

CATHOLIC NEW YORK

AMERICA'S LARGEST CATHOLIC NEWSPAPER | MAY 23, 2019 VOL. XXXVIII, NO. 19 \$1.00 | WWW.CNY.ORG

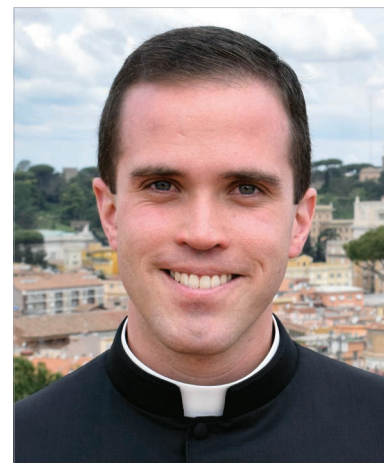


CHRIS SHERIDAN

Cardinal Dolan to Ordain Six Priests on Saturday

Cardinal Dolan will ordain six men to the priesthood at Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Saturday, May 25, at 9 a.m. Five will serve the Archdiocese of New York and one is a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal.

The 2019 ordination class includes Father Joseph C. Akunaeziri, 42, a native of Nigeria who studied at the Pope St. John XXIII National Seminary in Weston, Mass.; Father John J. Figueroa, 37, who grew up in Good Shepherd parish, Manhattan, and Visitation, the Bronx, and now belongs to Christ the King in Yonkers, and attended St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie; Father Walter J. Genito Jr., 25, of Sacred Heart parish, Suffern, who studied at Theological College in Washington, D.C., the national seminary of The Catholic University of America; Father Roger Kwan, 30, who converted to Catholicism in 2007 while a student at University of California, Berkeley, and attended St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie; Father Gabriel Monahan, C.F.R., 34, a graduate of the University of Notre Dame who entered the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal after a mission with the Missioners of Christ in Comayagua, Honduras; and Father Ryan A. Muldoon, 28, who was raised in St. Aedan's parish in Pearl River and studied at North American College in Rome.



CALLED TO PRIESTHOOD—Three graduates of St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie, are among the six men Cardinal Dolan will ordain to the priesthood this Saturday, May 25, at St. Patrick's Cathedral. In the seminary chapel, from left above, are Father Roger Kwan, Father Gabriel Monahan, C.F.R., and Father John J. Figueroa. On the far right are the three other ordinands, from top to bottom, Father Joseph C. Akunaeziri, Father Walter J. Genito Jr. and Father Ryan A. Muldoon. An eight-page ordination section wraps around this Catholic New York issue.



COURTESY OF FATHER JOSEPH C. AKUNAEZIRI

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| Father Joseph C. Akunaeziri | Father Akunaeziri will celebrate his first Mass at Holy Rosary Church in the Bronx, Sunday, May 26, at 4 p.m. Father Peter Mushi, A.J., pastor of St. Cecilia and Holy Agony parish in Manhattan, will deliver the homily. Father Akunaeziri chose Holy Rosary for his first Mass because it is a center for the African community. |
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He Seeks to Help the Faithful Grow in Holiness

Father Joseph C. Akunaeziri, 42, who studied at the Pope St. John XXIII National Seminary in Weston, Mass., is living out his decision to listen and follow God’s call to be a servant for Him in the Catholic Church.

In a recent phone interview with Catholic New York, Father Akunaeziri said he first knew he would pursue the priesthood when he was 10 years old, living in Owerri, Imo state, Nigeria, where he was born. The celebration of Mass, especially in Latin, has always been attractive to him.

“This is very important for me, because it is who I wanted to be,” Father Akunaeziri told CNY. “If I would not have realized it, I would not be complete in what God wants from me in this life, what God wants me to do.”

Father Akunaeziri, alluding to

recent crises in the Church, added, “I am looking forward to the Church to come back to its full glory...My hope for the faithful is for me to help them continue growing in holiness, and to nurture their faith. For myself, I hope to live in fullness for God, through my vocation.”

His first language is Ibo, one of three main languages in Nigeria.

Father Akunaeziri had been a member of a religious community called the Shoenstatt Fathers, in Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria; he entered in 1996 and left in 2001 before professing final vows. He received a bachelor’s degree in philosophy from Urban University in Rome in 2000, and then left for New York to determine his vocation here.

In New York, he worked as a substance abuse counselor. He earned a

master’s degree in systematic theology from St. John’s University, and a master’s in divinity from Pope St. John XXIII Seminary.

In Imo State, he attended St. Peter’s High School in Okigwe, and he later attended and graduated from Bishop Shanhal High School in Orlu.

He is the son of Joseph Nwabueze Umeaku, who died last year, and Virginia Nwamaka Umeaku. Father Akunaeziri grew up the third of nine children. His church as a youngster was Holy Ghost parish in Orlu. His brothers are Kingsley C. Umeaku, Izuchuwu Umeaku and Ejike H. Akunaeziri. His sisters are Chikwado Onuchukwu, Virginia Nwaobu, Nonye Atusiaka, Chizoba Obidimma and Kelechi Akujekwe.

Father Akunaeziri said he enjoys

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| Father John J. Figueroa | Father Figueroa will celebrate his first Mass at Christ the King Church in Yonkers, Sunday, May 26, at 2 p.m. Father Rufus Kenny, parochial vicar of St. Joseph’s parish in Somers, will deliver the homily. Father Kenny, ordained in 2017, was a fellow seminarian at Dunwoodie. |
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CHRIS SHERIDAN

As a youngster in the Inwood section of Manhattan, Father John J. Figueroa’s family were members of Good Shepherd parish. When he was a teen, the family moved to the Bronx and they became parishioners of Visitation Church, now St. John’s-Visitation parish. As a young adult, a number of influences brought him closer to the Church after a time of distance.

“It was really the influence of my older brother, who is really gifted in Catholic apologetics, teaching the faith and defending the faith,” said Father Figueroa, a seminarian at St. Joseph’s Seminary in Dunwoodie, whose current home parish is Christ the King in Yonkers.

“He was living in Singapore, but we would speak via Skype; he would give me lots of good counsel,” Father Figueroa said of the time in his late 20s.

Father Figueroa, 37, a Manhattan native, said he was “very blessed”

by the mentoring of Msgr. Robert Larkin, then-pastor at Visitation, who helped lead him back to the Catholic faith. “I went back to confession, and I received the sacrament of confirmation, it was the Easter Vigil 2010. That was a life-changing moment. I was 28 years old,” he said. “This is the path. God gave me the graces.”

At that point, Father Figueroa became an altar server, an early step toward the priesthood, along with increased involvement in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and a strong devotion to Blessed Mother Teresa, now St. Teresa of Calcutta. He also began volunteer work in the Bronx with Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity who served there.

Father Figueroa had worked as a manager at a fitness center in the Bronx for 12 years until 2011. Now he will guide people in their journey for tip-top spiritual condition. He entered Cathedral Seminary House

of Formation in Douglaston, Queens, in 2012 and St. Joseph’s Seminary in 2015. He is the son of Louis and Elena Figueroa, who are both Cuban-born; they are divorced. Father Figueroa has a married older brother, Louis Jr., who has two children, and a married younger sister, Jacqueline Rocafuerte, who has three children, and is pregnant.

He holds a bachelor’s degree in philosophy from St. John’s University, with a minor in theology.

His apostolic assignments were at the Missionaries of Charity homeless shelter in the Bronx, visiting the sick at Montefiore Hospital, the Bronx, and visiting prisoners and assisting at the infirmary and the Resolve to Stop Violence program at the Westchester County Department of Corrections, Valhalla.

Father Figueroa’s summer parish assignments were at Annunciation-Our Lady of Fatima in Crestwood,

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His Brother’s Influence Brought Him Closer to Church

Grandmother's Dream Offered a Clear Sign of Priesthood

Walter J. Genito Jr. was an eighth-grader at Sacred Heart School in Suffern when he was told by then-parochial vicar of Sacred Heart parish, Father Matthew Furey, that he possessed priestly qualities. "I was wondering if God was calling me to the priesthood," Father Genito, 25, told CNY, "and in my heart I was seeking a sign."

He got one. "In the fall of 2007 when I went to visit my grandmother who I didn't even tell that I was thinking of entering the priesthood, she told me she had a dream of me and in the dream she

saw me in a long, loose, white gown and prostrated on the ground. She woke up startled and said, 'Oh, my, Walter is going to be a priest.'

"I knew in my heart that God was sending a message to me and, shortly after, I had a burning desire for the priesthood."

He recalled attending Sunday Mass with his parents throughout childhood and First Friday Mass with his elementary-school classmates. "When I was in fifth grade I became an altar server and that gave me a more meaningful view of what was going on" in the liturgy, Father Genito said. "Around seventh grade, I began to be more attentive to the readings and how Jesus was present in the Eucharist."

He has a proclivity to the study of systematic theology, "seeing how various teachings developed and are interconnected. Within that field, I have a special focus on ecclesiology, particularly how the ministry of the Bishop of Rome fits in a Eucharistic framework."

Leisure time is spent with family and friends, going for walks and contemplating. "What I enjoy most about nature is how peaceful it is, and how there is a sense of closeness between all things," Father Genito said. "I particularly like looking at the ocean and taking in how vast it is." Likewise, he has felt "God's love and presence in nature" while strolling through Mary's Garden on the campus of The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

"I have enjoyed being at Theological College because of the healthy community where the faculty treat us like adults and discern with us what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives," he said.

Father Genito is grateful for the generous gifts God has bestowed upon him. "I believe that I have an open heart to what people bring to me, and a good mind so that I may understand them," he said. "I think people are most in need of priests who will reflect to them the compassionate face of Jesus."

His hope, he said, "is that I can be in a parish and become a part of people's lives so that ministering the sacraments and being compassionate to them, we may experience what it means to be God's family."

Born in Ridgewood, N.J., he is the only child of Walter John and Bernadette Rappel Genito. He

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COURTESY OF FATHER WALTER J. GENITO JR.

Father Walter J. Genito Jr.

Father Genito will celebrate his first Mass at Sacred Heart Church in Suffern Sunday, May 26, at 2:30 p.m. Auxiliary Bishop John O'Hara, also an alumnus of Don Bosco Prep, will deliver the homily.



CHRIS SHERIDAN

Father Roger Kwan

Father Kwan will offer his first Mass at St. Monica's Church, Manhattan, Saturday, May 25, at 3 p.m. The homilist will be Father William Tulua, parochial vicar of St. Catherine of Alexandria parish in the Diocese of Honolulu.

Father Roger Kwan is planning to use one of his talents to enrich his new parish.

"I really hope I'll be able to utilize my gifts musically to help draw people back to the Church and back to God," said Father Kwan, 30.

Music "expresses what the soul is feeling but the mouth doesn't know how to articulate."

Father Kwan, who plays piano and organ, sang with the Metropolitan Catholic Chorale during his time at St. Joseph's Seminary in Dunwoodie. The group, led by the

seminary's director of sacred music, Dr. Jennifer Donelson, D.M.A., meets on Tuesdays at St. Barnabas in the Bronx and sings in the archdiocese, Diocese of Brooklyn, Diocese of Rockville Centre and sometimes in New Jersey.

"It's a group of Catholic musicians who want to learn the repertoire of the Church's patrimony and offer it back by singing it for free," Father Kwan said. "We try to inspire people and expose people to that rich musical patrimony that we have as Catholics, which oftentimes most parishes don't get to experience."

Father Kwan converted to Catholicism in 2007 while a student at University of California, Berkeley and spent a year after college discerning with the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest in Milwaukee before entering the seminary.

"Our Lord in the Eucharist and the beauty of the Church's sacred liturgy drew me to the faith," he said.

Father Kwan was raised in Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., as one of four children of Lawrence and Emily Kwan. His parents immigrated to the United States from Hong Kong in the 1970s.

"For me, the importance of family was instilled at a very young age, as well as staying in touch with my parents and visiting," Father Kwan said. "I'm kind of surprised it hasn't been the experience for a lot of Americans. As I visit the sick and elderly, I find out a lot of children moved away or don't call or visit very often. I find it very tragic and sad."

In his apostolic ministries, Father Kwan served food to the poor with LAMP Catholic Ministries in the Bronx, and prayed with and distributed Communion to sick and dying patients at Calvary Hospital in the Bronx.

Father Kwan served his diaconate assignment at St. Mary-St. Joseph and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Poughkeepsie, and previously had pastoral assignments as a seminarian at St. John Chrysostom, the Bronx; St. Stephen the First Martyr, Warwick; and St. Teresa, Manhattan.

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His Musical Talents Should Serve New Parish Well



COURTESY OF FATHER RYAN MULDOON

Father Ryan A. Muldoon

Father Muldoon will celebrate his first Mass at St. Aedan Church in Pearl River at 2 p.m. on Sunday, May 26. Father Jeffrey Maurer, pastor of St. Mary’s parish in Washingtonville, will deliver the homily.

Growing With His ‘Brothers’ at North American College

Father Ryan A. Muldoon’s summer experience in Pattaya, Thailand, following his first year as a seminarian at North American College in Rome, reinforced his “utter reliance upon Divine Providence.” He and two other seminarians, working with the Redemptorist Fathers, were assigned to teach English to groups of blind teenagers.

His inexperience as a teacher and lack of knowledge of the Thai language led Father Muldoon to believe, at first, that the experience would be disastrous. “However, the Lord, in His providence, make miracles possible if only we offer Him humbly the gifts He has given us,” he said.

Father Muldoon, 28, came away with more than a successful experience; he learned how “radically I—as a Catholic man and a priest—need to

depend on the Lord.”

He first started to appreciate the gifts of Catholicism while growing up in the “close-knit and largely Irish-American community” of Pearl River, with his parents, Bruce and Nancy, and his now-married sister, Tara. The family belonged to St. Aedan’s parish, where his parents still worship.

Many priests influenced Father Muldoon’s priestly vocation, but one in particular was Msgr. Joseph Penna. He served as pastor of St. Aedan’s from Father Muldoon’s boyhood to his early seminary years. “Msgr. Penna influenced me most by his example: He was always to be found before and after Mass in a chair in the back of church with his eyes fixed on the tabernacle. The Eucharist was and is the center of his priestly life.”

During high school, the future

priest was a member of the cross country and track teams at Don Bosco Prep, just across the border in Ramsey, N.J. Kevin Kilduff was his coach for four years as well as his biology and chemistry teacher. While his coach wanted his athletes to attend daily practices, he allowed Father Muldoon time to be involved in campus ministry, retreats and discernment programs. “Mr. K is a great model of Catholic manhood and of a well-lived lay Catholic vocation to teaching and forming young people,” he said.

He earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., and a master of arts in Catholic philosophical studies at St. Joseph’s Seminary, Dunwoodie. He also holds a bachelor of sacred

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Father Gabriel Monahan, C.F.R.

Father Monahan will celebrate his first Mass at Annunciation Church, Manhattan, Sunday, May 26, at 2 p.m. Father Luke Mary Fletcher, C.F.R., director of priestly studies for the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, will serve as homilist.

A nine-month mission with the Missioners of Christ in Comayagua, Honduras, became a “game-changer” for Father Gabriel Monahan, C.F.R., and he soon entered the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal.

“I recognized my desire for the Lord and desire for prayer,” said Father Monahan, 34, who started his mission in August 2007. “That paved the way to saying yes to the friars. It was down in Honduras, I realized I did not want to go a day without Mass and adoration.”

Father Monahan had his two-week official visit with the friars in June 2008 before entering the friars that September and professing his final vows in July 2013. As a friar, he spent three more years in Comayagua and has also served in Limerick, Ireland; St. Michael’s Friary, in Paterson, N.J.; St. Joseph’s Friary, Manhattan; and St. Leopold Friary, Yonkers.

“Their faith is real because it has to

be,” said Father Monahan of Honduras. “If you’re scrounging on beans and rice and you don’t know where your next meal is coming from, God becomes real. When you’re living stripped of excess and you realize what do I need to survive, live and thrive, you become very aware of God’s blessing. The fact you have a roof over your head, a meal and you’re supported by people who love you, the essentials become very clear when you stay down there.”

Father Monahan is one of eight children of Joseph and Jo Ellen Monahan. His older brother, Father Tim Monahan, is the director of vocations for the Archdiocese of Chicago.

“Seeing how joyful and happy he was as a priest was an example for me growing up in high school and college,” Father Monahan said. “He was my mini-spiritual director. I’d call and we’d talk on the phone. He’d give me tips and advice, and he guided me

through rough waters of high school and college.

“The whole family was an influence, especially mom. She’d bring us younger kids to daily Mass and rosary. That was a big impact growing up. By the time I got to college, I received a strong foundation, but it was still the faith of my parents and family. It wasn’t personal faith yet. I wasn’t in a personal relationship with the Lord yet. In college, I was blessed with good Catholic friendships, friendships rooted in the Lord. It was really an answer to prayer.”

Father Monahan, a graduate of the University of Notre Dame who earned a bachelor’s degree in liberal studies, currently works in the vocations office at St. Joseph’s Friary in Yonkers. A runner who completed his first half-marathon in Atlantic City, N.J., last year, Father Monahan is looking forward to his ordination.

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CHRIS SHERIDAN

Mission in Honduras Helped Him to Say Yes to the Friars

Akunaeziri...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE P-2

singing, organizing seminars and writing reflection articles.

His apostolic assignments were at St. Patrick's Manor nursing home in Framingham, Mass, where he taught RCIA; and he served as a deacon at St. Catherine of Siena parish in Westford, Mass. His summer parish assignments were at St. Francis of Assisi in West Nyack and St. Christopher-St. Margaret Mary on Staten Island.

Figueroa...

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for two summers, and Holy Cross in the Bronx,



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where he resided during an assignment at Calvary Hospital. He was a postulant with the Carmelites in Wyoming in 2015; after discernment, he decided to return to Dunwoodie. Among his interests are weight training and learning about sacred art and architecture.

Genito...

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graduated from Sacred Heart School in Suffern in 2007 and Don Bosco Preparatory High School in Ramsey, N.J., in 2011.

He earned a bachelor's degree in liberal arts, with a major in philosophy, from Fordham University, and a bachelor's in sacred theology from the School of Theology and Religious Studies of The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He is pursuing a licentiate in sacred theology.

Kwan...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE P-3

At St. Teresa, he met Father Donald Baker, and will celebrate his first Mass at St. Monica's in Manhattan, where Father Baker is now the pastor.

“He's been a very helpful, very frank mentor,” said Father Kwan, who has a degree in the Latin language from UC Berkeley. “He's not afraid to tell a seminarian some of the hardships and challenges of becoming a priest. At the same time, he's very happy as a priest and he's encouraged me a lot, especially when I had my own personal doubts and challenges to go through.”

Muldoon...

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theology from Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He expects to receive his licentiate of sacred theology in ecumenism and interreligious dialogue

from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome next year.

In the archdiocese, he served summer parish assignments at St. Mary's, Washingtonville; St. Barnabas, the Bronx; and St. Charles Borromeo, Harlem; and expects another summer parish assignment after ordination before returning to Rome in the fall for one more year of studies.

The “Christ-centered” nature of priestly formation at North American College has made his fellow seminarians into brothers, “in a very real way,” Father Muldoon said. And that's a good thing when the long distance precludes regular visits home.

“Two of my favorite times during the week are Tuesday nights, when, instead of the entire community praying together, the 12 men who live on the same hall as me gather to pray Evening Prayer and share graces from the past week, and Thursday nights, when the Archdiocese of New York seminarians gather to share some time together and to pray Night Prayer.”

Monahan...

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“I'm kind of blown away by who comes,” Father Monahan said. “It's a reminder of the blessings from God how many people have been a part of my life through this journey.”

“The more I'm in this life, the more I realize I was made for this. The prospect of being ordained is a new thing, but I'm still me. I'm entering this mystery and it's deepening.”



PROFILES OF THE ORDINANDS IN THIS SECTION WERE WRITTEN BY ARMANDO MACHADO, DAN PIETRAFESA, CHRISTIE L. CHICOINE AND JOHN WOODS.



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CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR
NEWLY ORDAINED PRIEST
FATHER
JOSEPH AKUNAEZIRI,
NEW YORK ARCHDIOCESE
ORDAINED ON MAY 25, 2019

St. Cecilia and
Holy Agony Catholic Church

*Prays the Lord blesses you
As you follow in His way.
May you find joy and peace
As He inspires you in your priestly ministry.*