

NFCRV

# VOCATION FUND



SPRING 2026

newsletter

**NURTURING VOCATIONS: STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS LIFE**

NATIONAL FUND FOR CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS

6348 N. MILWAUKEE AVE, STE #102

CHICAGO, IL 60646-3728



CONTACT US

Phil Loftus, Executive Director

312-318-0180 ploftus@nfcrv.org

## From burden to belonging

### A Lenten vocation story

Lent is a sacred season when the Church invites us to face what weighs upon the heart—to name our burdens, surrender our self-reliance, and return to the Lord who alone gives rest.

At 19, Elijah’s life appeared full: faith, friendships, studies, and plans for the future. Yet quietly, a deep interior darkness took hold. What he later came to understand was this: his life was built not on surrender to Christ, but on carrying everything himself.

As the pandemic deepened his isolation, the Church became his refuge. On retreat with the Capuchin Franciscans, kneeling before the altar on the Feast of St. Francis, he brought Christ the only thing he had left—his brokenness. He prayed, “I have nothing left to give. If You want me to die in this habit, I will—but You have to tell me.”

*“I have nothing left to give. If You want me to die in this habit, I will — but You have to tell me.”*

Through the Gospel—“Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened...” — Christ met him in his poverty of spirit. The burden lifted. Peace returned. And a call emerged: to follow Christ as a consecrated man.

The road forward required years of discernment, healing, and trust. Yet Christ never stopped calling him home.

Today, he is responding to that call as a Capuchin Franciscan, embracing the Cross and the freedom found only in surrender.

*Read more about our 54th Grantee, Elijah Miller, on page 5.*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Lenten Vocation Story... 1
- Message from Board Chair ..... 2
- Message from Executive Director ..... 4
- Meet our 54th Grantee.. 5
- Meet Sister Michele Vincent Fisher, C.S.F.N. .. 6
- Invitation to Give..... 7

—LENT—

*Fast*

*Discover that for which we hunger spiritually in our lives and in our world.*

## A Lenten Message from the NFCRV Board Chair, Father Anthony Vinson, O.S.B.

Dear Friends of the Vocation Fund,

As we enter Lent, we are reminded that the spiritual life is not built in dramatic moments alone, but in the common, ordinary flow of daily choices. This truth resonates deeply with the mission we share in supporting men and women who hear God's call to religious life.

Lent gives us 40 days—a measurable time—to try on new attitudes, habits, and ideas, to discover what draws us closer to Christ and what does not. Like a farmer who turns the soil before the first planting, Lent invites us to prepare the ground of our hearts—to clear away what has hardened and make room for something new to take root.



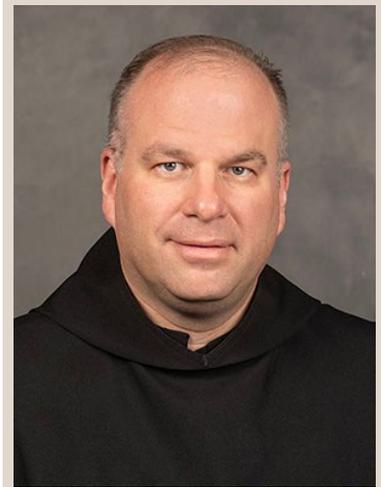
For those discerning religious life, this journey takes on particular significance. They face choices both temporal and spiritual—decisions about educational debt and family obligations, alongside the deeper movements of prayer, community and surrender to God's will. Your generous support through the National Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations helps remove the barriers that too often prevent good people from following their call. The path is there. Sometimes it simply needs clearing.

**Recent research from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate regarding the Class of 2025 reminds us that the need continues.** Young people are still hearing the call, still responding with courage and faith. But they need our help to answer.

This Lent, pray—daily, if you are able—for the men and women we serve, for the religious communities who welcome them and for all who struggle to discern God's voice amid the noise of our world. Pray, too, for this mission and for all who make it possible.

And then, tell someone. Share what you know about the good work

*Continued on page 3*



FATHER ANTHONY VINSON, O.S.B.  
*Board Chair  
National Fund for Catholic  
Religious Vocations*

*“Like a farmer who turns the soil before the first planting, Lent invites us to prepare the ground of our hearts—to clear away what has hardened and make room for something new to take root.”*

*The more we pray with confidence to the Father,  
the more we discover that we are beloved children  
and come to know the greatness of His love.*

—POPE LEO XIV ON PRAYER AND THE FATHER

*“Pray, too,  
for this  
mission and  
for all who  
make it  
possible.. And  
then, tell  
someone.  
Share what  
you know  
about the  
good work of  
NFCRV.”*

*Scan QR code  
to donate  
securely online.*



*Continued from page 2*

of NFCRV. Tell a friend, a fellow parishioner, a family member. The sisters, brothers and priests now serving across the country exist in part because someone cared enough to help. That story deserves to be told, and you are the best person to tell it.

The Catechism reminds us that Lent is the Church's privileged season for interior renewal (CCC 1434) and that religious life is one of the most profound expressions of the universal call to holiness—a life given wholly to God for the sake of the world (CCC 914-916). When we support those answering that call, grace moves through us—from your generous gift to a discerner's courage to a community's welcome. **Your prayer and your giving help clear the path between a soul and its calling, and help the Church receive the gifts God is already offering her.**

There is nothing small about that. It is quiet work—unhurried, like good soil and steady rain—but it is God's work. And we are grateful beyond words to walk it with you.

May this season of conversion renew in each of us the daily choice to draw closer to Christ and closer to those he calls us to serve.

To learn more about the National Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations or to make a gift this Lenten season, please visit **[vocationfund.org](http://vocationfund.org)**. Your prayer and your generosity make this mission possible—and together, they help the Church receive the gifts God is already offering her.

In gratitude and prayer, I am

*Father Anthony Vinson, O.S.B.*

Board Chair

National Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations

# A Lenten message from the Executive Director: gratitude, discernment, and the call of Baptism

As we enter this holy season of Lent, I am grateful for nearly eight years of serving as Executive Director of the Vocation Fund. Lent's call to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving reflects the very mission you support through the Vocation Fund—helping women and men discern God's call without the burden of educational debt.

I have witnessed how your generosity and our accompaniment have allowed communities to prayerfully guide their candidates through discernment. At its heart, the Vocation Fund is about accompaniment—walking with candidates and communities as they listen to the Holy Spirit and discern religious life freely and prayerfully.

*At its heart,  
the Vocation  
Fund  
is about  
accompaniment.*

About 37 percent of our grantees ultimately discern a vocation to marriage or committed single life. This is not a failure but a faithful response to God's invitation—and your support makes that freedom possible, even if their discernment and financial support concludes. Your support still bears fruit.

Through baptism, each of us is called to our own unique vocation essential to the Body of Christ and your generosity ensures that those drawn to religious life are not hindered by obstacles of educational debt.

**Thank you for your faithful partnership in this sacred work during this holy season of Lent.** Your almsgiving through the Vocation Fund is nurturing vocations and strengthening the Church. Because of you, women and men can listen more clearly and respond more freely to God's invitation.

With gratitude and hope,

*Philip R. Loftus*

Executive Director

National Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations



PHILIP R. LOFTUS  
*Executive Director*  
*National Fund for Catholic  
Religious Vocations*

## DISCERNING?

ASK ABOUT OUR  
NEW ROLLING  
GRANT WINDOW



Contact Phil Loftus  
312-318-0180  
[ploftus@nfcrv.org](mailto:ploftus@nfcrv.org)



ELIJAH MILLER  
*Capuchin Franciscan Friars*

**Congratulations  
to Elijah Miller**

*The Capuchin Franciscan Friars (Western America Province) order follows Saint Francis of Assisi as they live the Gospel in prayer, fraternity, and ministry. They serve as a witness and joyful presence of hope and salvation to all, especially to those in need.*



## NFCRV Welcomes its 54th Grantee: Elijah Miller, Capuchin Franciscan Friars

The National Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations is pleased to announce its 54th grant award to Elijah Miller, a postulant with the Capuchin Franciscan Friars of the Western America Province (Our Lady of Angels).

A 24-year-old from the Sacramento, California area, Elijah spent several years discerning God's call to religious life through prayer, study, and a growing desire to serve others. He was immersed in Catholic intellectual and spiritual formation at Benedictine College and Gonzaga University and later discerned as a seminarian for the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Elijah felt increasingly drawn to the Capuchin Franciscans — men inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi to live the Gospel in fraternity, prayer, and service to those most in need.

Known for his compassion and readiness to serve, Elijah has worked as an elementary school teacher, a certified nursing assistant, and a construction worker. His mentors describe him as a genuine man of faith who finds joy in connecting with people on the margins — especially the poor and the homeless. The Capuchin community welcomed him into his first year of formation with confidence in his vocation and commitment to their charism of joyful simplicity.

Elijah's call to religious life has been nurtured from those who have witnessed his generous spirit. His acceptance as a postulant marks an important milestone, and the Vocation Fund is honored to accompany him as he continues to grow in formation and fidelity to God's call. As the Vocation Fund continues its mission, we celebrate Elijah's "yes" to God's call and the vibrant witness of the Capuchin Franciscan Friars, reminding us that with each vocation journey supported through our grants, we strengthen the future of the Church.

*His mentors describe him as a genuine man of faith who finds joy in connecting with people on the margins.*



SISTER MICHELE VINCENT FISHER, C.S.F.N.  
*Board Vice Chair*

*“The common thread that has been woven throughout these roles is a mission to connect people to God and to one another.”*

—LENT—

*Pray*

*Brief daily prayers help to stay connected to God on busy days.*

## Meet Sister Michele Vincent Fisher, C.S.F.N., NFCRV Board Vice Chair

Being the only child and daughter of a Boy Scout leader, I grew up with a penchant for people and adventure!

That early love of people found new direction when, in the third grade, I met Catholic sisters for the first time. The Sisters of Saint Joseph of Philadelphia were the first to nurture the seeds of a religious vocation in me. **Helping the sisters and seeing their simple joy in day-to-day life together made me want to be just like them when I grew up.**

After graduating from Chestnut Hill College, the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth invited me to join them in putting my Spanish degree to good use by moving to Puerto Rico to teach in their newly opened school. It was a grand adventure! One daily “yes” led to another, and here I am, thirty-eight years later! I have been blessed with a wide variety of ministries including education, pastoral care, and as a caregiver for children and my own parents. Roles in vocation ministry, and congregational leadership and formation deepened the call. The common thread that has been woven throughout these roles is a mission to connect people to God and to one another.

While serving in vocation ministry and on the National Board of the NRVC (National Religious Vocation Conference), I learned how educational debt affected discerners. The idea of a vocation fund was born and assisting religious congregations to welcome candidates burdened by educational debt sparked a new flame in me. When invited to serve on the Board of the National Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations (NFCRV), I felt affirmed in my mission.

The Vocation Fund is all about building bridges, connecting discerners, religious Congregations and donors into a wonderful tapestry to continue God’s call to “go out into the whole world and share the Good News!”

SISTER MICHELE VINCENT FISHER, C.S.F.N.  
*Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth*

*NFCRV Board Vice Chair*

*NRVC Delaware Valley  
Member Area Coordinator*

—LENT—

Fast

Pray

Give

Renew

## A Lenten invitation to give

Many men and women called to religious life carry a heavy burden of educational debt. Without assistance, this burden can delay — or prevent—their response to God's call.

During Lent, your generosity becomes an act of mercy.

Your gift to the Vocation Fund removes obstacles, restores freedom, and allows discerners to say, "yes" without fear.

## Please help to advance the mission of NFCRV

- ✓ **Give today** . Mail a donation or donate securely online by scanning the QR code to the right
- ✓ **Forward this newsletter** to family and friends
- ✓ **Learn more**, visit our website [vocationfund.org](http://vocationfund.org)



**Questions?** Contact Phil Loftus at [ploftus@nfcrv.org](mailto:ploftus@nfcrv.org)



### NATIONAL FUND FOR CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS

6348 N. MILWAUKEE AVE,  
STE #102  
CHICAGO, IL  
60646-3728

Phone:  
312-318-0180

E-mail:  
[ploftus@nfcrv.org](mailto:ploftus@nfcrv.org)



# LENT