

**Priesthood Ordination Remarks**  
**Bishop John O. Barres**  
**St. Agnes Cathedral**  
**June 18, 2022**

June is the month of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and today we celebrate Our Lord's gift of three new priests, three new shepherds after his own heart!

As your Bishop and Successor of the Apostles, I am pleased to present to you, the People of God, Fr. Louis Cona, Fr. Christopher Heller, and Fr. Stephen Rooney.

Brothers, I am grateful to Almighty God for bringing you to this day and for your docility and dedication to the work of formation. Your continued cooperation with God's grace throughout your priesthood will be a gift to those you serve and will be an instrument of promoting and encouraging vocations to the priesthood.

May your priestly hearts always beat in rhythm with the humility, meekness, sacrifice, courage, fortitude and fidelity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

May your priestly identity and your commitment to apostolic celibacy be a Light of Jesus Christ and His Most Sacred Heart to the World!

May your priestly intimacy with the Eucharistic Heart of Christ help you to be courageous witnesses to the Splendor of Truth of the Ten Commandments, Catholic Moral Teaching and Catholic Anthropology.

Brothers, you have been ordained to serve, and I am pleased to announce again your first assignments where you will begin a lifetime of priestly service.

Fr. Cona, before returning to Rome in September to complete your STL studies in Moral Theology at the Angelicum, you will serve the people of St. Therese of Lisieux in Montauk with Fr. Liam McDonald.

Fr. Heller, you will serve the parish and schools of St. Dominic in Oyster Bay with Msgr. Thomas Coogan.

And Fr. Rooney, you will serve the parish and school of Notre Dame in New Hyde Park with Fr. John McCartney.

Brothers, today you are surrounded by much love and affection. Allow me to express my deep gratitude to your families, who formed you into the men you have become.

I thank the rectors and the faculties of St. Joseph's Seminary, the Pontifical North American College, and Cathedral Seminary Residence for their fine work of preparing you for the priesthood.

Our Vocation Directors, Fr. Sean Magaldi and Fr. Joe Fitzgerald, assisted you and helped to shepherd you throughout your seminary years.

My gratitude goes to them and to all the bishops, pastors, priests, deacons, religious and parishioners who walked with you in your pastoral assignments. Their holy example, pastoral charity and artistry will remain with you throughout your priesthood.

Finally, I thank Bishop William Murphy for the encouragement and model he has given you over the years.

Fr. Jean-Jacques Olier, the Founder of the Sulpicians, once said: "The heart of the priest must be as large as the Church."

Bishop Murphy, you have always taught us that a missionary love for the global universal Catholic Church makes us more effective evangelizers in our local Church here on Long Island. What a joy it is to celebrate this day with you!

I am grateful for the presence of Mr. George Weigel, the great biographer of Pope St. John Paul II and a true Champion of the Catholic Priesthood. He has supported and inspired popes, cardinals, bishops, priests and seminarians and rejoices, as do we all, on ordination days.

Fr. Rooney, Fr. Cona and Fr. Heller, today you experienced an ontological change that connects you with priests throughout the world. Remember especially the priests in Ukraine and Poland who are shepherding refugees and living the Church's mission of mercy. Remember those bishops and priests who minister to families in Uvalde, Texas. They are our brothers and witnesses of the Lord's love for his people. Pray for them and imitate their example as you begin to serve the people of God.

Each of you brings your gifts and talents to this ministry.

Fr. Cona studied at Georgetown University with the Jesuit philosopher, Fr. James Schall, SJ. In this Year of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Cona wrote an article on Fr. John Courtney Murray, SJ whose thought and writing had a significant impact on the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Religious Liberty (Dignitatis Humanae)*. Fr. Cona, your commitment to studying and living the relationship between Spiritual Theology and Moral Theology, daily prayer and daily moral action, will continue to prepare you well to be a wise and thoughtful parish priest with a pastoral heart.

Fr. Heller, a graduate of Chaminade High School and The Catholic University of America, wrote his MA thesis on Pope Benedict XVI's teaching on the relationship between Revelation and Ecclesial Communion. Fr. Heller, your zeal for the Scriptures and Systematic Theology, your love for the Catholic liturgy and the people you serve will be an instrument of Communion and Mission at St. Dominic's parish and schools and all the parishes you serve in the future.

Fr. Rooney, a graduate of Holy Trinity High School, entered formation at the Cathedral Seminary Residence in Douglaston immediately after high school and has given himself enthusiastically and joyfully to preparation over these last nine years. Recently, he wrote his MA thesis on the Catholic parish's mission to form missionary disciples. Fr. Rooney, we look forward to you using your contemplative energy to be a creative evangelizer at Notre Dame parish.

One of the Twelve Promises of the Sacred Heart to Sr. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) is the Tenth Promise: "I will give to priests the gift of touching the most hardened hearts."

As new priests of the Divine Mercy and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as newly ordained priests who are both humble penitents and about to be compassionate confessors, I want to thank you for the gentle, humble and merciful ways that the Holy Spirit will touch and lead you to touch the most hardened hearts.

All of us will be calling on this gift and this promise as we engage ever more deeply in the Eucharistic Revival the Holy Spirit is calling us to in the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.

In the seminary, you have been men of fraternity. You became leaders, men that others could look to as examples. I encourage you to continue to build bonds of intergenerational priestly fraternity, not just with those close in age but with all the priests of Long Island and beyond. There is much wisdom in their experience and you have many gifts to help enrich us, your older brothers.

Pope Francis recently spoke of a priest's closeness to the people of God, reminding us that priests must imitate the Lord's own "closeness, compassion and tenderness, in which we act...as Good Samaritans who acknowledge the wounds of our people, their silent sufferings, the self-denial and sacrifices made by so many fathers and mothers to support their families."<sup>1</sup>

Fr. Cona, Fr. Heller, and Fr. Rooney, remember these words of our Holy Father. You were ordained today to serve, not to be served. You were ordained to give your lives to Jesus Christ and His Church. Many will come to you with their struggles, their concerns, their fears, and you will accompany and serve them. Show them always a relentless Good Samaritan charity, kindness, mercy and follow through.

And as you prepare to celebrate your first Masses of Thanksgiving on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi), may your living of the Catholic priesthood inspire many to realize that the Eucharist is the true way of all our loves upon earth (Tolkien) and the true way to Heaven and Eternal Life.

*Ad Multos Annos!*

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis. February 17, 2002. *International Theological Symposium on the Priesthood*.  
<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/february/documents/20220217-simposio-teologia-sacerdozio.html>