



# Personal Profiles

Learn more about the people who treat you like family.  
Interview with John Paul Shimek

Spanish Teacher

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## WHAT WERE YOU LIKE AS A STUDENT?

As a student, I enjoyed my liberal arts courses (e.g., history, literature, art, foreign language, etc.) more than my Science and Math courses. I always enjoyed class discussion and working with friends on group projects. One thing I remember about my student days is that I always looked for connections between my Catholic faith and what I was learning in the classroom.

In the interests of full disclosure, I should probably add that I wasn't a very diligent student and I'm sure I got called to the Principal's office more than once. During my years in elementary school, I had a wonderful School Sister of Notre Dame as my Principal, Sister Mary Anne Joseph. I learned a lot about forgiveness and compassion from her.

## WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO BE A TEACHER?

I had been a college professor of Theology and Philosophy and a Vatican journalist, living abroad in Rome. One Christmas season, I was back home in the United States visiting family. My bags were already packed and I was preparing to return to Europe. I was playing with my nephew. At that time, I don't think he was much older than 1 or 2. In that moment, I realized that I wanted to be around him as he grew older. The idea of flying in to visit family only once or twice a year didn't appeal to me. So, I made the necessary calls to my editors and received permission to stay stateside. But in order to make that happen, I needed to find additional work. At just that time, another Catholic school was looking for a language instructor. I had always enjoyed working with young people and I had (and have!) a passion for foreign languages. So I decided to apply for that position. Once I had taken it, I very quickly fell in love with teaching. I loved working in the Catholic school system, putting faith and prayer at the heart of our day, networking with parents and colleagues truly concerned for the welfare of our students, and building together a community where Jesus shines in all that we do.

## WHY DID YOU BECOME A WILDCAT?

St. Bruno is a wonderful faith-filled community that prides itself on offering our students a quality Catholic education. The cohort of teachers is a closely-knit community of people who want the best for their students. How could I not want to be a member of that team?!

## HOW WERE YOU CALLED TO CHRIST?

To answer your question, I don't think I could point to one single moment. Instead, I would need to refer to the whole form of the life I received from my ancestors, parents, and teachers. I grew up in a practicing Catholic family. My parents were active members of their parish community. And they took time to teach my siblings and me the beauty of the Catholic faith. They took us to Sunday and daily Mass, they loaded us into the family van to go on pilgrimages, and they brought us to special events like the 1993 World Youth Day in Denver, Colorado with Pope St. John Paul II. When we were school-aged, they enrolled us in our parish's Catholic elementary school. And they sent us off to Catholic colleges. I attended Saint Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire where I studied under the Benedictine monks in the foothills of the picturesque White Mountains. In this way, I learned the truths of the faith.

But in addition to receiving a quality Catholic education, my parents also made sure that we got to know the charismatic life of the Church. And so we got to know the Carmelites at Holy Hill, the Jesuits at Marquette University, the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Elm Grove, and groups around the diocese like Opus Dei, Schoenstatt, and also Communion and Liberation. In this way, my siblings and I were exposed to the universality and catholicity of the Church and we were taught how to deepen our prayer lives. To be certain, these experiences awakened us to the diversity of gifts of the Holy Spirit and the full plenitude of beauty that radiates from the communion of the Church. Across all of these experiences, and central to them all, was the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified and risen. He is the mission of God in this world, revealing the merciful love of the Father, and revealing the truth and dignity of man to man himself, making his high calling clear. My answer would be incomplete, however, if I did not speak to how I learned the importance of carrying that proclamation into the world. Indeed, I learned to make this proclamation my own in the context of my Christian family. My mother was a school teacher and my father a lawyer. And so I learned from them the importance of building the Kingdom of Christ and pursuing the common good in the middle of the world, working daily to draw a little closer to the standard of Christian holiness illustrated in the Gospels. Through them I learned the importance of seeking to serve the least among us. In this connection, I should mention one group that had a special hand in teaching me the beauty of service. During my time in Washington, D.C. and again in Rome, I was blessed to get to know the Missionaries of Charity, founded in India by St. Teresa of Calcutta. From them, I learned a special love for the poor and the suffering. Their way of life prompted me to volunteer in soup kitchens, prisons, nursing homes, hospitals, and special homes for those with intellectual and developmental challenges. They sparked in me a desire to teach the catechism to refugees, immigrants, and others at the margins of society and to bring Holy Communion to the shut-ins and homebound.

## **HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR TIME OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL?**

I am an avid reader. My formal academic degrees are in Theology and Philosophy and I am completing a Master's degree in Education. So I spend a lot of time reading books and articles in these fields. Some of my favorite creative writers are Flannery O'Connor, Dorothy Sayers, Walker Percy, Evelyn Waugh, and CS Lewis. And I also enjoy reading people like Edith Stein, Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Gabriel Marcel, Josef Pieper, Romano Guardini, Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, and many others. I have a large collection of books that I am always handing off to friends, hoping to spread the joy of reading. Throughout all of my life, I have been an active language learner. And so I spend a fair amount of time studying and learning languages such as Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, Classical Syriac, Arabic, French, Italian, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, and - of course - Spanish, among others. In particular, I enjoy reading the news in these languages. And, naturally, I enjoy speaking these languages with friends. Also, I am a member of the Board of Directors of Millennial Catholic Gentlemen, a third degree Knight of Columbus, a member of the fraternity Communion and Liberation, and a cooperator of Opus Dei. So I keep myself very active in the Church and in my home parish (St. Mary of the Visitation in Elm Grove). As I noted before, service work is very important to me. And I do keep active in that. But above all, probably my most favorite thing to do is to spend time with my two nephews (ages 2 and 5). I enjoy playing with them, taking them to the zoo and the museum, and - most importantly! - I try to pass the faith onto them by teaching them how to pray. We are blessed to have a Eucharistic Adoration chapel at my home parish. And so I spend time before our Eucharistic Lord with them there. Then, we go for ice cream or spend time playing at the playground.

## **WHAT DO YOU WANT PEOPLE TO REMEMBER?**

I would like people to remember these beautiful words from Pope St. John Paul II: "Each of you has a special mission in life, and you are each called to be a disciple of Christ. Many of you will serve God in the vocation of Christian married life; some of you will serve him as dedicated single persons; some as priests and religious. But all of you must be the light of the world. To those of you who think that Christ may be inviting you to follow him in the priesthood or the consecrated life I make this personal appeal: I ask you to open your hearts generously to him; do not delay your response. The Lord will help you to know his will; he will help you to follow your vocation courageously."