



VOCATION STORY: Friar Julian Zambanini, OFM Conv.

When people ask me about myself, I generally begin by telling them I was born in Brooklyn! But I guess I started thinking about my vocation when I was in 7th grade, when our class was given the assignment to write a paragraph on what we would like to be, with a picture of that occupation. I wrote I wanted to be a, “teaching religious brother.” All I remember was a bit of pleased surprise on the part of the Court Street Franciscan, Sr. Casilda, and my parents. “Of course, he’s only 12 and still may change his mind.” And they were right.

At the end of 8th grade, I was offered the opportunity to go to St. Francis Seminary, Staten Island, for 4 years of high school. But fortunately, I received a scholarship to attend a local Catholic High School, V.I. (Vincentian Institute) in Albany NY, a co-educational -- boys and girls the same building but separately taught by the Holy Cross Brothers and the Sisters of Mercy. It was the perfect excuse for not going to the seminary at 13 years old and one of the best decisions I have made. I had a great 4 years: the teachers, my friends, the football and basketball games, the dances ... in the Marching Band and 2 Dance Bands ... All this time I stayed in contact with Conventual Franciscan Friars at my parish and at the end, although I still was looking to be a, “teaching brother,” I decided to go to St. Francis Seminary for 2 years of college. I remember my father saying, “If you like it stay, if you don’t think it’s for you, come home!” I have never regretted staying even though with the grace of God I gradually came to realize that the Lord was calling me to be a Franciscan, a Priest, and a teacher.

And the rest is history: a year of novitiate, taking my first vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, 2 years of Philosophy, making my Solemn Profession, 4 years of Theology at St. Anthony-on-Hudson, Rensselaer, NY ... and Ordination in May 1965.

After Ordination, I was sent to make use of my M.A. in Classical Languages to teach Latin (my students would sing to me: “What is a nice guy like you doing, teaching Latin?”)! Religion and Journalism at Canevin High School (now called Bishop Canevin High School) in Pittsburgh, PA. Some of my time there was dedicated to being a Guidance Counselor, Newspaper Moderator, Lighting Technician for school musicals, Vice Principal for Curriculum, and Head Master while involved in the Province as President of the Formation Commission.

After 13 years in High School work, I was asked to pursue one of my first loves ... to study Sacred Scripture and to be able to dig more deeply into the Word of God and St. Francis of Assisi’s experience of the Crucified Christ.

This began a new chapter in my life as a Conventual Franciscan Friar: studying at the Biblicum in Rome, working with our seminarians at the Seraphicum, being elected to General Central government of the Order as Assistant General for Formation and visiting the Seminaries of the Order in Western and Eastern Europe, Japan, Australia, Brazil, Central America, and U.S. During this time, I have met and lived with friars from all over the world at our International Seminary, who are now Teachers, Pastors, Missionaries, some Ministers Provincials, one Minister General and some Bishops. During my 37 years in Rome and Assisi, I came to appreciate different cultures, the differences in the Church, the dedication and love of men and women who gave their lives to help the poor and disadvantaged all over the world, some of them even being considered or already declared canonized Saints.

I certainly have learned a great deal in all these years ... about myself, the Lord’s great love and his plan for each one of us, even though at one point when recognized that I would have to spend years in Italy, I finally said to myself, “Up to now you have followed your own will, now you have to do God’s will!” And thanks to my mother, father, family, friends, spiritual guides and to our Lord, his Blessed

Mother and St. Francis of Assisi, I am still happy, after coming full circle and returning to the Friary I left almost 40 years ago. May the Lord guide you in your life decisions. Begin your journey by greeting all, the way St. Francis greeted everyone: **May the Lord give you peace!**

If you are interested in the Franciscan way of life, please contact Fr. Russell, our vocation director at vocations@olaprovince.com, www.franciscans.org, @conventuals1223 or 718-510-5822.