

Brother Silas Henderson to be ordained a priest

The Oak Ridge native and Clinton High School graduate is serving with the Salvatorians By Dan McWilliams

Oak Ridge native and Clinton High School graduate Brother Silas S. Henderson, SDS, will be ordained to the priesthood, the Society of the Divine Savior announced May 21.

The Salvatorian brother will be ordained on Monday, June 24, at the Basilica of St. Josaphat in Milwaukee with Bishop Jeffrey R. Haines, auxiliary bishop of Milwaukee, celebrating. The new priest's Mass of thanksgiving will be celebrated the following day at St. Pius X Church in Wauwatosa, Wis.

Brother Silas was a parishioner of St. Mary in Oak Ridge. He was ordained a deacon in 2021 and is currently ministering as a member of the Society of the Divine Savior's USA Provincial Council as its director of planning and as the spiritual director for the Salvatorian Center. In 2023, Brother Silas was elected to serve as chair of Region V on the board of directors of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men.

"In the years since my diaconate ordination, I have exercised my diaconal ministry most often in conjunction with my work as a retreat leader and presenter, for example preaching at Mass or presiding and preaching at Benediction," Brother Silas said. "I also continue to be very involved in sacred music, something which began during my time at St. Mary's, and I am a cantor and section leader for the choir at the Basilica of St. Josaphat in Milwaukee, which became my 'home parish' when I returned to Milwaukee in 2022. That is why I will be ordained at the Basilica of St. Josaphat."

Bishop Edward J. Weisenburger ordained Brother Silas to the diaconate at St. Augustine Cathedral in Tucson, Ariz.

"Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the ordination celebration was very simple but no less meaningful," Brother Silas said. "Looking back, I remember the humility I felt



Brother Silas S. Henderson, SDS

that day. To be called by the Church for a particular ministry reminds you that the ministry to which you feel called is, ultimately, not about you, and it isn't something that one can simply choose for themselves. The same holds true for religious life, which involves mutual discernment—the individual and the community discern together if the man or woman is truly called to that way of life. It's a reminder that a true vocation is something that is bigger than any one of us and is, in the end, a gift. It is the Church that affirms that sense of calling by entrusting particular ministries to those whom God chooses. For me, the only response is humility and gratitude. And that same sense is what I am praying and reflecting about in these days before my ordination to the priesthood."

Brother Silas was baptized at age 13 by Father Vann Johnston, then associate pastor at St. Mary and now bishop of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Mo.

"I participated in St. Mary's religious-education programs throughout high school," Brother Silas said. "Because of scheduling conflicts, I was confirmed at St. John Neumann [in Farragut] in 1995, where I became very involved in the youth-ministry program. During this time, I continued as a parishioner at St.

Mary's and was very involved with the parish music programs and was an altar server.

"I was very close to my paternal grandparents, and while my immediate family moved to Clinton in 1989, it was because of that relationship that St. Mary's became my parish rather than St. Therese [in Clinton]. In grade school, I attended Oak Ridge public schools, but following the move, I attended Clinton Middle School and High School."

Bishop Johnston is among several clergy who influenced Brother Silas' priestly vocation.

"I began discerning the priesthood during high school," Brother Silas said. "It was because of the witness of wonderfully committed priests, including Father Chris Michelson, Father Michael Woods, Father John Milewski, Father Jim Harvey, and Bishop Vann, to name but a few, that I felt the desire to serve God and the Church, although I ultimately discerned that God was not calling me to the life of a diocesan priest."

"As a monk, there was less emphasis on ordination, and so life as a brother made sense, particularly since the focus of one's life and ministries was centered on the monastic community itself. However, in the years since joining the Salvatorians, my vision of ministry—and by extension my understanding of my own vocation—have continued to broaden. As a step in that process, I was ordained to the diaconate in February 2021 and have enjoyed my years of diaconal ministry very much. However, that sense of being invited to something more—something deeper—has remained, and I am grateful that my community has affirmed this sense of call to the priesthood."

Brother Silas "brings a rich background in liturgical ministry as well as skills for the written word that are both informative and accessible to the reader," said Father Peter Schuessler, SDS, USA Province provincial and director of formation. "As a priest, he will make

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COURTESY OF SUE KAUBRICH (2)

From the ambo Brother Silas preaches at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology in Hales Corners, Wis.

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God's Word come alive, a talent he has given around the country and world. I have no doubt he will be a blessing to the Salvatorian family and to all those we serve."

With nearly 20 years in religious life, including 11 years as a Benedictine monk before becoming a Salvatorian, Brother Silas holds a bachelor of arts degree in philosophy from St. Joseph Seminary College in St. Benedict, La.; a master's in theological studies from St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad, Ind.; and an ecumenical doctor of ministry degree from Catholic Theological Union of Chicago.

"Although I spent time discerning diocesan priesthood, I ultimately felt drawn to life in a religious community," Brother Silas said. "I had come to know the Benedictines during my early years in college and felt a real attraction to that form of religious life, particularly the Benedictine emphasis on the liturgy. I entered the monastic community at St. Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad, Ind., in 2002. I professed religious vows in 2004, at which time I received the religious name Silas—my baptismal name is Shawn—and professed solemn vows in 2007. During my time at St. Meinrad, I completed my undergraduate and graduate degrees."

Brother Silas first became involved in adult faith formation and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults while serving in parish ministry in Louisville, Ky.

"Within the monastic community, I was a member of the monastic schola and was one of the community's organists," he said. "In 2010, I was given the opportunity to work at St. Margaret Mary Church in Louisville, Ky., serving as director of lifelong formation, overseeing the parish and school religious-education programs, and developing a series of adult and family formation processes as well. In 2011, I was called back to the monastery and



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Brother Silas S. Henderson, SDS

was appointed as managing editor of Abbey Press Publications and *Deacon Digest Magazine*."

Brother Silas' time in Louisville changed the course of his vocation.

"My experience in Louisville awakened in me a real passion for adult faith formation and catechesis," he said. "Although I saw real value in the work I was doing at Abbey Press Publications and *Deacon Digest*, I missed direct ministry, such as I had experienced at St. Margaret Mary. This prompted me to begin discerning a transition to a more active form of religious life. And so, in 2013, I left the monastic life, although I did continue my work with Abbey Press Publications, and entered into a two-year period of discernment that ultimately led me to the Society of the Divine Savior. Because of the community's historical emphasis on faith formation and education, as well as pastoral care, it felt like a very natural fit. I entered the Salvatorians in January 2016."

Since then, Brother Silas has offered parish missions, workshops, retreats, and other faith-formation programs in more than a dozen states. In his ministry as the director of the Tucson-based Jordan Ministry Team, a collaborative Salvatorian ministry focused on initial and continuing faith formation and catechesis, he offered in-person and online programming for permanent deacons, parish

leaders, religious educators, and catechists across the United States.

He has been a featured presenter at the Southwest Liturgical Conference, the Dallas Ministry Conference, the Diocese of Fresno Diocesan Congress, and the "Together in Hope" Conference, and has collaborated with Liturgy Training Publications for a special series of reflections on the liturgies of Lent and Holy Week at the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

In his retreats and workshops, Brother Silas focuses on discipleship and spirituality as he reflects on Mary and the communion of saints, the liturgy, sacred Scripture, and the sacramental life of the Church.

"The aspect of retreat work and offering faith-formation opportunities for adults that I most enjoy is the opportunity to companion people—with their questions, fears, doubts, as well as their hopes, joys, and faith—and help them to discover how they can live their faith in a more adult and intentional way," Brother Silas said. "St. Aloysius Gonzaga, a saint who is especially important to me, once described God as a 'shoreless and fathomless ocean.' And I wholeheartedly believe that is true. This also means that there is also more to discover about God and the depths of God's love and mercy for each of us. Helping people come to appreciate that and to open themselves more and more to that mystery is a gift for me."

Brother Silas is the author of four books, including *St. Aloysius Gonzaga: With an Undivided Heart* (Ignatius Press) and *Lights for a Waiting World: Celebrating Advent with the Saints* (Abbey Press Publications). He has published articles and reflections in a variety of prominent Catholic publications, including *America Magazine*, *Give Us This Day*, *The Priest*, *Loose-Leaf Lectionary*, *Pastoral Review*, and numerous *CareNotes* and *PrayerNotes* (Abbey Press). He has written extensively for LPi and Aleteia.org, offering commentaries on the readings for

the Sunday Mass and Aleteia's "Today We Celebrate" series. His articles have appeared not only in the United States but also in Great Britain.

"My first article was published in *Liguorian Magazine* in 2008," Brother Silas said. "In the years since, I have published hundreds of print and online pieces. I have also had the privilege of teaching and leading retreats and workshops in dozens of parishes and schools in various parts of the United States and have most recently had the opportunity to work with our Salvatorian seminarians in Morogoro, Tanzania; Madrid, Spain; and Rome, Italy.

"I have always seen my work as a writer as part of my sense of calling to be an educator and catechist. I'm reminded that the new *Directory for Catechesis* published by the Holy See in 2021 describes a catechist as a 'steward of the mystery of faith' and as one who has a special call to share with others what has been entrusted to them in their own experience of the mystery that is God. Writing, for me, has been one of the ways that I have tried to make that real in my ministry. The same can be said for the many retreats and workshops I've led over the years. I bring those experiences and perspectives to my ministry as a priest."

Salvatorian priests and brothers are members of the Society of the Divine Savior, a Catholic religious community founded in 1881 by Blessed Francis Jordan. The USA Province is headquartered in Milwaukee and led by Father Schuessler. As men of prayer and action, Salvatorians are encouraged to use their unique and diverse talents through "all ways and means" to spread the Word of God. They work as equals within their family of Salvatorian sisters, lay men and women, priests, and brothers.

For more information on Brother Silas, visit his website at www.brothersilas.org. ■

Portions of this article were provided by the Society of the Divine Savior.