

# Joel Brackett will be first priest ordained from Rogers

written by Alesia Schaefer |



ROGERS — After decades of praying for vocations, parishioners of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Rogers witnessed those prayers come to fruition at Joel Brackett’s diaconate Mass.

Brackett, the first transitional deacon in his home parish, professed his vows before Bishop Anthony B. Taylor with more than 500 family, friends, clergy and seminarians in attendance May 15.

Father Jeff Hebert, vocations director, said it was a moment in time where “the Church on earth and the Church in heaven join together,” when the Litany of Saints was prayed for Brackett in the Mass.

Father Hebert said he feels the most moving moment of any ordination is when the ordinand lies prostrate before God and the parish.

“It’s always so powerful to me, and Brackett’s gift of himself to the Church gives me great hope,” Father Hebert said.

Father Hebert was associate pastor of St. Joseph Church in Conway when Brackett was attending Hendrix College and discerning his call. Father Hebert recalled being able to minister to Brackett, encouraging him to enter the seminary.

“Priests don’t always get to be a part of a seminarian’s journey that closely, so I was extremely grateful to walk with him all the way to his diaconate ordination,” Father Hebert said.

A former college football player, Brackett said he first received his calling when returning from a football game in Texas with his teammates. He said it was a “silent night on a dark interstate” when he felt the call of the Holy Spirit.

“I underwent a conversion to Christ and a reversion to the Catholic faith that I had received as a child,” Brackett said. “It was October of 2017, and I was with my team on a bus ride back and was scrolling through YouTube to pass the time, I stumbled upon a video in which a priest was encouraging young men to consider a vocation to Catholic priesthood. As I watched the video, I suddenly began weeping and knew that I was being called to explore this vocation more deeply.”

His parents, Burke and Kristi Brackett, said they have also experienced a “rollercoaster of emotions” for the past six years as they have watched their child journey down an unfamiliar path.

“We have watched him grow from a confused college student into a man of faith,” said Kristi, longtime music, band and choir director at St. Vincent de Paul School and Parish. “Joel's journey to priesthood has dramatically changed our family. Watching him grow has brought us all closer together and brought each one of us closer to our Catholic faith.”

Being a longtime member of his parish also played a crucial role in his discernment and Brackett attributes his successful journey to the prayers he received.

“I pray that, as a deacon and priest, I am able to have as generous a heart as the faithful of my home parish. I am sure that their countless prayers for my vocation have carried me through these years,” he said.

Pastor Msgr. David LeSieur said the parish’s first diaconate ordination of a man who will become a priest touched many people because Brackett was notably a graduate of the parish school.

“Since before I became pastor (in 2006), the parish has been offering a prayer for vocations at Sunday Mass and at school Mass,” he said. “We’ve been blessed with two classes of permanent deacons and now with three men in the seminary. I believe that the prayers we’ve been offering as a parish are bearing the fruit of religious vocations — of men and of women. There are three women religious from our parish, and three seminarians, including Joel, so prayer for future and present vocations is important.”

In his homily, Bishop Taylor emphasized the sacrifice of obedience and that the sacrifice of the will is a special kind of listening.

“There is something uniquely powerful about ordination Masses,” Father Hebert said. “Every sacrament in which we get to participate in is witnessing the mystery of Christ, but an ordination uniquely displays young men responding to the gospel with their entire life.”

“We all need to see those concrete moments in which the Gospel bursts forth into our lives, and few do so as clearly as an ordination.”

Brackett, 26, is scheduled to be ordained a priest in May 2025. This summer, he will serve at St. Theresa Church in Little Rock before finishing his final year at St. Meinrad Seminary in Indiana.

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# Rogers church venerates saints with 14 custom portraits

written by Katie Zakrzewski |



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Framed portraits of 14 saints were displayed around the perimeter of the altar at St. Vincent de Paul in Rogers during the All Saints Day Masses Nov. 1, portraits that will soon be hung in the gathering rooms of the ministry building sharing each saint's name.

Associate pastor Father Keith Higginbotham said the All Saints Day display's origins date back to 2019, when the new ministry building was constructed on the St. Vincent de Paul campus. The 20,000-square-foot building contained new meeting spaces for all of the church's ministries, gift shop, parish offices and some classrooms. Parishioners began to share ideas for the new building. Parishioner Karen Peters, had an idea.

"It could be hard to find the right room for a meeting," Peters said. "I suggested at a staff meeting that we could do something different besides numbering the rooms, and instead tie it into our faith and offer a little education and personality to our spaces if we named them after

saints.”

Approval grew among clergy and staff members, and parishioners began to submit the names of saints.

The following 14 saints were selected:

- Blessed Father Michael McGivney
  
- Mary Mother of God
  
- Our Lady of La Leche
  
- St. Cecilia
  
- St. Charles Borromeo
  
- St. Ignatius of Loyola
  
- St. Jerome
  
- St. John
  
- St. John Paul II
  
- St. Joseph Protector of Christ
  
- St. Kateri Tekakwitha
  
- St. Luke
  
- St. Mark
  
- St. Matthew

“The consensus came to include some saints related to what we do here,” Peters said. “St. Charles Borromeo is the patron saint of catechists, and so he's in our meeting room for catechists. ... Our music room doubles as a meeting room, and so that room became the St. Cecilia room.”

Father Higginbotham said a need to decorate the bare walls and staying within budget led to the idea of the framed portraits.

“Originally there was a plan to have an artist come in and paint images of the saints on the walls,” Father Higginbotham said, but the project would have been too costly.

The parishioners turned to the idea of framed portraits, and Father Higginbotham spent the next two years researching.

“We wanted to make sure the styles matched and that they were all roughly the same size,” Father Higginbotham said.

He came across the work of Catholic artist Tracy L. Christianson of Seattle. Her work is on the website [PortraitsofSaints.com](http://PortraitsofSaints.com).

“I went through her website and found that she had the vast majority of our saints,” Father Higginbotham said. “I first emailed her to see about getting the portraits so we could print them in a size we wanted that she didn’t have. She worked with us to get them printed how we wanted them.”

The large prints were received in November 2022. An anonymous parishioner paid for the portraits to be framed. The framed portraits, which are 36 inches by 48 inches, were displayed around the altar in the days leading up to Nov. 1.

“At the vigil Mass, we blessed the images, and at the rest of the Masses, we will venerate them, celebrating both the feast day and these new images,” Father Higginbotham said. “We need people that have shown us that the normal folks can follow our Lord Jesus Christ - that it’s possible, especially in the moments when we doubt the most, when we struggle the most with temptation. We need heroes. We need companions. And you can find both in these saints.”

Following All Saints Day, the portraits were relocated to their respective rooms.

Parishioner Betty Rolniak has been a member of St. Vincent de Paul since 1979. She said she was excited to incorporate the saint portraits into the ministry building rooms.

“It’s encouraging to know that we’re part of the communion of saints, and that these rooms have the names of unique people behind them,” Rolniak said. “They were real people, and they’re real saints now. It’s really exciting to know that we’re being encouraged to ‘up our game’ in terms of being members of the community of saints.”

Parishioner Adriana Rodriguez said the portraits have added life to the rooms.

“Even though the ministry building is in full use, the rooms looked bare and very standard,” Rodriguez said. “The color was plain — beautiful, but plain. The portraits definitely add color and character to each room.”

Rodriguez said that the portraits also make rooms easier to find.

“It’s like the icing on the cake, because we finally have a visual to go with the name of the room,” Rodriguez said. “Even though I use the ministry building a lot, I have meetings and go back and forth to different rooms. Sometimes I’d get lost or confused. But now with a portrait in the room, it’s much easier to immediately glance in and know where you’re supposed to be. I

know exactly where the St. Joseph room is now.”

Rodriguez said she hopes the parish will add informational plaques about the saints next to their portraits.

“I’m hoping the church will put a little bit of a description with the history of each of the saints next to the portraits on the wall, like an art museum,” Rodriguez said. “The portraits have added so much to the room. They’re huge and they really light up the room — you don’t need much more.”

For Peters, the project is a reminder for parishioners young and old about the importance of All Souls Day and All Saints Day.

“This was a beautiful project that’s been a couple of years in the works with a lot of people involved and the Lord guiding the project the whole way,” Peters said. “The body of Christ is made up of the unborn in the womb to people in heaven. They’re all ages and shapes and sizes and colors and nationalities. We have an opportunity, whether it’s a child or a young adult or a senior, to be sitting in one of those rooms and look upon the portraits. It doesn’t matter how much you know about your faith, you can always grow and learn more at any age.