The word vocation has its roots in the Latin *vocare*, meaning “to call.” Whether to religious life, to a marriage or to productive and inspiring work, a vocation is the answer to God’s call.

In 2013, 22 men were called to Final Vows in the Society of Jesus in the United States. Their vocation journeys started many years ago. As novices, they pronounced simple and perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and those vows have sustained them through their years of Jesuit formation and in their ministerial work. In the solemn profession of Final Vows, these men reaffirmed their commitment to God, the Catholic Church and the Society of Jesus, and the Society welcomed them as fully incorporated members.

When asked to describe the greatest grace of their Jesuit vocations, the men who professed Final Vows in 2013 wrote with passion and eloquence of a journey that started long ago. It has been a journey of surrender, gratitude, availability, surprise, joy, love and many blessings.

What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

During a short retreat I used to prepare myself for my vows, I recognized many of the graces that I received from God: gratitude for being called to the Society of Jesus; vulnerability to profess the vows; and fruitfulness, which rises up from the vulnerability. My vows are a concrete expression of gratitude to God—a grateful loving response to the love of God. As the Gospel reminds us: “If you want to follow me, deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24). To take the vows is to be vulnerable like Jesus our Master and the very people we are called to minister to. As an artist I understand fecundity as a creative act of bringing something new alive: forms, colors, vision of hope. Through his passion, Jesus brought us new life in ultimate vulnerability. As an artist, I testify that if you surrender yourself to the impelling desire of God manifested through your deepest desires, it will bring new light and life to you and to others.
What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

I think the greatest grace for me has been that of complete surrender to God in all that I do. I’ve discovered how peaceful life can be when one does not have to worry about it. On a daily basis, I converse with people who simply do not understand that God continues to bless us as we journey. Many worry about work, money, health, family, drugs, politics, you name it. One of the greatest ministries I do is to teach hope to those who seem to have no hope. Our ministry involves teaching people to pray regularly so that the grace of trust in God can be given to them. Personally, I have found that prayer changes the one who prays. A regular habit of prayer will do wonders to lift people’s spirits in this troubled world. I encourage people to trust in God, to give in to God’s will for their lives. I can only do that because I do trust that God is active in building his kingdom from moment to moment. The grace of complete surrender has been a great gift to me. I could not have earned it. It has been a pure gift from God.
Father Flavio I. Bravo, S.J., is the Director of Pastoral Ministry, School Chaplain and Rector of Strake Jesuit College Preparatory School in Houston, Texas, where he also teaches theology. He pronounced Final Vows on September 17, 2013, at Strake Jesuit College Preparatory School. (New Orleans Province)

What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

Being invited to take Final Vows in the Society of Jesus confirmed one of the deepest desires I had since the day I entered the New Orleans Province Novitiate in Grand Coteau, Louisiana, 21 years ago: to link my desire to make a difference in the world by giving my life to God and to minister alongside the people of God. The journey to Final Vows opened me to greater availability and has given me multiple opportunities where grace after grace unfolds and reveals God’s presence in my life. While the formation process has not been an easy road, I am grateful for having the chance to serve in different apostolic endeavors and ministries. In so many ways, the current ministry and work among the youth I do has anchored me in the mission of the Society of Jesus. Through it all, God has marked my formation years with the richness of mercy and joy. I pray that the opportunity of being fully incorporated in the Society of Jesus would give me the grace to remain open to God’s will so that I can be readily available to follow Him and serve Him with a generous and joyful heart.
Father Thomas J. Brennan, S.J., is an Associate Professor of English at Saint Joseph’s University in Philadelphia. He pronounced Final Vows on September 16, 2013, at Manresa Hall at Saint Joseph’s University. (Maryland Province)

What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

I find working alongside of laypeople—and sometimes under their supervision—to be the greatest grace of my Jesuit vocation. Two excellent experiences of working in education immediately come to mind here. In regency at Georgetown Preparatory School, my lay colleagues taught me how to teach, and I worked day-to-day with them in the same office for three years. Since 2001, I have taught at Saint Joseph’s University and have profound respect for my lay friends here; they remain among the most important people in my formation. My lay coworkers have become important collaborators with me on this work, and I will need them to continue to sustain me.
Father David J. Collins, S.J., is an Associate Professor of Medieval History at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. He pronounced Final Vows on October 19, 2013, at Georgetown’s Dahlgren Chapel of the Sacred Heart. (Maryland Province)

What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

I’ve been a Jesuit for 25 years. The single most important grace of my vocation as a Jesuit has been the ways that the vocation has encouraged and challenged me to grow in my familiarity with and love of God. Everything about the life has been a part of that: the spirituality and history of the Society; the men who are my brothers and the fraternity they foster and the wisdom they impart in word and action; the process of formation; and the intellectual apostolate to which I have been missioned by my superiors.
What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

There are many continuing graces in my life as a Jesuit. The life of prayer, service as a priest and teacher, and life in Jesuit community are at the heart of these graces in my life. I continue to experience God’s generous grace and consolation working alongside my lay faculty and staff colleagues in the university. Being with college students in the classroom during an important formative time of their lives is deeply gratifying, creatively challenging, and spiritually life giving. I also find much joy presiding and preaching in the University Chapel and at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Fairfield, Connecticut, where the community is vibrantly alive, praying, and committed to building up the Church. I am very grateful for these and many other graces in my life in the Society.
What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

The greatest grace of my Jesuit vocation is that it has helped me deepen my relationship to God. The tools and guidance that I have been given as a Jesuit opened a pathway that continues to draw me deeper into the mystery of God's love and the unique way in which God is calling me. Within the Jesuits, I find community support for regular prayer and psychological growth, but I am also inspired by the heroic lives of my brother Jesuits. They challenge me to look at the tragic brokenness and injustice of our world and consider: How is God calling me to respond? This all comes together when, in preparation for Final Vows, our Provincial asks us to consider: Are we willing to be sent anywhere? My life as a Jesuit had already helped me to see the real challenge in that question, but when I prayed about it, I was surprised to find a voice inside of me saying, “Yes, I am willing; send me.” It surprised me because it was not always there, but my relationship with God had deepened to the point where I was able to process the obstacles that had held me back before.
What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

“. . . para hacer oblaciones de mayor stima y momento…” [Spiritual Exercises #97] To ask for the grace to make an offering of one’s very self that is more deeply to the greater good and meets the need of a particular moment—this is the advice that St. Ignatius of Loyola suggests at the end of his meditation in the Spiritual Exercises called “the Call of the King.” This is something that I cannot do on my own. I have had the privilege of God’s grace working through the Society of Jesus to assist me in constantly discerning how I may make a greater offering of myself in many situations over some time. Often enough, the spirituality of St. Ignatius has enabled my vocation to make good use of all of my limitations, weaknesses, gifts and strengths. And the discerning spirit of my brothers in the Society has been a great help along the way. For this, I am most grateful.
Dorian Llywelyn, S.J.

Father Dorian Llywelyn, S.J., is an Associate Professor of Theological Studies, Director of Catholic Studies and Acting Superior of the Jesuit Community at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He pronounced Final Vows on October 26, 2013, at Sacred Heart Chapel at Loyola Marymount University. (California Province)

What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

In prayer, the greatest grace I have been given is the encounter with a God who is relentless, faithful when I am not, unpredictable, boundlessly generous and compassionate beyond comprehension. Outside of prayer, the greatest gift of my Jesuit vocation is that vocation itself, which sought me out over decades. I have experienced the grace of companionship, not only of the Jesuits and laypeople with whom I work, but also of St. Ignatius himself and through him, the rich tradition of other Jesuits’ prayer life, and service to the Church down the centuries and across the world’s continents. Feeling part of something older, bigger and better by far helps in the struggle against the tyranny of one’s own chattering ego. It is when I am with Jesuits of different countries that I feel most aware that Río Ignacio is deep and wide and continues to flow strongly, nourished by many different streams. I feel the same thing today as I did when I was accepted into the novitiate: gratitude, above all.
What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

When I was a novice in my room was an interesting night-light. It was made from a piece of firewood that was half-cylinder in shape with about a six-inch radius. It was less than a foot high, with a hole cut in the side. Behind the hole was a small light bulb. In front of the hole was a small picture of Jesus holding a little lamb in his arms. Around Jesus there were other sheep as well. The whole thing was attached to an electric cord so, when plugged in, one could turn the bulb on or off. I was describing this to my novice master during one of our spiritual conversations and he asked me, “Now, which sheep are you?” I answered that I was one of the ones standing off at a distance and admiring Jesus. He replied, “No, you are the little lamb that Jesus is holding in his arms.” Then he told me to go and pray about it.
Fr. Flavio I. Bravo, S.J., pronounces Final Vows at Strake Jesuit College Preparatory School, Houston, Texas.
What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

The greatest grace of my Jesuit vocation has been being with Jesus at two different tables every day: at the table of the Eucharist and at the dinner table of my Jesuit community. When Jesus is present, people who otherwise wouldn’t even dream of eating together manage to sit down and enjoy a lively meal side-by-side: tax collectors and zealots, prostitutes and Pharisees, slave and free, Jew and Greek. At Jesus’ table, no one gets turned away. But be careful: if you sit down, by the end of the meal you will be changed. I am grateful to have been changed by the daily Mass and meal with Jesus and with my brother Jesuits and companions. Being at the table with Jesus daily fills me with energy and zeal to go forth to carry on His mission in this world—haltingly and sinfully, but with deep joy and hope.
What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

The other day a student asked me, “Why do you want to become a Jesuit?” I think this question is deeper and bigger than “Why do you want to become a priest?” When I think of being a priest, I think of a parish priest and his sacramental duties. But when I think of being a Jesuit, I can think of the incalculable possibilities of how I can bring God’s presence into this world to the people around me. The greatest grace in my Jesuit vocation is to be able to stay in the present and to see the divine manifestation through each living moment. This ability allows me the freedom and the peace to be who I am to others, as well as the patience and compassion to accept whoever comes to me. Each day my trust and belief in God is confirmed when I have to face a classroom full of teenagers who are confused and scared of their future, yet are full of hope and dreams. It is through them that I see God’s face and through them that I live each day full of trust, peace and love.
Father Gregory J. O’Meara, S.J.,
is a Professor of Law at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, where he also serves as the Rector of the university’s Jesuit Community. He pronounced Final Vows on July 6, 2013, at the Church of the Gesu in Milwaukee. (Wisconsin Province)

What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

The greatest gift I have received as a Jesuit is always the people through whom a loving God is made manifest. I am a teacher and a priest. Much of what I do is structured and occurs within predictable boundaries. I lecture, lead seminars, try to research, write and go to meetings. I preach at Mass. But it is in the interstices—in the places in between—where I find God most reliably audible. Again and again I am reminded that God breaks rules and ignores structures. We can’t cling to our own certainties; we can only cling to God. In my Jesuit life, I am called to recognize the holy ground wherein people who perceive themselves at the margins are welcomed home by a God who loves them and leads them out of slavery and into becoming the free women and men God calls them to be.
Father Douglas F. Peduti, S.J., is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Fairfield University in Connecticut. He pronounced Final Vows on February 17, 2013, at Fairfield’s Egan Chapel of St. Ignatius Loyola. (Maryland Province)

What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

When I was ordained, I placed a verse of Psalm 115 on my Mass card: “Not to us, O Lord, but to your name give glory.” I had envisioned a life of service in the Church and the Society of Jesus as being available to the Lord in whatever way He saw fit, giving back to God what He has so generously bestowed. Imagination led me to think of our great saints in the Society, both living and with God. Nearly 20 years after ordination, the same sentiment prevails. But now not so much in fanciful imagination, but in the classroom and at my desk, at the altar, with Jesuits in community and among colleagues in the University, I find God in the lives of loved sinners, myself included. This awareness draws me closer to God in prayer and, in turn, leads me forward in mundane yet graced ways to be of service to Him through his people. This, for me, is the grace of being a Jesuit.
Father Bryan V. Pham, S.J., is a doctoral student of Canon Law at Canada’s Saint Paul University and the University of Ottawa. He pronounced Final Vows on February 2, 2013, at the Church of the Gesù in Rome. (Oregon Province)

What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

One of the greatest graces of my vocation, which is also a source of both spiritual and personal comfort for me, has been the ongoing realization that my religious vocation as a Jesuit is a pertinent part of a larger vocation of the Society of Jesus. This vocation started with that first fire that ignited in the hearts of St. Ignatius and the First Companions, and this same fire will continue with those who will come after me. Thus, even though our passions, skills and training may carry us to various ministries in our diverse world, our vocation as Jesuits compels us to journey together on the same shared mission in the Church and in the world.
What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

The greatest grace of my vocation has been witnessing God’s providence, generally in the world and particularly in my life. The vows provide the context for the latter: in such a life, the “God of Surprises” never stops astonishing me. His grace, at work in creation and especially in the human soul, renews all things. The vows make us not just privileged observers and companions, but full participants in this heartbreaking and heart-making experience of life. At present much of my prayer is sheer wonder at a God who has brought my order through suppression and crisis to seating one of its sons on the throne of St. Peter. In much less dramatic ways, over the course of my life and throughout the course of each day, God has allowed me to be broken and built up again as a witness to his limitless beauty, truth and mercy. I can only echo St. Paul’s magnificent words: “To him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”
Fr. Francis T. Hannafey, S.J., pronounces Final Vows at Egan Chapel of St. Ignatius Loyola, Fairfield University.
What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

The greatest grace of my Jesuit vocation has been the vocation to the Society itself. Coming as it did when I was in my late forties, it remains a joy-filled surprise. It is the source from which all of the graces of the past 16 years have flowed. Most significantly, the influence of Jesuit spirituality and Ignatian prayer on my life as a physician has been enormous. I don’t think it is possible to dissect it further.

The international character of the Society has been another grace. Because of the Society, I’ve been in Taiwan, Vietnam and Australia. One of the great gifts of the Society is that I can go to any continent where Jesuits are and stay with men with whom I have lived, studied or worked.

My mom gave me a ring as a vow gift. It is engraved with AMDG. I could not have understood what that meant when I finished medical school in 1975. Explaining it now would take many effusive pages. Suffice it to say that AMDG covers everything in four words.
What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

The greatest grace of being a Jesuit is to encounter many faces of God. When I visited the sick in the hospital, I saw the face of God in a young woman who struggled with cancer and wondered “Why?” When I visited abused women and children, I saw the face of God in children, who brought joy and laughter in the midst of their family suffering. When I tutored young men on the south side of Chicago, I saw the face of God in these young men who feared being shot. When I visited prisoners at San Quentin, I saw their sorrow and repentance. When I lived in the Philippines, I saw the face of God in scavengers who collected food and recycled items from the garbage. When I work in the Campus Ministry office at Santa Clara University, I see the hopes and dreams of God in college students. Among all the faces of God, the one I see clearly the most is the God of healing and forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation. Being a priest, I not only feel the sorrow of penitents but also the mercy of God.
Father Quan Minh Tran, S.J.,
is a graduate student of Ignatian spirituality at Regis College at the University of Toronto. He pronounced Final Vows on December 29, 2013, at the Community Chapel at Arrupe Jesuit Residence in Seattle. (Oregon Province)

What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

It is the grace to understand that despite my shortcomings, despite many ups and downs or consolations and desolations in my faith journey, His love and call for me has never changed. I realize that He calls me not because I am perfect but because His love and grace can shine through my very weaknesses and shortcomings. The address of my Jesuit vocation slowly goes beyond a physical address and grounds deeper and deeper into the love and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. I know that I can put my trust in this God. That trust enhances my ability to find Him in everything I do. God is a God of surprises. From the first few unsteady steps to discern a Jesuit vocation to the night before taking the Final Vows, God has never stopped giving out surprising graces. Sometimes, I received those gifts with joy and amusing laughs. Other times, it took me days to fully accept them with a loving and obedient heart. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, God always leads me right into his arms.
Father George M. Witt, S.J., is the Pastor of the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola in New York City. He pronounced Final Vows on April 21, 2013, at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola. (*New York Province*)

**What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?**

The greatest grace of my Jesuit vocation is the excellent formation I have been blessed to receive. This is not only because of all the wonderful people encountered along the way, which has been a tremendous blessing in itself, but mostly because it has afforded me the opportunity to minister in a manner that is fully informed by Ignatian spirituality and the rich heritage of the Society. As I prepared to profess my Final Vows, I found myself deeply moved by this truth. The example and teaching of St. Ignatius and the witness of countless Jesuits through the ages have become the dominant images through which I continually discern the Lord’s call and accompany Him on mission. Whether preaching, counseling, directing retreats or carrying out the many administrative duties of pastoring a large urban parish, I remain deeply grateful for this great gift. I consider myself truly blessed to be counted as a son of Ignatius and a member of the Company he founded.
Father Alan G. Yost, S.J., is a Campus Ministry Coordinator for Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, where he also serves as a residence hall chaplain, helps lead Montserrat silent Ignatian retreats and works with Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) candidates. He pronounced Final Vows on December 8, 2013, at the Student Chapel at Gonzaga University. (Oregon Province)

What has been the greatest grace of your Jesuit vocation?

As I continually grow to know myself as a loved sinner, more and more I learn to see others that way as well. This is a tremendous grace because it allows me to experience greater compassion and care for people that previously I might have judged and/or dismissed. It confers the grace of being better able to apply the presupposition. The Exercises, particularly the contemplations on the life of Christ, really foster one’s ability to think creatively and to imagine what we can’t experience directly. Valuing the imagination as a gift from God in which the Spirit works with us in collaboration has changed my life. The idea that the Almighty Creator of the Universe wants to partner with each of us, insignificant specks of creation, has enormous redemptive power. As a result, one of my passions—and one that can animate any ministry—involves helping others find their own creative gifts so that they too can see a bit more clearly how God wishes to honor us all—even the people we struggle with—through this divine partnership.
For more information about becoming a Jesuit priest or brother, visit Jesuits.org.