



## A Life of Service

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### Here I Am Lord to Do Your Will

When we reflect on the vocation that God has called us to live we need to be aware of, "the free and gracious intervention of God who calls. It is God who takes the initiative in the call." (John Paul II *Pastores Dabo Vobis* #36).

As the prophet Jeremiah says: "Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you prophet to the nations'" (Jer. 1:4-5) The story of Fr. Steven Cron is one of those stories of attentiveness and docility to God's call from a very early age. Fr. Steven was born into a deeply Catholic

family, marked by a profound devotion to the Eucharist that was reflected in the activities and games he played in his early years. When we asked him how his vocation was sparked, he told us: "...I don't know, because for as long as I can remember I have wanted to be a priest", and added: "I remember coming home from kindergarten in the afternoons and pretending to celebrate Mass. When I was 8 years old, my maternal grandmother gave me a little altar that she put on the table to celebrate mass and two years later she gave me a set of priest's vestments that she custom-made to fit me. So, when someone asks me about the beginning of my vocation, it's like someone asking me when I started to love my mother and father".

### ‘With the Smell of Sheep’

Pope Francis, during his first Chrism Mass on March 28, 2013, calls priests to go out of themselves to serve the people. The pope says: "be shepherds with the smell of sheep, let it be noticed-;" And this "smell of sheep" is one of the aspects that has characterized Fr. Steve's pastoral ministry, especially his dedication to the Hispanic community of the Diocese of Grand Rapids. However, this dedication does not happen by chance, since at a very young age Steve had the opportunity to become acquainted with people from the Latino community. Fr. Steve tells us that his fascination with this culture began when he was four years old and recounts: "We lived in a ranch on the second floor of an apartment building near Carson City, behind the apartment were the workers' houses, which at that time were known as "the braseros". My brothers and I (in spite of language limitations) would talk with them, and I marvel that our

parents never told us "Oh, don't go with them!" Later when he was just 11 years old and already an altar boy, the priest of his parish invited him to his home to ask him to help at the 6 PM Masses on Sundays that were held during the summer season for the *braseros*. His familiarity with them led him to say yes, and for the next 5 years he helped out every summer at these celebrations. By that time, in 1963, as a seventh grader, the principal of his school, Sister Thomas Ann, enrolled him and four other classmates in Spanish classes at the public school, which he enjoyed very much. While in the seminary he persevered in his Spanish studies. He continued to be involved in migrant ministry thanks to the support and advice of a young priest he knew before he was ordained. In fact, this same priest convinced him and then seminarian Fr. Larry King to live and work for a summer in one of the migrant camps. This was a great experience for Steve as he was able to learn more about the Hispanic community and practice his Spanish without having to go to another country.

Once ordained a deacon in 1977 and then a priest on April 1, 1978, Fr. Steven Cron embarked on a 44-year journey of service to God's holy people. Throughout all those years he supported the Hispanic ministry at St. Joseph in Wright by celebrating Sunday Masses consistently for 43 years. His ministry has been carried out as follows: 1 year as a deacon at St. Patrick in Portland, 3 years at St. Francis Xavier where he began the Hispanic ministry with special celebrations for the community, 3 years at Holy Trinity, 1 year at St. Francis de Sales in Holland, 9 years as pastor of St. Joseph the Worker, 9 years at St. James Parish, 5 years at the Cathedral and now he has been for 13 years back at St. Joseph the Worker his first ministerial love since he visited the parish in 1975 and wanted to work with this community.

### **The Radicality of the Call**

There is one story in particular that represents Fr. Steve as that shepherd that every sheep needs and that highlights his deep love for his vocational call to the service of others. This is reflected in number 28 of *Pastores Dabo Vobis* when he says: "... priestly obedience has a particular "pastoral" character." That is to say, "It is lived in an atmosphere of constant readiness to allow oneself to be taken up, as it were "consumed," by the needs and demands of the flock." Fr. Steve's love for his "flock" led him to the lengths of adopting two young boys from the community and becoming an adoptive father like our blessed St. Joseph. Now that our beloved Fr. Steve is retiring, he will be able to spend a little more time with his thirteen grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren in addition to continuing to collaborate when prudent with the parishes of the diocese.

Finally, as *Pastores Dabo Vobis* number 41 reminds us: "We are all responsible for priestly vocations". Therefore, let us take time today to give thanks for Fr. Steve's vocation and pray for him in this new stage of his life. Let us make this a habit and pray constantly for priests especially those in our Diocese of Grand Rapids so that the Lord will continue to fulfill his promise to give us shepherds after His own heart. (Jer 3:15)