

**Wednesday June 12<sup>th</sup> 7 pm in the Chapel**

**Fr. Michael Eisenberg, Director of Vocations for the Diocese of Arlington**

**More information can be found at**

<https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/Vocations/For-Men/How-to-become-a-priest/>

**We started the evening with prayer and then Irene Zaso introduced Fr. Eisenberg.**

**Reverend Michael C. Isenberg** is a native of Buffalo, NY, though he moved to the Arlington Diocese when he was a child and attended Our Lady of Angels Parish in Woodbridge, VA. He graduated from Virginia Tech in 2003 with a degree in Computer Engineering and worked in the field for a few years. In 2006, he entered seminary formation for the Diocese of Arlington, attending both Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, MD, and the Pontifical North American College in Rome. After his ordination to the priesthood in 2013, Fr. Isenberg served as Parochial Vicar at St Veronica Parish, Chantilly, VA. In June 2018, Fr. Isenberg was appointed as the Director of Vocations for the Diocese of Arlington.

### **Rough Notes of the presentation**

His role is to get to know the men and for Bishop Burbidge to get to know them. The Bishop is very generous with his time.

Religious Communities like the Oblates differ from Diocesan priests in that they strive to make each other holy. They pray together, grow spiritually together and that overflows into their mission and where they are assigned. They live their charism in what they do whether at a school or parish and that holiness & charism overflows to the parish.

Unlike the Oblates the Diocesan priest has no particular charism or community, but grow in holiness in the life of the parish. They are instructed to make parishioners holy. Holiness come through all they give. Many who are not attracted to a religious community like the parish life.

When men are interested, we find out what they are interested in or attracted to in order to help determine the best formation. There is a back & forth that builds on a relationship in order to seek information about the candidate. Many candidates think meeting Fr. Eisenberg after one time that they will receive an application, but it doesn't work that way. The process is slow and is meant to be slow to get that relationship going. Sometimes there is an instinct when you meet someone, all receive the same attention.

We do not recruit but we have events to promote the vocation, with camps, college events, presentations at school, vocations Masses etc., to draw people to pray & open the door

Types of candidates are:

- High school students – They have their eyes open and want to see all, parents have goals for them, their prayer life might not be strong enough. Many do not come from this area.
- College students – exposed through campus ministry and FOCUS missionaries who go to college campuses and help form small prayer groups and Bible studies.
- Working professionals feel the desire.
- Military people

When looking at candidates I might try to think, "If my parents were dying would I want this person to come and walk with me." Looking for some normalcy, can they minister, do they have good people skills.

There are two sides to the process: the person answering the call and the church responding to the call. On Sunday's ordination Fr. Eisenberg presented the candidates to the Bishop on behalf of us the church by saying, "Most Reverend Father, holy mother Church asks you to ordain this man, our brother, to the responsibility of the Priesthood...After inquiry among Christian people and upon the recommendation of those responsible, I testify that he has been found

worthy.” The Bishop then replies, “Relying on the help of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ, we choose this man, our brother, for the Order of the Priesthood.”

The application process is long, in order to paint a picture of who they are. They might not receive an application until a year after Fr. Eisenberg gets to know them. Once they are ready there is a 27-page document they need to fill out which is a biography of their life - all they did. Essay of why they want to be a priest. A psychosexual history. Criminal background check, fingerprints, Virtus training for children protection. Even if they are currently employed by the church a background check is redone. Need referrals from someone in religious life, a 2nd reference, parents, sibling, friends, professor, education & employer references.

Out of the 95% of parents that didn't want their son, to be a priest over the time of his studies they turned around, because they saw how happy he was.

Other essays, why is God calling you to be a priest and what does the priesthood mean to you?

A forensic psychologist does a test and evaluation for four hours to determine who is the person. The test has been updated over time as culture has changed and new information is found to be relevant.

Do an IQ exam, aptitude & personality screening for depression, anxiety, accuracy MMPI, positive vs pessimistic personality.

The psychologist report becomes a sixteen-page evaluation. Recommendations are made most need additional help to understand their feelings & emotions better, since most men think linearly.

The full process can take from 2 months to a year.

There are no rejection stats.

The 100-page report is sent to the Bishop with a summary from Fr. Eisenberg and he reads the whole thing.

Bishop makes notes and talks with the candidate and then sends the information to the Admissions Committee because he needs the wisdom of the whole Church. The committee consists of seven positions – a senior priest, psychologist, a sister, a person from academia, a lay person, and a married couple who have connections to the priesthood. (Between the lay person and academia person one would be male, and one would be female).

The committee meets every three weeks usually meeting three candidates in a cycle. They review summary, essays, autobiography, psycho eval (given verbally) and they meet the candidate for a half hour. Ask questions, talk & conversation. They give recommendations, any reservations or need for an explanation.

Once accepted, the Bishop calls the candidate to give them the news on his cell phone so that they have his cell number in case at any time they need to talk with him. Then he determines what seminary they will attend.

If you do not have a college degree, it takes eight years to be formed as a priest, four years of College Seminary and then four more years of Major Seminary. If you already have your college degrees then it takes six years to be formed as a priest, two years of prerequisite classes and formation, called Pre-Theology, and then four years of major theology.

Minor seminary - If they have not gone to college nor received a degree, they go to the St. John Paul II Seminary at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC (House of Formation). They live together with other seminarians, eat, sleep & study together while studying at Catholic University to receive a 4-year college coed experience. They receive a bachelor's in philosophy. Student pays half and the Diocese of Arlington pays half.

Major seminary - Used to send students to Ohio but it was too far away from the Diocese, so now attend Mount St. Mary Seminary in Emmitsburg, MD (an independent seminary), St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia, PA (part of the Diocese of Philadelphia) or Pontifical North American College in Rome, Italy. The Diocese of Arlington pays all of it.

Three years at the Pontifical Northern American College in Rome.

Rector oversees seminary and they have Bishop like faculties. Seminary also includes the Vice Rector, Dean of Men (get to know seminarians), Formation Director (talk with the Bishop on how the men are doing) & Spiritual Director (form their internal being, they are like a counselor, it is confidential like a confessional, only if there is a detriment to their health or another's would that confidentially be broken), Lay Staff and educators.

Bishop visits the seminarian once a year for a half hour meeting, as well as with rector & Directors to see how things are going. Fr. Eisenberg visits each semester one on one. Men know they call the bishop anytime. Once a year there is a picnic for all seminaries & families.

There is a Mass for the men to enter as a Candidate for the first 2 years of study. They after 4 years become and Accolate where they can give Communion become an Ordinary Minister and Lector read the scripture at Mass, then a deacon in the Diaconate and then ordained a priest.

They have yearly evaluations and there are sometimes when men need to step away from studies to get counseling which we have psychologists with a Catholic perspective to guide them.

Every year Seminarians are sent to parishes for the summer. Feedback from pastor and parishioners is gathered to determine if he can build up the community.

What is different now than back in the 60- 80s? There was no psychologist evaluation. The life history document was not as thorough. The formation and relationship of the seminarians to the Diocese was nonexistent. Bishop Burbidge even says that the first time he met his Bishop was at his ordination. Summer Assignments were not done, the seminarians just had off. There was no spiritual direction. Not enough attention was given to them. Over the past 5 years, Seminarians are building better relationships with one another with small groups to support one another.

We've learned a lot in the past. Many things were fixed even before the charter in seminarian formation just before they realized it was even needed.

Diocese of Arlington was the leading diocese for Child Protection and the first to implement Virtus and Victim Assistance program three years before the Dallas Charter.

Bishop Lenten Appeal pays for \$39,000 a year for each seminarian's education.

Clergy will be receiving continuing education classes in economics and finances.

Currently the Diocese is bottom heavy with new priests. We are growing healthy priests with enthusiasm and joy. They bring life and encourage the faith.

Vocation Directors across the country meet once a year in convocation. We received updates on a variety of different topics such as psych update, immigration since many come to the US to become priests and meet others to share what they are doing in each Diocese

Archdiocese of the Military does not have their own priests and they borrow from Dioceses. Our Diocese gives quite a few based on our location to DC. We currently have six of our priests or in the military. These priests are usually ones that have debt from their studies or they were in ROTC or come from a military family.