



Seminarian Matthew Bernhard

I was born on August 4, 1999, to my loving parents Greg and Colleen. I am the oldest of three boys, my younger brothers being Nathan and David. I grew up going to Catholic school at St. Joseph's in Manhattan from kindergarten to eighth grade. Going to Catholic school for nine years fostered my love of God and Catholicism, providing me with a sturdy foundation as I entered public high school.

Beginning in high school, I immediately became very active in the local youth group. Through my constant involvement, I made many of my closest friends. I started going on retreats and mission trips which deepened my relationship with God. Through mission trips I began to realize my passion for serving others. I started looking for opportunities to serve within my parish, which I found in teaching religious education. I taught Confirmation prep for seventh and eighth graders, as well as First Reconciliation and First Communion prep for second graders. During high-school I went on multiple retreats and helped lead some as well. On one specific retreat called Steubenville, I had a profound experience while in adoration. During adoration I felt God's love in a way I had never experienced before. That experience showed me something that I already knew, that God's love was endless, and I started to experience it in my heart. Experiencing this truth in such a profound way motivated me to strive for a deeper relationship with God, and through this I started to become more open to what He is calling me to.

As my heart became more open to what God was calling me to, I realized that God was calling me to seminary. I thought this desire would go away, but it only continued to grow. I decided to meet with my cousin Fr. Mark Bernhard to figure out how I could go about becoming a seminarian, and to see just what I would be getting myself into. While I had many doubts about going to seminary, I had a burning desire to study for the priesthood. My cousin helped me reach out to the vocation director at that time, Fr. Burke Masters. It was not long after meeting with him that I started filling out the application to seminary. At the time I was beginning my first year at Joliet Junior College and pushed off the application to focus on school, but over the summer before my second year at JJC I still strongly desired seminary. Fr. Borello, the new Vocations Director, greatly supported me during my discernment and gave me the motivation to finally finish my. I was accepted that summer during my time as a Totus Tuus team member and since entering seminary, I have never been happier. Looking back, I would never have imagined the personal growth that would have taken place in the first two years of my formation. I am looking forward to my first year in Theology at Mundelein Seminary this Fall, 2023.