



# The Visitation Visitor

VISITATION OF THE BLESSED  
VIRGIN MARY CHURCH

Volume 21 Issue 2

September 2024

## “Home Grown” Vocations

by Deacon Vince and Patty Drewicz



Visitation BVM Church has had a rich history of vocations since the founding of our parish over 70 years ago. Over 23 sons and daughters of our parish have dedicated their lives to serving our God as either a Priest, Deacon or a Religious Sister. We decided to dedicate this cover story to the members of our parish who are currently studying for the priesthood or religious life.

Our parish daughter and sons were asked how did you get the call to religious life/priesthood, how do you spend your free time, and what advice would you give someone discerning a vocation to the priesthood or religious life?

\*\*\*\*\*

### Sister Mary Guardian of Hope

Daughter (Claire) of Mark and Allison Miller. Sister Hope professed her first vows with the Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matará in Washington, DC in November 2022. Prior to entering religious life, Sister Hope spent time as a missionary (2020-2021) with Christ in the City.

- Prayed before the Blessed Sacrament often and discerned the call there. Joined a small group who were also thinking about religious vocations
- Has many favorite saints, but St. Charles de Foucauld came to mind
- Loves relaxing with the sisters in her community and reading

\*\*\*\*\*

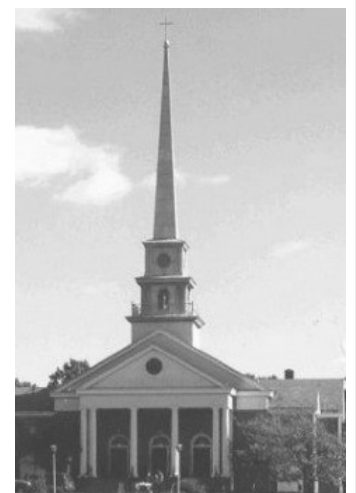
### Luke Baran

- Felt the call to priesthood in freshman year of high school. Drawn by the simple lifestyle of a priest, the laying down and self-emptying to serve Christ. Luke learned that seminary is just a step to seriously discern one’s vocation. Vocation Office events were helpful enabling Luke to live, study, and pray with men his age who also seek a life of holiness.
- Enjoys photography, basketball, card magic, recently added exercise every day, and makes rosary bracelets to give as gifts to family and friends.
- Find time for silence every day. Meditate on scriptural or spiritual reading passages. Have a conversation with God, since that’s what prayer is all about. Bring to God all the desires you have, along with anything else you wish to share with him.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Inside this issue:

“Home Grown” Vocations	1
Parish Profile — Deacon Chike	2
Meet Our Parish Staff Mary Ann Smallberger	3
Praise and Worship Group	4
“Home Grown” Vocations (cont’d)	5
Parish Organizations— Bible Study-led by Betty Welsh	6
School Page—Focus on Home and School Association (HASA)	7
Do You Know? Miscellaneous, Interesting facts about Visitation	8





# The Visitation Visitor

## Parish Profile — Deacon Chike Egbufoama

By Joe Gavanus



“I want to be holy too”. This was Deacon Chike’s (pronounced, “Cheek-A”) response to a comment from a parish priest he knew as a child who told him that he wanted to be holy when he grew up. Deacon Chike attributes his desire to become a priest as an indirect request to be HOLY. To this day that is still Deacon Chike’s goal. “I have always wanted to become a holy person”, he states, “and have always thought that a career leading people to holiness would offer me that.”

Deacon Chike, while born in the United States, is very proud of his Nigerian-American heritage. His parents were both educators in Nigeria. His mother was deeply involved in the development and growth of local churches in their home diocese. When asked about the Catholic population in Nigeria, he answers that, “in my native country we were proud to proclaim that we were members of the Roman Catholic Church. This is a distinction that everyone wanted to make clear – we are Roman Catholics.”

Never giving up on his quest for holiness, Deacon endured some trying times in his earlier years. He attended the Minor seminary under the tutelage of the Holy Ghost Fathers where he completed his elementary and high school education. After high school, he joined the order of Saint Augustine and continued on to attend the Saint Thomas Aquinas Major seminary. There he received his undergraduate degree in Philosophy. At this point one would think that this is the end of the story, but not quite yet.

Chike is a very complex person who thinks deeply and passionately about many things in his life. He left the Augustinians because he “lacked the trust in his readiness to answer YES to ordination”. He describes this period in his life of departing from what he thought was best for him as “separation anxiety”. So, he then returned to the educational world where he took masters courses in International Relations and Diplomacy.

Returning to the United States, he spent several years working in the corporate world. He was very proud of the fact that he worked with people in a team environment, not just as team members but as family. But, there was that underlying feeling that Christ was still “asking me to follow and serve Him”. Chike eventually made the decision to live as a student in the Redemptorist House in the Bronx, New York. There he worked with people of various ethnic backgrounds in helping them through life’s struggles. “Following GOD to the Bronx was an encounter with diversity at its best”. But, Chike was asked to discern out of the Redemptorists because it was deemed not a good fit for him.

Again, he returned to work in the corporate world. His friends supported his decision but still reminded him that “they see a great priest in me” and that he needs to focus on his vocation. It is here that his focus turned to becoming a diocesan priest. Chike is now a transitional deacon in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia having been ordained so in May of this year. He was assigned to assist at Visitation Parish during the coming year leading up to his eventual ordination as a diocesan priest next May.

While Deacon Chike is a very devout and dedicated individual, he also has a lighter, humorous side to his personality. In a word, he describes himself as “Sanguine, always very jovial and happy”. Some of his friends describe him as an extreme extrovert who takes only seconds to get along with new people and the environment. He does concede, however, that “I still battle with my rather talk than work syndrome”. When asked what his favorite food is – in case a parishioner asks him over for dinner - he answers, “A nice, thick steak cooked medium to well done”.

May God keep the calling to serve Him in Deacon Chike’s heart and mind as he continues his quest to become Holy!





# The Visitation Visitor

## Meet Our Parish Staff — Mary Ann Smallberger, Parish Business Manager

By Pat Gavanus and Colleen Henderson



Special people work for non-profit organizations and Mary Ann Smallberger is no exception. Besides raising her three challenging grandchildren, she had a horrendous year battling cancer and undergoing treatment. Regardless, Mary Ann always keeps Visitation Parish's best interest as a priority.

In September 2017, Mary Ann joined the Visitation family as their Business Manager. She was raised in St. Helena's Parish in the Olney section of Philadelphia. After graduating from Cardinal Dougherty High School, she began a full time job at LaSalle University. While working full time, she attended classes there for several years until she acquired her BS Degree in Accounting. Furthering her education was a priority. She worked various jobs while earning her Masters in Accounting as well as her Masters in Human Relations Management. To top things off, she also became a CPA!

Mary Ann was now ready for the large workload at Visitation. Her daily responsibilities include all budgets, payroll, income and expenses, audits and various other activities for church and school. She also supports and participates in the Finance Committee.

A major challenge was the Covid-19 Federal PPP Program (Paycheck Protection Program). This was a U.S. Small Business Administration-backed loan that help businesses keep their workforce employed during the Covid-19 crisis. Mary Ann worked her way through the associated rules and procedures to acquire the substantial loan that prevented any layoffs at Visitation. She studied the on-going requirements, prepared and submitted the application that ultimately led to the forgiveness of the loan and therefore, Visitation did not have to repay it.

In her personal life, Mary Ann is a Visitation parishioner who recently became a first-time homeowner. She enjoys her annual Ocean City, New Jersey vacations with 200 plus family members. She also enjoys her job very much and is very grateful for her Visitation family for their support and prayers during her cancer surgery and treatment. We love Mary Ann and the great job she is doing at Visitation.



### The Visitation **VISITOR**<sup>TM</sup>

All rights reserved

Parish Newsletter

**Editor:** Joe Gavanus

**Staff:**

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Patricia Drewicz | Clare Hughes      |
| Patricia Gavanus | Bob Hehn          |
| Lisa Klaput      | Colleen Henderson |
| Tina Bruckner    | Joe Gavanus       |

**Spiritual Advisor**

Deacon Vince Drewicz

**Contact Us:**

E-Mail: [jgjr52@aol.com](mailto:jgjr52@aol.com)



# The Visitation Visitor

## “Come As You Are” to Praise & Worship with Adoration

By Clare Hughes

This past April, Visitation hosted its first Praise & Worship with Adoration – a unique holy hour of prayer and song in the presence of the Eucharist. The idea for this special adoration hour was the idea of parish member Andrew Pisano. “Adoration has been something very special in my life,” Andrew shared, “And I wanted to do something to enhance it with prayer and music, and find a way to encourage the younger generation to join in.” Andrew did not have to search far to form a group to bring this idea to fruition. Together with his sister Giavanna (Pisano) Bustynowicz, and friends Sophia Bonanno and Kathryn Zacckey, this group of young adults are sharing their musical talents with the parish community through Praise and Worship.

Praise & Worship with Adoration begins with the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, led by Deacon Vince, followed by a litany of inspirational and spiritual songs, and concludes with Benediction. Adoration is held in the Lower Church on the third Tuesday of each month. In a serene setting, the church is dimly lit except for the altar lights illuminating the sanctuary and Blessed Sacrament, providing a peaceful and intimate surrounding to be with God. “We really want the spotlight quite literally to be on God,” Giavanna commented.

In preparing the music, the group builds a playlist of songs that have special meaning to them personally and have given them positive experiences. According to Giavanna, “We really try to pick songs that are moving and touching and are good for adoration and would really set the tone. Oftentimes we will start with the song “Holy Spirit,” where the words are literally ‘Holy Spirit you are welcome here, come flood this place’.”

Another song called “Come as You Are” encourages everyone - no matter what state you are in emotionally, spiritually, physically, or whatever phase of life you are going through – to just to ‘come as you are’ and give it all to God. “We try to start with very welcoming songs that encourage everyone just to open their hearts to the Lord. Giavanna added.

Kate Girardo, a parishioner who has regularly attended Praise & Worship with Adoration shared her thoughts: “Each of us are dealing with ‘something’ in our lives... stress, worries, perhaps coping with illness or loss, or other types of concerns. This Adoration hour is a way to bring your cares to God and sit with Him in prayer, listen to beautiful music, and feel the Holy Spirit fill your heart.”

For this group of musicians, it is more than just giving their time and talent for the parish; they also find it brings them closer to God. “I think the most rewarding part is being able to use our gifts and bring them together for the better of other people, and in return, we get to experience adoration from being a part of it,” Sophia shared, and added, “It’s knowing that we’re doing this for everybody, and most importantly doing it for God.”

The response from participants has been incredibly positive. People have come up to me and said they have never gone to Adoration before. And now that they have come, they cannot wait to come back,” Kathryn notes. “It’s cool to see that we’re bringing people to the church and show them a different way of worshipping!”

Andrew summed up the essence of Praise & Worship with Adoration: “I just think that the praise and worship adoration is such a good way for people to just draw closer to God and really enjoy that time in adoration” Kate Girardo could not agree more. “It’s simply an amazing experience” she noted, “You really have to experience it to believe it!”

The group plans to continue the monthly Praise & Worship with Adoration service, even introducing some special touches around the Church calendar.

All are invited to attend Praise & Worship with Adoration. See the Parish Bulletin for details . Why not just give it a try? Come spend an hour with God... and *Come as You Are!*





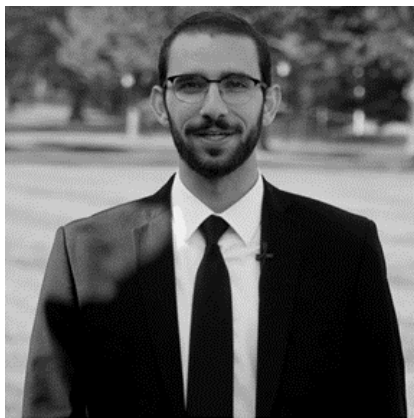
# The Visitation Visitor

## “Home Grown” Vocations (continued)

### Joshua Pisano

- Received call in senior year at Pope John Paul II High School. Learning centering prayer, students were instructed to clear their heads and ask God what he wants for your future. Set on being a physical therapist, Josh expected that as his answer, but the word priest popped in his head. He had never considered that path.
- The call came again at the end of his sophomore year at college. At the end of Mass, while on a weeklong camping trip with campus ministry, the priest spontaneously shared how grateful he was to be a priest, tears pouring down his face, imploring that anyone who feels a call to the priesthood to please take it seriously. The campus minister pulled Josh aside and said “You know Josh, I think he was talking to you.” Josh still chose to get a degree in physical therapy thinking, “I’ll consider it more seriously after a few years of work.” Two months into beginning his career at the exact job for which he prayed, God called Josh while in adoration, in a way so direct that it was undeniable.
- Josh spends his free time hiking, drawing, going to car shows, and spending time with family.
- Josh’s advice to someone who is discerning to trust in God’s goodness. “If God is placing that desire in your heart, it’s there for a reason.” Meeting regularly with a spiritual director is also very helpful to navigate discernment.

Continue to pray for religious vocations from our parish.



Joshua Pisano



Sr. Mary Guardian of Hope  
(Claire Miller)



Luke Baran



# The Visitation Visitor

## Bible Study - Understanding God's Plan for Salvation

By Bob Hehn



Bible Study could be said to be ever ancient, ever new. Perhaps the most iconic example is when, after his resurrection, Jesus instructed the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24: 13-35).

Visitation has had a continuous Bible Study program since 2006. John Doman started that program with Fr. McManus as the Spiritual Director. Fr. Kelly assumed that role in 2007 when Fr. McManus was transferred. John was motivated by his desire for participants to grow in their love for Christ and the

Catholic Church. He also wanted to introduce them to great Catholic speakers and apologists like Jeff Cavins, Tim Gray, Scott Hahn and then Father, now Bishop, Robert Barron.

Originally John chose to use the newly available and creative Bible study programs from Ascension Press. It created content based on specific books of the Bible like Exodus, Psalms and James. The first course was "The Great Adventure - A Journey Through the Bible". For each study Ascension Press provided multiple DVDs covering all the talks, Leaders Guides and Study Guides.

Initially John held biweekly, and later on weekly, meetings in the School Library. He featured programs in the Fall and Spring, and often included an additional appropriately themed Lenten program. The format which evolved and largely continues included singing a hymn, an opening prayer, the video talk, small or large group discussion, and a closing prayer, within a 1 1/2 - 2 hour meeting on Tuesday evenings. The program averaged 25 participants, 50 during Lent.

For many years, every session John would haul to the Library a projector, DVD player, two large box speakers and assorted necessary cables and extension cords. The Library already had a mechanized projection screen. It would take John about 20 minutes to set everything up and then again to break it down - truly a labor of love. In time Sister Diane was able to provide storage space for the equipment, and finally the Library was outfitted with an overhead projector, in-ceiling speakers and a DVD player.

John says his greatest joy was the fulfillment of his desire of "seeing many of our fellow parishioners grow in love for Christ and his Church". He thinks Bishop Barron's "Catholicism" series "more than any other program helped renew and inspire us all [in that growth]".

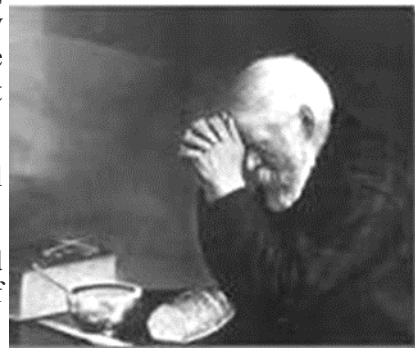
In 2017 John turned over the meetings leadership to Bob Hehn while he continued to support the administrative ministry requirements in the background. Then In Fall 2019 John Lang replaced Bob and continued for 3 years.

Currently, Betty Welsh is the leader of the ministry. An ongoing participant, she replaced John in Fall 2022. Appreciating the impact of the ministry on her and others, she was determined to see the program continue. Betty has been using FORMED streamed (on line) videos which are available to all Visi parishioners through a parish subscription. She averages 20-30 participants.

She says her greatest joy is "seeing new people grow in their Faith and their interest in learning more about it, and their being moved by sharing thoughts and praying for each other." She loves learning too. "I have learned so much in my years there." When asked what she would say to someone considering joining the group she replied, "All are welcome. We have great conversations but no one is forced to participate if they don't want to. [We have] really great material that teaches you a lot about our Faith."

Check the weekly parish bulletin or the weekly "Happenings Around Visi" email update via Flocknote to get info about the latest course.

St. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate) between A.D. 383 and 404 famously said, "Ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ". Knowledge of the Scriptures is an essential element of being and living Catholic.





# The Visitation Visitor

## School Page - Focus on Home and School Association

By Tina Bruckner

In June, school is over for the Visi students, but the work of the 2024-2025 Home and School Association (HASA) Board, comprised of *Megan Pinto, Meghan Dolfi, Shannon Oertel, Angela Zampogna and Debra Maresca*, is just beginning. This group of newly elected officers coordinate many social events for families as well as special programs that are presented to students. The group also sponsors fundraising activities that help to enhance the school and learning environments and to brighten the school day for Visitation BVM students, faculty and staff. Membership information can be obtained by emailing [hands@visitationbvmschool.org](mailto:hands@visitationbvmschool.org)

In addition to volunteering on various committees, HASA members and family volunteers are often onsite during the school day, assisting in the technology, art and library areas as well as recess. Each month, there are events planned for the Visitation BVM School students to bring about a sense of community and togetherness. These events include: *Meet Your Teacher, Father/Daughter Ice Cream Social, Trunk or Treat, Junior High Dances, Mother/Daughter Event*, and more.

Aside from the events for school students and families, HASA also sponsors events inclusive of the parish and surrounding community during the school year. These events include: *High School Information Night (October 3), Craft Fair (April 5), Moms' Night Out (May 16 preview, May 17 BINGO)*. Like previous years, raffle ticket sales for a \$5,000 drawing will be scheduled in November thru mid-December. Thanksgiving pie sales will be the week(s) prior to Thanksgiving, with pickup at the school during Thanksgiving week (exact dates TBA).

In addition to the above events, there are a variety of school affiliated event committees where adult volunteers are needed. Individuals must meet Archdiocesan and Parish clearance and training requirements before working with our children. Parent and grandparent involvement is strongly encouraged! These wise individuals help teach values, instill ethnic heritage and pass on family traditions! Additional information on volunteer opportunities and processes can be found at <https://school.visitationbvm.org/volunteer-info> [[school.visitationbvm.org](https://school.visitationbvm.org)]

Catholic school education is more than teaching academics; students are taught how to be responsible, good people who care for their community and try to emulate Christ. Being well-rounded individuals with planned non-academic activities is an important part of our children's education.

As Whitney Houston sang **"I believe the children are our future; Teach them well and let them lead the way."** Remember, it takes a village!



HASA Prayer  
Most dear and mysterious God,  
Give us the wherewithal to properly cultivate  
The young stewards of Your legacy  
Who are entrusted to us.  
This we ask in the name of Jesus.  
Our Lady of the Visitation, pray for us!

Blessed are they who serve on committees  
For they shall be known leaders in commitment  
Blessed are they who Fund Raise  
For their efforts go toward raising up academic excellence.  
Blessed are they who share their time and talents in our school,  
For they are surely treasured by faculty and staff."  
*Created by Jenn Petka, HASA President 2020-2022*

# VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY CHURCH

196 N. Trooper Road  
Norristown, PA 19403

Phone: 610-539-5572  
Fax: 610-539-3240  
Web: [www.visitationbvm.org](http://www.visitationbvm.org)

---

Non-Profit Org  
U. S. Postage  
PAID  
Mineola, NY  
Permit No. 70

---

## The Visitation Visitor

### Do You Know?... Some Facts About Visitation

By Deacon Vince Drewicz

- *Our parish name, The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, was chosen to honor the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth and to symbolize the joyful ending of her journey of faith.*
- *That the 750lb bell in our bell tower came from the Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Manayunk. It was used in the Civil War to sound reports of Union victories over the Confederate army.*
- *That the upper church was not completed until 1971.*
- *That our parish has a **Grief Ministry Group** that, unfortunately, is growing and thriving. They meet each month in the Larkin Center.*