

# Weighing life's choices, the question is: what if?

BY MICHAEL C. GABRIELE

Editor

NEWARK—What if?

A clipped phrase—two words and a question mark. However, it can reveal a multitude of possibilities on the purpose and direction of a single life. It can come at a critical moment, when someone pauses to consider one choice among many; a choice that will have profound consequences.

Father Pedro Bismarck Chau posed the what-if question to students at Saint Benedict's Prep, 520 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., on Nov. 3 as the featured speaker at the school's third annual Vocation Awareness Day program.

Though the thrust of his message was for students to be open to the calling of religious life or the priesthood, he invited all those in the packed auditorium to ponder the what-if question with regard to any vocation.

"Do not dismiss the what-if question," Fr. Bismarck told the young men of Saint Benedict's. "Answer the call and follow Jesus. Whatever your calling in life, see it through the eyes of Christ. Everyone has a vocation. Think of the needs of others and forget about yourself. Then you'll know who you really are."

He reminded students to keep God "in the equation" as they move forward to new chapters in their lives. "Be holy as a creation of God," Fr. Bismarck advised. "Holiness means perfect love. Don't let possessions become false fulfillment. Don't let possessions become an obstacle to God's call.

"Are we selfish people?," he asked the audience, challenging students to re-evaluate those things they consider to be valuable. "I know you all have great dreams and goals. Goals are fine, but strive for perfect love. Fulfill your vocation, whatever it is, with perfect love."

The parochial vicar of Our Lady of Mount Virgin Parish, Garfield, Fr. Bismarck shared his life journey with students, which started in Managua, Nicaragua, 41 years ago. He was ordained to the priesthood at the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart on May 24, 2008. It was his experience that the what-if question on his calling to the priesthood took more than 15 years to percolate in his heart, mind and soul. His discernment included a career in the insurance business before he entered the seminary at age 34.

His siblings—brother and sister twins—proved to be a guiding force for his discernment. His beloved sister, who is deaf, inspired him to become accomplished in liturgical American Sign Language, making him one of the few priests in the area able to "sign" a Mass. His brother, who has cerebral palsy, serves as a lay missionary and travels throughout the world.

He first encountered his own what-if question at age 18, Fr. Bismarck confessed. He felt God's call to the priesthood, but Fr. Bismarck's dreams and goals initially took him in other directions.

"Sometimes God works in your life without you knowing it," he said. "Ever since I entered the seminary and became a priest, these have been the happiest days of my life." He said he experiences the joy of the priesthood every day—even when he's forced to deal with difficult situations and people in his ministry.



Advocate photo – M. Gabriele

Brother Patrick Winbush, O.S.B, (right) the director of vocations at Saint Benedict's Prep, organized "Vocation Awareness Day," which featured Father Pedro Bismarck Chau. The two are pictured in the Newark Abbey's garden. Those seeking more information on vocations can contact Br. Patrick by phone at (973) 792-5772, via e-mail at (pwinbush@sbp.org) or visit the school's Web site ([www.sbp.org](http://www.sbp.org)).