



Society of the Divine Savior  
**SALVATORIAN**S

Apostles for our times.

## AN INDIRECT PATH

*Fr. Salvatore Ragusa, SDS*

God's intended path for us is not always direct between two points. Fr. Salvatore Ragusa, SDS, bears witness to that. He recalls attending a benediction with his dad as early as five years old. Then, standing on a pew, he proclaimed, "I want to be a priest."

He began his studies for the priesthood at the Diocese of Houston when he was 19 years old, then changed gears during his second year of graduate theology studies when he entered the Benedictine Order. "Coming from an Italian family, community and shared life were important to me," said Fr. Sal. "When I met the Benedictines, I felt drawn to the community life, the value on prayer, liturgy, and ritual." Still, Fr. Sal wasn't sure this was his life's calling. So, he left the Benedictines for a period, eventually returning for his final vows and ordination. "Leaving and re-entering religious life was a part of my maturing process," he said. "By leaving, I was also able to gain real world experience as a teacher, then an accountant. In addition, I learned valuable life lessons which ultimately helped ready me to return."

He was ordained a Benedictine in 1988; he was in a good place until the monastery closed in 1990. "It was the end of a chapter for me," he said. "I thought of it as a divorce but came to see it as a death, working through anger, anxiety, denial, and finally acceptance."

Fr. Sal was now a 'free agent,' allowing him time to reflect more and recognize his call to an active life as a priest. His "come to Jesus moment" happened in Santa Barbara as a Campus Minister intern. "I learned how to be a priest as a brother, servant, and foot washer," he shared. "It was a



If you'd like to consider a gift to support our Salvatorian priests and brothers, please go to [www.SALVATORIANs.com](http://www.SALVATORIANs.com)

freeing experience to accompany the students on the faith journey rather than to be a ‘guru’ or something above them.”

As a campus minister intern, Fr. Sal had an opportunity to attend a conference facilitated by Fr. Dan Pekarske, SDS. Meeting with him later, Fr. Sal shared the ups and downs of his challenging vocation journey. Fr. Dan, in turn, shared the struggles of the Salvatorian Founders, Blessed Francis Jordan, and Blessed Mary of the Apostles. “He looked at me and said, ‘Salvatore, you will fit right in,’ then added, ‘after all, you are named Salvatore.’ It was a very spiritual healing moment in my life.”

A few months later, he visited the formation community in Milwaukee and learned about their Salvatorian Family of lay men and women, religious sisters, priests, and brothers. “They were developing the understanding of being ‘apostles for our times,’ which is how I understood my call,” he said.

“It felt like home.” Sal began the transition to the Society in 1991 and officially transferred his vows from the Benedictines in 1993. In campus ministry for 32 years, he started in Kenosha, WI, for a transition year, then served at St. Mary’s College in Moraga, CA, for 25 years, and is now at Holy Names University in Oakland, CA, where he has served for the last seven years. “The fact that young people continue to seek out and want to develop their spiritual life within the context of the Catholic Church keeps me energized,” he said. “Students experience that we have different gifts, but we are one body, the body of Christ, serving each other.”

Noting a particular time that impacted him as a Salvatorian priest, Fr. Sal shared, “Years ago, waiting in the boarding area for my delayed flight, I began talking with a woman and shared that I worked in campus ministry at a Catholic college. I was not dressed like a priest, nor did I mention I was a priest. She looked at me and asked, ‘Are you by chance a priest? A Salvatorian priest?’ Surprised, I said yes and asked how she knew. She said, ‘Because you are so human, and that is what I remember most about the Salvatorian priests when I used to live in Milwaukee.’” Blessed Francis Jordan trusted without fail in Divine Providence. Fr. Sal shared, “As someone who likes to be in control, this reminds me of the need to have deep faith in God’s plans.”

[Hope: In Depth \(view here\)](#)



[Click here to make a gift to the Salvatorian priests and brothers](#)