

MARK BECKER'S UNIQUE STORY OF DISCERNMENT

Please tell us a little bit about your family and growing up in the Becker household.

My parents made a decision that God would be the center of their relationship and the center of our family. This decision set each member of our family on a firm foundation and created a home in which God drew each of us closer to Him as we grew older. Our family prayed together regularly and clung to the sacraments, creating an atmosphere where talking to God and receiving His graces were normal everyday occurrences. Certain examples of this from when I was little stick out in my mind such as spending a Saturday afternoon making sandwiches for the homeless or abstaining from television and music on Good Friday and Holy Saturday as we waited for Easter. These simple things had a large impact on my siblings and I, and they created in us a hunger to love and serve both God and our neighbor. Looking back on my childhood, what strikes me the most is not so much the words my parents used, but their actions and examples. For instance, I remember when I was young that I would run into the living room and interrupt one of my parents as they sat in silent prayer. They would patiently pause their prayers and talk to me. In one simple action, they showed their child patience and love while at the same time showing him that prayer is a normal part of daily living. My parents were heavily involved in the life of our parish and showed me the role an active Catholic community plays in supporting a strong family.

God has done some incredible things with the decision my parents made to center our family on Him and the decision each member of our family made to run towards Christ.

After high school, what were your study and career plans?

After high school I decided to attend an aviation university in Florida called Embry-Riddle with the dream of becoming an airline pilot, however, I was still deciding if I should join the military. Just before my first semester at college I watched the Blue Angels perform at an airshow and it solidified what would be my goal for the next 10 years: I wanted to become a Marine Officer and Naval Aviator. After graduating from college, I worked as a civilian flight instructor for about a year until I was accepted into Officer Candidate School (OCS) for the Marine Corps. After completing OCS in 2015 I was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant and departed for Pensacola, FL, and later Kingsville, TX for flight training. After my head injury (details in the question below), I became an Unmanned Aircraft Systems Officer at VMU-2 in Cherry Point, NC. I stayed there until I left active duty in June of this year.

Your path to discernment for your priestly vocation took a unique path. Please tell us a little bit about that path. When did you first hear the call to the priesthood?

In 2018, I was two weeks away from finishing flight training in Kingsville, TX and earning my Naval Aviator wings when I made a bad decision during my time off and sustained a significant head injury that landed me in the intensive care unit for a few days. Thanks to God's mercy, the fervent prayer of many people (including more than a few St. Matthew parishioners), and a fantastic medical team, I was back on my feet quickly. However, the Navy medical professionals determined that I could no longer fly, so I changed jobs in the Marine Corps and I was moved to Cherry Point, NC in 2020. It was a few months prior to this move that God began pointing me toward the priesthood and I began an intensive period of discernment. Just prior to moving from Texas, I was 51 percent sure that God was inviting me to enter formation for the priesthood and it was time to make a decision. I resolved to break up with my girlfriend, leave the Marine Corps, and enter seminary in the hope that this was what God wanted me to do. I begged God to stop me if this was not His will and then I put my plan into action. I had expected to leave the military right away and enter the seminary, but God had other plans for me and I stayed in the Marine Corps for another two years at Cherry Point. Throughout this time period, I was constantly surprised by what God was doing to grow me and what He was doing through me to help those in my life. It made complete sense why God had kept me there and didn't immediately draw me out of the military. I left active duty in June of this year firmly convinced that this is where God is leading me and I began seminary at St. Joseph College Seminary in August.

What are some key lessons you have learned from your experiences.

- Most of the significant growth in my interior life has come during times of suffering. If one offers up everything to God in these moments and leans into the suffering, God will do incredible things in that person's life. I am convinced that a life without suffering or discomfort is spiritually deadly. Stated another way, a comfortable life should not be our goal.
- Plan your day around Mass and your prayer time, not the other way around: consistency is key.
- The more I try to control everything in my life, the worse my life becomes. Trusting in God for everything in my life, even in the seemingly small and unimportant things, is the only way to live.

Who are the greatest influences in your life, in the past and currently?

My family has been the greatest influence throughout my life and God continues to use them to guide me and teach me. Additionally, the formation staff at St. Joseph College Seminary and the Daughters of the Virgin Mother are playing a massive role in helping me grow closer to Christ Jesus and conform my life to Him.

When you envision your life as a priest, what do you see?

My focus has been on the near term. Later on in seminary, I'm sure I will spend more time reflecting on this than I have so far, but currently I am going one step at a time.

What advice would you give a young man discerning the priesthood?

The same advice that was given to me: spend time in front of the Blessed Sacrament every day. If you cling to prayer and the sacraments, God will go to work on you and lead you toward His will. This means daily prayer, daily Mass (if possible), and regular confession. Trust that God will show you where to go, but understand that the answer will most likely not come when you want or in the way you were expecting to hear it. I also recommend talking to a priest to help guide them in their discernment.

