



## Lord, are you calling me?

By José Astúa | Photography by Eric Tank

### THE CALL

God's call to follow Him comes in many different ways and many examples of these can be found in the Bible. For example, John the Baptist, who from his mother's womb, had recognized the presence of Jesus (Lk 1, 39-45;) or that of Samuel who heard a voice calling him, but does not know who is calling him (1Sam 3, 1-10). Like them, each one of us has received a specific call and we must discern what God is asking us to do with our lives.

When speaking with Deacon Noah Thelen, who will be ordained a priest on June 5th, regarding vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life in the Hispanic community in our diocese, he told me: "We need them, we need priests who speak Spanish and who are of Hispanic origin because they and their families are a very important part of our church here in Grand Rapids". And that they are!

Within our context we encounter many obstacles to responding in a positive way to the vocational call to the priesthood or to the consecrated life. We may find ourselves in situations where the "American dream," the idea that we are in this country to financially support our family, or the strong anti-religious trend we are experiencing right now prevent our young men from asking themselves the question about their vocation. We might also feel frightened to explore this possibility because the American ecclesial culture is very different from that of Latin America. However, we must remain firm in our faith and trust that God will bring about the necessary changes at the ecclesial and personal levels if He is calling to us.

### THE PEOPLE NEED YOU

There are more and more Spanish-speaking people throughout our diocese who need and deserve to be adequately served. To this need, God in his infinite mercy, since ancient times, made a promise to his people. A promise that Pope St. John Paul II reminds us of in his apostolic exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis, number one: "I will give you shepherds after my own heart" (Jer 3:15). With these words of the prophet Jeremiah, God promises his people never to leave them without shepherds to gather and guide them: "I will set over them (my sheep) shepherds to feed them, and they shall no longer be afraid or dismayed" (Jer 23:4).

In this regard, in our dialogue, Deacon Noah spoke to us about his pastoral experience in the

parishes of our diocese with Hispanic ministry. He told us: "having so many Hispanics in this area we need priests who can dedicate themselves to ministry with them." In addition, he said that "one of the things that struck me the most when I was in Ionia with Father Oscar Londoño (missionary from Yarumal) was that he would drive to far places to celebrate Mass in different places and many people would drive long, long distances to go to Mass in Ionia... I thought: We need more priests who can serve in this place! People drive up to an hour to go to mass in the language they speak. For me this is one of the factors that motivates me to work on my Spanish and do Hispanic ministry while saying to myself: "look these people are underserved".

## **FAMILY AND VOCATION**

Although God can call whomever He wants no matter where they come from or what family they belong to, parents can play an important role in fostering in their sons and daughters a spirit of openness to a vocational call. *Amoris Laetitia* reminds us that: " The family is thus the place where parents become their children's first teachers in the faith. (AL #16).

Noah's parents have been a great example for their children, Rex and Gwen tell us that they firmly believe that having one of their children on the path to becoming a priest "is part of God's plan and one of the things that has been very important to us has been the St. Patrick-St. Anthony parish community" (in Grand Haven). First of all, the support from the pastor, then from those who work in the parish ministries and finally from many of the parishioners who have helped them grow in their faith and have touched Noah's life and caused him to contemplate the priesthood more seriously. Also, in the case of Noah's parents they have been docile to God's plan thanks to their openness and willingness to participate in various activities for his spiritual growth, this has been very helpful for them to feel at ease with God's plan for their lives. Asking Rex for advice for Hispanic parents, he says, "As parents we must be open and willing to slow down the daily rhythm to listen to God's voice. He also tells us that participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, can help us be more prepared to accept God's plan for our lives.

In closing I want us to meditate on these phrases from Deacon Noah regarding parents who have sons or daughters who want to discern their vocation: "Parents should pray for their children and for themselves."

"Parents have to be generous with their sons on becoming a priest or their daughter on joining a religious community and at the same time be open to the fact that their children may or may not be called to this very particular vocation."

And finally, "you, the parents, are the image of God who as Father sent his own son for the salvation of the world... and Christian parents are called to imitate that generosity of the Father". This year is dedicated to St. Joseph, let us ask him as father of the Holy Family for his guidance and protection for us and for vocations to religious and priestly life in our Diocese.  
St. Joseph / Pray for us.