gerald made the decision to formally begin the process of becoming a priest. He applied and was accepted to be a seminary student through the Diocese of Gaylord, Michigan. Gerald explains, "I believe I am inspired. I want to be a priest to serve the people of God. I want to visit people in the hospital and spread the word of God through teaching."

The Diocese of Gaylord sends its students to seminaries in the Detroit area and here to Milwaukee to study. From there, it was just a matter of time before Gerald was assigned to work with St. Matthew's RCIA program as part of his class on pastoral formation.

### A Seminarian's Typical Day

So what's a typical day like for someone who feels the calling to be a priest? Gerald explains, "Seminarians usually get up early in the morning and begin the day with private prayers. Around 7:30 a.m., we come together for Mass and more prayers. After that, we all attend a number of classes. There are generally about four classes a day, some of which can last until 9:00 p.m." Some classes are predetermined for seminarians, but they are also given some optional courses too... like taking language classes like Spanish, if they want to.



Seminarian Gerald Okoli has been working with RCIA candidates while at St. Matthew.

Gerald says, "When we're not in class during the week, we're busy in the library or in our rooms studying."

During their free time on weekends, seminarians also enjoy some downtime. "On Saturdays and Sundays, there are no formal classes. I usually use the free time to catch up on classwork. Seminarians also enjoy some downtime where we can enjoy television, gym, and our rec room."

### Sundays At St. Matthew

On most Sundays, Gerald also comes to Mass at St. Matthew here in Oak Creek and stays late in order to help

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out in 'breaking open' and the sessions that RCIA candidates attend. Seminar-ians are encouraged to participate in RCIA programs at different parishes because it gives them the chance to see how a religious formation program is organized. It's important knowledge they can use once they become a priest and are actually assigned to lead a parish of their very own. Gerald says, "I really enjoy coming here to St. Matthew and working with the RCIA candidates. We all have such an open relationship... and that's really good. I have learned a lot of skills through observing and leading RCIA sessions here."

### **Many Steps on the Road to Priesthood**

There is a lot of work involved to become a priest... something not everyone might realize. The first step would be to obtain a Bachelor's Degree, and then a Master's Degree in an area like philosophy or theology. From there, a perspective priest would have to apply and get accepted by a diocese that sponsors them and sends them to a seminary. That's where they will study for several years before their final evaluation. If they pass all the requirements and the Bishop feels they are ready, they can become a priest. It's a process that can take between 6 and 10 years.

Gerald explains, "There are four basic aspects of things you focus in on during your time in the seminary. That's spiritual formation, academic formation,

human formation, and pastoral formation."

Many of the team leaders and candidates in the RCIA program look forward to Gerald's contributions during the weekly Sunday sessions. Growing up in Africa, he provides a truly international perspective... something that is new. Gerald says, "Things are a little different in Africa when it comes to church. First off, our services are much longer... more in the neighborhood of



two to three hours... instead of the typical hour Sunday service. We also don't pass the collection plate like churches here in the United States do. Everyone gets up and dances to the altar, where they bring up their contributions. This is a process that can actually last more than an hour."

Gerald also says, "In Africa, they don't hold religious formation sessions the same way that we do here at St. Matthew. Religion classes are taught the old way - where the candidates are taught more in a classroom style environment. I like the fact that we are able to have more open discussions and have more

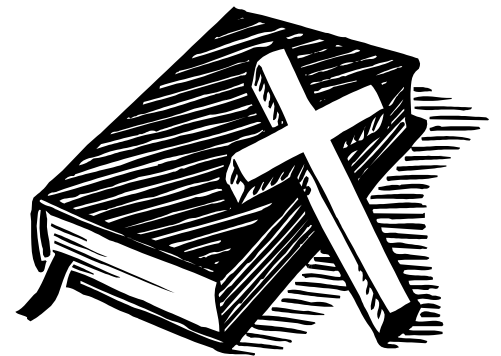
interaction with those who are learning."

### **Ordination Two Years Away**

So what's next for Gerald? He will be with St. Matthew's RCIA program for the next six weeks or so. During the summer months, he will return to his sponsoring diocese of Gaylor, Michigan. In August 2007, Gerald will return for another two years of training at the seminary here in Wisconsin. In 2009, Gerald hopes to become a priest at whatever parish he's assigned to work at in Northern Michigan. He explains, "I really like the Gaylor area because it's a small town. I really hope to grow and retire there."

Everyone at St. Matthew will miss Gerald when he leaves in a few months, but we all look forward to watching him as he grows closer to God.

— Article and photo by Robert Tabern



# St. Matthew's School Auction... Priceless!

On Saturday, February 24, a large group of St. Matthew's faithful braved a forecasted snow storm to support our church school at this year's school auction entitled "Priceless". Those



**Auctioneer extraordinaire, Sal Purpora, kept the bids going up during the exciting live auction.**

who gathered were in for an elegant evening... While enjoying drinks and conversation, the crowds weaved their way through seven silent auction tables checking out the items they could possibly bid on and hopefully win. Our fabulous Master of Ceremonies, Joel Breen, warned everyone right before a table was about to close so those last-minute

bids could be entered. During the silent auction, an elegant meal was served including a choice of stuffed chicken breast or beef tenderloin, parsley buttered potatoes, baby carrots and dessert.

Throughout the night, there were some opportunities for fun with two heads and tails games. For the heads and tails game you spent \$5 to play and were asked to predict the outcome of a coin flip by placing your hands on your "head" or your hands on your "tail". If you guessed wrong, you were eliminated. The last few who remained standing got to step on stage with Joel Breen. In the first game, parishioner Lisa Cheaney won the cash prize. In the second game, St. Matthew's School won the prize, because the two last contestants standing both chose their "tails" and neither



**Parishioner Sue Chilson (right) held the key that opened a box containing a beautiful necklace from Kelvin Shroeder Jewelers during the "Sparkling Surprise" game. Debbie Sievert looks on.**

one of them wanted to change their minds. Joel Breen suggested if the coin came up "heads" that all of the money would go to the school. The contestants agreed and sure enough it came up heads.

There was also a separate basket raffle held. The staff of St. Matthew's and each classroom created and donated a themed basket or item. These spectacular baskets represented the spirit and generosity of the St. Matthew staff, students, families and teachers. Raffle tickets were sold and

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**All enjoyed a "priceless" evening of fun and fellowship with other St. Matthew parishioners and friends.**

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a drawing was held right before the live auction.

The conclusion of the evening was the exciting live auction. Parishioner and auctioneer, Sal Purpora, did a fantastic job getting those bids up, up, up. Some of the more interesting items auctioned off included a brunch with Archbishop Timothy Dolan, a Bucks game and chance to meet Coach Terry Stotts, a tour of the interior roofline at Miller Park and a Michael Redd autographed jersey.

### Major Success!

The event overall was “priceless”. Despite the snow, the crowd enjoyed a memorable evening. Many thanks go out

to the auction co-chairs Stacy Sims, plus the entire auction committee and volunteers. Your hard work and dedication provided the St. Matthew community with yet another successful auction. We also want to thank the many businesses who donated items and services. Your generous support was truly appreciated. The proceeds from the 2007 auction will be earmarked to refurbish the computer lab and to help meet other school needs.

— *Article and photos by Amy Cicigoi*

## Parish Involvement Day Photos Saturday, March 10



Fr. Bill and Shelly Madden finish praying the Labyrinth, a sacred walking path, in our Gathering Space, on Parish Involvement Day.



Parish Council, staff, and parishioners gathered in our multi-purpose rooms to pray, reflect, and share on our “J.O.Y.” theme

### St. Matthew Parish Buzz

Produced by the St. Matthew  
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Alice Hatzenbeller, Pastoral Associate, led a morning of reflection on Sat., March 10th, focusing on our theme: J.O.Y. (Jesus, Others, Yourself)