

Greetings from the St. Paul Seminary! I hope I have introduced myself to most of the parish community already, but for those who do not yet know me, my name is Evan Koop and I am the Teaching Parish Seminarian here at St. Michael's Catholic Church. The Teaching Parish program is just one of the many ways the seminary provides for the pastoral formation of men preparing for ordination to the priesthood. Periodically (usually about once per week) I am able to make the drive from St. Paul out to St. Michael and spend some time at the church learning about what ministry in a parish entails. It is a chance for me to "get my feet wet," if you will, so that I gain some experience in the practical aspects of what my life as a priest might be like. So far at St. Michael's I have been able to try my hand at youth ministry, visiting the sick and elderly of the parish, teaching faith formation classes, and, as many of you have noticed, serve as a Lector or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion during Mass. This semester I am very excited to have the opportunity to visit some classrooms at St. Michael Catholic School and share the beauty of our Catholic faith with the children there. I sincerely hope that over my four years here at St. Michael leading up to (God willing) my ordination to the priesthood, I will have the opportunity to meet and learn from each and every one of you. So if you see me walking around one day looking lost, please don't hesitate to introduce yourself to me!

One final note: As many of you have noticed, this year I have been dressed a bit differently at the parish than last year—to put it simply, I'm wearing a collar! No, I have not yet been ordained a priest or deacon (I wish that I were!). In point of fact, over the past summer Archbishop Nienstedt, in consultation with the St. Paul Seminary, has asked all seminarians to wear "clerical dress" when attending classes and when engaged in any pastoral activity (like visiting one's Teaching Parish). In order to facilitate this, we seminarians who are in our last four years of theological formation were recently accepted by the Church as "Candidates for Holy Orders." It was a beautiful and profound ceremony in which I was able to declare my desire and intent to proceed on to ordination as a priest, to say with the prophet Isaiah, "Here I am! Send me" (Isaiah 6:8). It is an "engagement" of sorts, which is why it is fitting that I now wear the "ring," the collar around my neck. It is a helpful reminder to me, as well as to the world, that I am "spoken for" and that my heart has been totally and exclusively given to the Lord. It can be confusing sometimes for parishioners who are used to seeing only priests wear clerical clothing, but in fact for most of the Church's history those in formation for Holy Orders have worn such distinctive dress. So it is still appropriate to call me nothing more than "Evan," but if a parishioner slips and calls me "Father" I won't mind at all! I will only ask for prayers that the Lord will continue to form me to be a true Spiritual Father one day soon.