

# ‘Share in all of it’: Ashburn wants to walk with people

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



Nathan Ashburn, 34

**Parents:** Juliann and Deacon Chuck Ashburn, assistant director for development and academic advising in the diocesan vocations office

**Parish:** Cathedral of St. Andrew, Little Rock

**Seminary:** Assumption Seminary, San Antonio

**First assignment:** Associate pastor, Christ the King Church in Little Rock and St. Francis of Assisi in Roland (Little Italy)

**Favorite Scripture:** Luke 15:11-32, the prodigal son

Ahead of his priestly ordination, Deacon Nathan Ashburn felt all the typical emotions — nervousness, excitement and relief that seminary schoolwork was over. But more than anything, it was joy, knowing he was about to live out who he was meant to be.

“It’s like I finally get the chance to do what I enjoy, to do what I was called to do,” Ashburn told *Arkansas Catholic* April 17.

Ashburn, 34, will be ordained a Diocese of Little Rock priest at 10 a.m., Saturday, May 27 at the Cathedral of St. Andrew, along with Deacon John Paul Hartnedy.

His path to ordination was winding, identifying most with the biblical story of the prodigal son. After graduating from Catholic High School in Little Rock, he became a paratrooper in the U.S. Army in 2007. He was deployed twice to Afghanistan, receiving a Purple Heart after being hit with shrapnel from an RPG. The death and devastation of war pushed him away from his Catholic faith.

Suffering from PTSD, Ashburn admitted he self-medicated with alcohol but was led back to the faith with the support of his parents, Deacon Chuck and Juliann Ashburn, along with counsel from Msgr. Scott Friend, former diocesan vocations director and pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church in Jonesboro.

While attending Pulaski Technical College in Little Rock in 2015, he felt the Lord say, "Nathan, I want you to be my priest."

Ashburn said his experience of brotherhood at CHS, the military and seminary impacted his vocation, along with the dark times of his life.

"It was a struggle. It was a gift. Now that I look back on it, it's a gift that I can help relate and empathize with the people of God who are struggling, who are having problems with their faith, or family members whose kids are struggling that don't go to Mass anymore," he said. "I can tell them there's hope, that things can turn around. People struggling with PTSD in any kind of way, teaching them to rely on your faith and that brotherhood."

Ashburn attends Assumption Seminary in San Antonio and has learned the virtue of patience. Creating a healthy balance between ministry and a personal life is important, he said, knowing that making time for personal prayer and hobbies like hunting and fishing will allow him to be better mentally for his parishioners.

"I was diagnosed with chronic depression about two years ago. It was definitely a struggle trying to stay on top of my work because it makes you lethargic and no motivation to do anything," Ashburn said, adding that fellow seminarians, prayer and spiritual direction helped him push through. "I got to know myself very well ... my triggers, things that cause bad behaviors. In dealing with depression, my biggest prayer would be the Suscipe prayer by St. Ignatius of Loyola. St. Ignatius is my spirituality that I've come to learn over the years ... it's a prayer of just knowing everything is God's and I give everything up to him; my life is in his hands. That's how I can say I can let go of these struggles, 'Lord, I need your help and this is why.'"

Following his priestly ordination, Ashburn will be an associate pastor at Christ the King Church in Little Rock and St. Francis of Assisi Church in Little Italy. He attended CTK School and some of the teachers he had are still there, along with principal Kathy House.

"I'm really excited about the school. I asked the bishop if I could be attached to the school," he said, adding he has a heart for youth ministry.

Ashburn said he wants to be a priest for all people, to meet them where they are in their spiritual journey and walk with them.

"I want to be a priest who is involved in my people's lives. I want to be a priest that they know they can rely on and know they can always come and talk to me if there's any struggles," Ashburn said. "Whether it's embarrassing or joyful or some kind of struggle in general.

Because we are here to share in all of it and be a spiritual father.”