

# Fr. John Sarge

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Parish, Seminary, priests, St. Paul, diocese, Saginaw, church, Rome, Bishop, Cardinal Hickey, community, love, change, pastoral, Bishop Woznicki, Bishop Reh, Eastside

## SPEAKERS

Tyler Provow, Father John Sarge, Cam

**Tyler Provow** 00:01

So, if we can just jump right in here, if you can just give us your name and where you currently serve or what your current role is, and then maybe some background about what your various assignments have been in the diocese and all that.

**Father John Sarge** 00:17

Okay. It's Father John Sarge. I live in Midland, Michigan. Now my home, in the family home, that I grew up in most of my youth. Let's see you what else did you want?

**Tyler Provow** 00:36

Are you currently serving at a parish right now?

**Father John Sarge** 00:37

I'm a Sacramental Minister at Our Lady of Peace in Bay City.

**Tyler Provow** 00:41

Okay.

**Father John Sarge** 00:43

Along with Father Jim Carlson, we share the duties there.

**Tyler Provow** 00:46

Okay. It must be nice to be back in the house that you grew up in.

**Father John Sarge** 00:51

It is, it is. It's very comfortable.

**Tyler Provow** 00:52

Probably a special connection there.

**Father John Sarge** 00:54

Yeah

**Tyler Provow** 00:54

Have you always lived within the diocese here or had ever moved out?

**Father John Sarge** 00:59

Only for schooling.

**Tyler Provow** 01:01

Okay. Where did you go to school at?

**Father John Sarge** 01:03

Well, I went to after seminary, grade school, Seminary in Grand Rapids, first year of high school. Then they opened the St. Paul Seminary, and I was here for its first five years. Then Theological College in Washington DC for three years. And then Rome for four years.

**Tyler Provow** 01:22

Okay, nice. Kinda were all over the place before you came back and starting serving here. How many years have you been serving in the diocese for?

**Father John Sarge** 01:31

50.

**Tyler Provow** 01:32

50? Okay,

**Father John Sarge** 01:32

Well, 50 as an ordained priest, I was here a year of diaconate before that.

**Tyler Provow** 01:38

Okay. Very good. How many parishes have you been at?

**Father John Sarge** 01:44

I have never stopped to count'em all up. As a deacon, I came back and worked at St. Josaphat's. Now St. John Paul, saint, yeah, St. John Paul, on the 23rd over, anyway, Carrollton. It was St. Josaphat's then. So I had a year of diaconate there, and then I went to the cathedral, for only about four months or so. And then St. Peter and Paul. And then Hemlock, St. Mary, all its associates. From there, I went to the east side of Saginaw, and Holy Rosary Church. Was pastor there about nine years, I guess. And then I went to St. Mary's in Alma and then back to Saginaw to Holy Rosary and Our Lady Help of Christians. And then was the founding pastor for Ss. Simon and Jude, which is a consolidation of five parishes.

**Tyler Provow** 02:45

Oh wow.

**Father John Sarge** 02:46

So that was a big job. Then from there, I went to St. George's and St. Casimir, at the same time. And then out to Birch Run and Assumption Bridgeport for the final years before I retired in 19...or 2013. 2013, I retired from there.

**Tyler Provow** 03:11

Okay, wow, it's quite a career. Any, any favorite parishes or any, any special stories from any of those?

**Father John Sarge** 03:18

Well, there'd be a lot. I certainly loved...they say the priest's first love is first parish, as a pastor, if it goes well.

**Tyler Provow** 03:29

Yeah.

**Father John Sarge** 03:29

And it did very well at, one the Eastside of Saginaw, Holy Rosary no longer exists, but as part of that merger of five parishes and then. So that was, I'd have to say almost all of them were very good assignments and a lot of ways I enjoyed them all. One or two were a little more struggles. At, when I was at Holy Rosary, I was part of the creation of East Cath...Saginaw East Catholic and pastored at St. Mary's High School for a while. East Catholic High School, and then in charge of the...pastor in charge of the merger, the formed Nouvel out of St. Stephen's, St. Pete's...St. Peter & St. Paul, and St. Mary's. So though...those were quite the days. I also was started a diocesan office here, the original offices as the...I think I've mentioned to you last time that when I was ordained, I think there are only two or three employees at the Chancery.

**Tyler Provow** 04:41

Quite a bit different now.

**Father John Sarge** 04:42

Quite a bit different now yeah. And but during that growth period, which is in the 1970s, mid 70s, it started really. There were certain offices opened up like the Liturgy Office and and other ones like that, and one of them that was open was called the Office of Social and Apostolic Action. That was the name of the the, Diocesan Council group, and eventually changed names, became the office of Christian Service.

**Tyler Provow** 05:19

Okay.

**Father John Sarge** 05:19

So I was in charge of that for a couple of years, founding it and a lot of exciting things that went on there, including the call to action and helping parishes. It was a new idea to have parish councils and committees, and so I was charged with helping parishes get their Christian Service committees going and offering resources. So I put out a monthly newsletter with opportunities and ideas. And for three years, I put out a weekly homily service. It was published monthly, but it was homily ideas for the whole month on little suggestions about if you wanted to preach a social justice theme, this would seem to come from the...this is what I saw in the reading of that Sunday, really not everybody, people aren't going to preach...preach a social justice homily every weekend, but I gave some ideas in case they wanted to. I only remember one time in the three years, I think, where I said, I just don't see anything this week, that has to do with social justice. Probably that honesty gave me some credibility. So during that time, we had a lot of, we had some workshops for people. And we, we were instrumental in, in our diocesan response to the call to action, the National Bicentennial Observance and had a group of 10 or 12 of us that went down for that. It was held in Detroit, the National Conference, and it was a marvelous experience. We came back and wanted to share the results, but thought, you know, just going around from meeting to meeting telling people a little bit of what happened, wasn't gonna catch the spirit of it or involve the people. So we decided to do a diocesan call to action. And but we didn't want to start that commission, that diocesan, or national, meeting had a number of, of work teams and areas that were being examined and suggestions for what the Catholic Church in United States could do to support various forms of social actions, social justice. They came up with this whole list and we didn't want to just start from scratch and have our people experience exactly the same thing. So what we do is we took all the recommendations for each of those committees, and had people from each parish who came sign up to go to one of those and our task was to be "how do we implement in Saginaw what the National Call to Action said we should do about racism or about working or immigration or whatever the various topics were." And we we held it here in the summer, in July, probably or August, right on these grounds, and we had over 1200 people for a weekend, Friday to Sunday. And we had facilitators, obviously, and preparatory information and so we had...we had meals and we ended up with a mass celebrated by Bishop Reh. And it was, it was a powerful experience for a lot of people, have that many folks that we...we had. The staff that we had in the diocese from the various offices work to help pull this off. And so people signed up for it had choices they could go to...in a motel or something in the area, but we also assigned anybody who wanted to a family in the Tri-Cities to live with them for those Friday night, Saturday, and then Sunday, they would go back home. And we had people come with campers. So we provided like three options as to people who wanted to stay here but came from Bad Axe, or, places you know, some distance from Saginaw. So it was a really powerful experience. It was, it was, it was raucous in some ways. We had time constraints because maybe had 10 things you're supposed to consider and facilitators trying to get people to do it and, and people came with their own agendas too, obviously. As I remember, there's a group of folks who wanted to say celibacy should be optional. And women should be priests or this that and the other. And I said, no, we're not here to recommend new projects. But how do we implement the ones that the National Call to Action. But anyway, it was a very wonderful, exhilarating thing. And I think it had a nice effect on the diocese. And then we had probably, I don't know whether it was once a year or that often, but we'd have a big workshop for members of the parish Christian Service committees and perhaps sometimes national, sometimes state, or local people come in and talk to us. So that was, that was an exciting thing. Around the time that I came back to Saginaw, from Alma to be at Holy Rosary for the second time, and just shortly end of that we, you know, a year or two later, we were forming Ss. Simon [and] Jude out of

five parishes. They were small and wanted to make one strong parish, how to that. That was a powerful, difficult experience. And so, as was the the merger of the three Catholic high schools into Nouvel, there was a lot of struggle over that. And so they were in difficult times, in some way we got on the news, on the station...a TV stations and radio and people interviewing people who are objecting to this or wanting to do that, and so it was some exciting times. Not always easy, but for me, it was an enriching experience along the way. And then, shortly, right around then too, shortly thereafter, I was one of the founding pastors for the Ezekiel Project, which is a community organization. We were affiliated with the Gamaliel network of religious community organizing. Gamaliel was operating out of Chicago, but had a strong presence in Detroit. And the Detroit people kind of came up and wanted to have us start a local group, and they came to Bishop Untener at the time, who introduced them to me, so I was one of the ones gathering pastors, Catholic, and non-Catholic, different denominations, different racial groups and so forth. And so we had a lot of wonderful community action and support, you know, not always as successful as we wanted to be. But it was an exciting time. And that was another really powerful experience for me to go through the community organize... organization. So I'd say that working on the the office of Christian Service, the Ezekiel project, forming East Catholic and then Nouvel, and all those were pretty exciting things.

**Tyler Provow 13:29**

Yeah, getting involved, like kind of heading up some of that community organizing so like that, is that something that you get appointed for? Is that something that you volunteer for, to kind of head those up?

**Father John Sarge 13:37**

I volunteered, I mean the Bishop Untener knew me and working on the east side of Saginaw with the issues that community organizers wanted to work with and he invited me in to meet the people from Detroit, who were looking for somebody to, among in the Catholic Church to spearhead it here. So he invited me and I was intrigued by the idea so I jumped in and said "yeah, I'm happy to work with this." So it was like, right up my alley and something we need on the side of Saginaw, especially the east side, but the whole of the Saginaw community.

**Tyler Provow 14:14**

Yeah, that's, that's pretty interesting. It's a lot of work. But you know, a lot of challenges, but probably can be very fulfilling, when you kind of see it all come to fruition at the end.

**Father John Sarge 14:23**

Yeah, one of our highlights was, we had an annual meeting. We held that the big Baptist Church out on I-75 and Buena Vista, and we, which you, when you do a meeting like that you may...you have things you want to accomplish, promises you want to elicit from political figures or business or whoever. And so we decided to have a big one there and we invited the governor to come to it. She He had just been nominated and was at a meeting sponsored by the Detroit Gamaliel group. And we were there. And at that time, she was a candidate and we, we, what you do at the end of one of those meetings is you have all the leaders that you've tried to influence come up. And you've negotiated this ahead of time, so they know you're not ambushing them. And you know, and you've got them to say, "Oh, we will ask you this question. And will you answer it?" So you said, "if you are elected, will you come to Saginaw,

Michigan on such and such a date for the meeting of the local Ezekiel group there?" And she said, "Yeah, I would do that." So then we had her, and we probably had 1000 people or so at this church.

**Tyler Provow 15:52**

Oh wow.

**Father John Sarge 15:52**

I'm not sure. Well, it may be fewer than that, because I know how big the church is, but it was packed. And it was a very powerful thing. And so it was...that was that was a highlight, at least a publicity highlight, for...for the time I worked with Ezekiel.

**Tyler Provow 16:14**

Yeah, that's very cool. Very cool. Kind of switching gears and thinking back to before you got into the priesthood. What was kind of that call? What was that message like? How did you get interested in becoming a priest? What was that process?

**Father John Sarge 16:31**

Okay. Yeah, it was. My parents were very involved in church. I lived in Midland. My mother was a musician, an organist. And in 1950, I think it was 50 or early 50s. Anyway, diocese decided that Midland had this Catholic population had grown and needed another parish there. It had St. Brigid's as THE parish. There was also a little country mission kind of at Larkin at the time. It's since really grown and become a full parish. But they formed Blessed Sacrament Parish, and the incoming pastor was given my mother's name as how could...she could play the organ and organize a choir and that kind of stuff, so she did that. And about the same time my dad was asked to help organize the catechetical program for public school students in the parish. And so he did that. And we became very close friends with the pastor who was forming the parish. And at the time, we didn't have a church building. So the...we had services in a public Midland Public school, junior high, we called it at the time Northeast Intermediate. And it was across the street from where we lived. And so every Saturday morning, the pastor would come over have breakfast with us. And, he and my dad and I would go across the street and set up folding chairs and an altar and everything for Mass on Sunday, was only on Sunday in those days. So the priest was practically a family member with us, you know, and my parents were, were very strong in their faith and generous with their time and their talents. And they were beyond Sunday worship, you know, weekday and my mother, you know, once we built a church, she was there every day, you know. So, my mother built up the program, the choir used to rehearse in our living room. A little three bedroom house, one bedroom very small, my sister got, that the boys had to share the other group. And so every Monday night, at about eight o'clock, they would come together and practice in our living room, we'd set up some folding chairs and it's time for us to go to bed, the kids ya know, and had a little pump organ that the parish bought used for that. So that was a growing experience. Then they formed a grade school and I had gone the first three years for...three years or four at St. Brigid school and then we the first building we did was a school and I was in that for the rest of my, through eighth grade. And the...what would eventually become the social hall and gym was the church at the time, you know, I was an altar boy from first grade on and I had to fake the Latin at the time. ["Latin"] until the nuns came for the school that I better memorized it.

**Tyler Provow 19:35**

Yeah.

**Father John Sarge 19:41**

My dad's as they started the, that program, recruiting catechists and organizing it, and my memories of grade, late grade school and so forth were every August, he got a cauliflower ear because he'd be on the phone every night, recruiting teachers. When he relinquished the job there, I think 1200 kids from the program.

**Tyler Provow 20:40**

Wow.

**Father John Sarge 20:41**

And he had to get teachers for those classes. And he had some other people I'm sure that helped him but I just remembered him, the month of August on the phone every night, trying to recruit teachers trying, to recruit teachers. And then when it got that big, it was when they when parishes first started hiring a full-time person to run its education program. So he relinquished it, the first person who did that at Blessed Sacrament. But my folks were so deeply involved in church and their faith was so strong in their activity and, and knowing the priest so well, you know, practically a family member. So I'm sure all of that, then the nuns of course, in those days were pushing vocations. Matter of fact, I there were, we had double grades in some of the grades and as a school went on, and my last year, eighth grade, I think we had 70 kids in the classroom, one nun. It was seventh and eighth grade. And the graduates of that year in eighth grade, there were 13 boys and six of us went into the seminary. That's amazing. But that's the late 1950s was kind of the maximum growth period, you know, parishes and the church in this country. So it was pretty amazing. And my first year I went to St. Joe's in Grand Rapids as a freshman in high school. And then the St. Paul seminary opened and I was here for the next five years. I was one of the perpetual seniors. The first year there were freshmen and sophomore classes, and a special college Latin class for high school graduates, who in those days needed Latin to go on to seminary. And so every year they'd add a grade, so I was in the top class for so...sophomore in high school through junior college. And then after that was when I went to Washington, and then after Washington to Rome. But I was was, it were interesting times, a wonderful time then the council, of course came along. During that time, too, when I was in seminary at St. Paul's, and we were very lucky in this building here. It was founded by Cardinal Hickey, Father Hickey at the time, had been the Secretary to Bishop Woznicki. And he started the seminary and got a remarkable teaching group of priests and a couple lay people and a nun. But it was, in some ways, the most progressive Seminary in the country of a minor seminary. And those of us who were part of that, it only lasted 10 years. The kind of the bottom fell out of seminarians and vocations and all that stuff. We opened with...the building was built for maybe 110, 120 students, the rooms upstairs. And there were like, there were 28 of us in that sophomore class. I think the freshman class was 50 or 60. And the special college class of about 12 or 13. By the time I left this place, in 1965, there were over 220 students here. We took in a few from Lansing and Detroit in the...in the college years, but they had they had single rooms and double rooms, the double rooms all had another bed there were a triple room on a bunk bed. So you've got three in one room up up there. It was just an amazing growth period. And that faculty was sent off to different schools to polish their skills and whatever they were going to be teaching. And the council was



happening, it was an exciting time, an enthusiastic time. And I'd, I'd say that, in my 13 years as a seminary student, the best teachers, the best education ever had was right here. It was better than Catholic University, was better than the Gregorian University in, in Rome. There you had some, you know, if you had a couple of one or two good teachers a semester, you felt great. Here we got upset with one teacher we thought was boring. But it was an amazing, amazing place and, and the emphasis on liturgy and formation and church, teaching and practice was just an incredible, even though the people who left even to this day I run into people who maybe spent two or three years of high school, and they come up and they just have wonderful memories of the school. And the faculty and the, gah, that was influential in all our lives was really beautiful. A very powerful thing.

**Tyler Provow 26:02**

Yeah, that's pretty amazing, how, you know, we're not a super big community, just little Saginaw here, but you get, you know, some amazing growth and, you know, you go off to some of these other bigger cities. And you know, you come right back here, because this is where you have the best teachers and you know, the most impact on your life. It's pretty amazing.

**Father John Sarge 26:19**

And, and Cardinal Hickey, who was Father Hickey to us, and then monsignor, he would, he had been secretary to Bishop Woznicki, before he became Rector that founded the seminary, built the building, recruited the staff, sent them off for training and organize became an expert in that, and he became one of the leading bishops in the country in the for seminary education, eventually when was Rector the American College in Rome for a number of years and all that, but it was, it was a truly incredible place. And it kind of imploded in some ways with what happened in the in the late 60s. And so, it didn't, it didn't continue all that long. But while it was here, it was really, it had a profound influence on a whole lot of people and forming the ethos of the clergy, the presbyterate here in in the Saginaw diocese. And Hickey, he had been secretary to Woznicki before he became here. Well, when the bishops went to the Second Vatican Council, they were supposed to bring what they called the peritus or an expert, advisor along with him. Woznicki asked Hickey to go with him, and as his peritus, and Hickey went and after the first year, I think it was Bishop Woznicki had a heart attack and wasn't able to go back for any more sessions. But Hickey went each one. And he met, the theologians was in you know, their little caucuses off to the side and all that attended all the meetings. And he sent us, I don't know whether it was every week, but at least once or twice a month, he would send an audio tape back to the seminary of what was going on in Rome and who he had met with or what he was hearing and learning. And it was, it was so exciting. And those days during lunch, that taped would be played for us while we ate lunch, and we're, we're, we're hearing what's going on in Rome with this thing. So we became excited about it. And then and then when he came back, and we set up, set up a series of bringing in guest speakers about the council, he brought in some of the biggest theologians and names in the country to speak to probably 800 to 1000 People in the gym here. You know, it was a, it was really a wonderful time and exciting. And I think it formed, there's in the in the middle of the snake, there's this bulge of priests who went through the St. Paul's seminary, and who were here for, for that, that conciliar period and immediately afterwards, and all of that had a big influence on us as well.

**Tyler Provow 27:49**



Yeah, yeah, that'd be pretty exciting. You know, obviously, there's not internet and things like that back then. So, you know, you guys are sitting, waiting for your once a month, little inside scoop of what's going on over there, so that'd be pretty cool. So, how would you say that you're, you know, based on some of the challenges you faced some of the different parishes that you've served and just your own personal journey, you know, how has your faith kind of changed or evolved over the years as you've kind of gone through this whole process?

**Father John Sarge 29:57**

I would say that there was a lot of factors coming together. But I would say, when I went into the seminary, it was still a very regulated thing. And we were going to be taught the truth. And what to tell the people, how to do it, it was, it was very kind of authoritarian is meant to be benevolent. It was, you know, we're taught to love the people. That was one of the things about the St. Paul seminary too, that all of the priests had served in parishes and loved and they're brought here to love parish work and make us enthusiastic about that. Not to be thinking career of who's going to move up and become a Monsignor and run or head some office in those days, we didn't have many offices or anything. So it was very pastoral background, and we, I think, the different seminaries and school, Hickey sent...The pattern in those years was seminary training was minor seminary and major seminary. Minor seminary was high school, and two years of college in your college. And then you went to the major seminary for the four years of theology. And for the two years of college, St. Paul's sent us out all over the country, one or two guys to each place. So most most bigger places, New York, Chicago, Detroit, had their own system, you never left classmate from ninth grade, until you were ordained a priest, you know, you might change from Sacred Heart seminary to St. John's seminary, or whatever, but you were in a particular group. Whereas after the first six years, we got set off to Baltimore to Emmitsburg, Maryland to St. Paul, Minnesota, to Denver to San Diego to San Antonio to New Orleans. And we'd come back with some of the flavor of those places. And, and then we then we went back together either to St. John's seminary, or some of us or Louvain, or, or Rome, or theological college. But that was a big thing too, just wanted everybody to get new experiences, meet the Catholic Church, United States in a different setting. And I think that was a really powerful experience too. But overall, I think the emphasis on parish, love the people, serve the people, meant that we kind of got away from you know, here's the textbook, you this is what you tell them and this is what you you know, they're supposed to do and you're supposed to straight, keep them on the straight and narrow, to a more of the kind of the pastoral approach of love the people. Look for God in them, and see how their what their struggles are, what's going to how you can help them and bring this, the scriptures and the person of Jesus to their lives. So I think there's a really big emphasis on that, among the priests of this diocese, and, and we had two bishops after you know, Woznicki died and 60...was it 68, I think, and the his successor was Bishop Francis Reh, who was a remarkable man himself. He, I went to Rome in 68, and in September, and he left in January to come to Saginaw is our bishop. And it was he came in at the time and he had been active in the council. He was on the post-conciliar commission to update canon law. He was one of the leading canon lawyers in the United States. And he was on that commission. And he was, he was filled with the Vatican II spirit [s'how it became]. And we went from that little, you know, office over on Hamilton Street with three or four employees and some priests who had various responsibilities in part time, but that was when began to form offices of Christian service and liturgy and pastoral services and all that kind of stuff. And so with him, too, he had a great pastoral touch, and he influenced us a lot. I remember initially when I came I was ordained in 1973 and I remember coming back and he was

creating these new offices and putting people, priests and lay people in positions of, of leadership and some of the older priests thought "by god, he's building, you know, big, big something, we didn't need all this, all we needed was, you know, a couple, we've been getting along fine with just a few people." But he, he was forward looking, wanted to implement the council. And so he had a big hand in developing. And he was very, pushed very much parish centered and pastoralist-centered kind of approach. And when he retired Bishop Untener came, who was kind of the ultimate of trying to, you know, inculcate the values that he understood of Second Vatican Council. And he was a magnificent teacher. And he, he, he spent time every year, several times, gathering all the priests, gathering the religious and lay leaders and, and discussing things with them and hammering out how we were going to approach various issues and stuff. So I would say what, what formed me over the years, and how I would have changed more from like, a graduate of the United States Military Academy with a clear mission, and this is what you do, and, and you don't vary from that, to a more people centered, pastoral approach, you know, and listen to the people and be with them. It's a lot like Pope Francis, you know, get the smell of the sheep, and, you know, get to know them and, and don't be so eager to condemn them as to help them and encourage them and, and accompany them, and their spiritual development and so forth. So that that's...that I see is what happened to me. And I remember, I guess I can, I can think back on certain things that my first assignment was, it was brief, because a change of leadership throughout the diocese happened, and during my first year as a priest, when the limited tenure was introduced, and a lot of pastors had to move, and there was a big shake up, you know, but so I was only there from August to March at the Cathedral, but we're right next to St. Mary's Hospital, Ascension, you know, so. I went over, I remember going over there to visit parishioners, and this guy's lying in a bed, and he's very ill. And I had an argument with him about something in Vatican II, or the changes in the liturgy of the church or something. And I looked back later to say, what was wrong with my head, you know, this is not the time or place to argue with somebody about why we're not going to have Latin, or we're going to do this or whatever, I don't even remember what it was about. But I think that's the kind of thing that over the years those experiences made me say, wait a minute, you're not here to beat people up. You're not to whip them into shape, you know, you're to accompany them, help them and do what you can to support them and be a leader, yes, but recognize their gifts and talents and try to draw them out. So I think my approach to ministry is very much influenced by people like Bishop Hickey and Bishop Reh, by what was going on around us. And I just thought it was a very rich time and, and I keep on changing and realizing mistakes I've made. And I need to go on from there, but trusting that the Lord's gonna guide us in this if we're all doing our best, and trying to discern what we can do to be part of the process that helps people bring us the Lord to them, or recognizes the Lord's already there to help them to recognize the Lord's activity in their lives and the life of the world.

**Tyler Provow 39:20**

Yeah, I imagine that would be a really hard transition for any young priest is, you know, being comfortable in front of people, and then, you know, developing that personal connection with people as a young priest probably fresh out of school, it's, you know, you're more concerned with what you're doing, and am I doing the right thing and then as you get more experience, you realize that you're really there for the people and to connect with the people. And, so I'm sure that would be a tough transition for anybody. But you know, when you talk about your community organizing and when I hear you talk about your parents and your organizing that they did, you know, it's kind of something that I'm sure just came natural to you in some in some respects

**Father John Sarge** 40:01

Yeah. Yeah, I feel very blessed and...next month, it's gonna be celebrate or July, my 50th anniversary and you're planning a celebration. It's got me looking backwards a lot. And you're thinking that just, what a journey it's been.

**Tyler Provow** 40:20

Oh I'm sure.

**Father John Sarge** 40:21

At my ordination, after communion, I sang a meditation. My sister played the piano, and we had a harpist and I sang Simple Song from Bernstein's mass. And it's "Lauda Laude," is the other name of it. And it's "Sing God, a simple song, make it up as you go along. God loves all simple things. Because God is the simplest of all." Well, I look back now, that's going to be kind of the theme of my celebration next month, you know that, that, boy have I found that out, you know? Let God take the lead, and just try to let him fill your sails, moving the directions he wants. And, and it's amazing what I've learned from people, you know, and things you've seen the courage, the generosity, the goodness of people, you say some other stuff, too, obviously. But it's been an amazing ride.

**Tyler Provow** 41:32

Yeah, yeah, that's beautiful. And I'm sure it's an amazing experience to see, you know, some of the great things that happen in people and some of the transformations that take place. And, like you said, to some of the generosity and, you know, it's we're surrounded by so much negativity, but as a lot of beautiful things still happening out there.

**Father John Sarge** 41:52

And it's, there's a mixture to me, there's a kind of a sadness now, at what's happened in society in the world, I mean, some of the division that the anger and the frustration, and the loss of numbers, I mean middle aged and young people are notoriously absent now. Does that mean that what we did was all wrong, or we should go back and be clearer again, about what to tell them to do or what's expected of them. I just think there's some forces out there that have made a big difference in our world, in people and we haven't figured it out yet, you know? You gotta trust and, this is Pentecost season, you gotta trust in the Lord, you know, that he's gonna guide us if we're open to it. And do our best to enrich the lives of people rather than get them angry or frustrated or lose hope. And it's not easy, but it's may take another generation coming at it with fresh eyes and in a different experience than I grew up with.

**Tyler Provow** 43:18

Kind of looking forward, what what's your hope for the diocese or for just the Catholic Church in general? You know, that you'd like to see.

**Father John Sarge** 43:26

I guess I would say that I draw, I've drawn some hope from Pope Francis and the synodal way. I think that he's asking us to talk to each other, and more importantly, to listen to each other. You know, and I think that's going to be the only way out of this, it's not going to be talking at people or winning

arguments with him. I think it's finding the things that touch their hearts and move them together, can help them be generous and kind and looking out for the poor and the weak and comforting each other. Learning to recognize more clearly God at work in our lives, and then helping to share that and celebrate it as a people so I don't lose hope. I'm discouraged by some of the things and some of the attempt to restore the church, you know, to try to get it back to where it was. It's, it's gonna have to go to a new place. And I'm, I'm not smart enough to know how that happens or what it will look like. But I just trust the...if we're faithful if we're, if we if we try to remain kind and civil and open, to listen, to let the Spirit instruct us and guide us. You know, it will turn out there have been other periods of history been so bad, you know, think back to the times of the, the excesses of the the, even the papacy and Rome. Just all the vices and horrible things that happened at different periods in history. We can come out of it and be strong again and maybe experience a new kind of growth. I think the internationalism, that's part of our world now, we don't know how to harness that or to how to avoid that being divisive in our midst, but the gifts experience more openness to the gifts of women of other groups, subgroups within our church of different nations. I felt blessed to have worked on the eastside of Saginaw with a lot of Hispanic and African American folk that was far different from my experience of family, of church, all that and just to see some wonderful things and in people, their their goodness, their generosity. Different way of approaching and doing things, but I think we can enrich one another. If we're open to to one another into the Spirit of God and in our midst.

**Tyler Provow 46:35**

Absolutely. Yeah. A couple other quick questions for you. Is there a particular piece of scripture that is your favorite or that really sticks out to you. I'm sure there's many that, you know, there's a lot to choose from.

**Father John Sarge 46:52**

Yeah, yeah, right. Nothing's popping into my mind at the moment, a particular one, but I love the Easter stories of Jesus breathing the spirit to his disciples saying receive the Holy Spirit. You know, his forgiveness of Peter. Three times do you love me, yeah, and make up for his three denials. Think of the, the Pentecost we just celebrated in bri...to believe that the Spirit's been breathed into the us, for the world. Those are enriching and love one another as I've loved you. The Gospel of John is powerful for me. And, and Mark's too, I think, I notice from my scripture, study...studies in Rome, I, I came to appreciate Mark. It's the shortest, the most direct in some ways. I think of it as the gospel and praying...in plain brown wrapper. Yeah, to the point and, and, and this is, this is how this is what Jesus said and deal with it. Just, it was barely 16 chapters, you know, it's just, but it's very powerful to me. It's less artifice, you know, and unvarnished. And there's something of that that appeals to me. Sure.

**Tyler Provow 48:47**

How about any particular saints, you have a favorite saint or anybody that you really enjoy learning about or reading about?

**Father John Sarge 48:56**

Now, Paul, for sure. Although he's a, he can be a tough character. I think of him right away, and of course, he was the St. Paul Seminary here, so there is an important part of this...part of a...don't know about...apart from from him there, there are so many others. Just read that, the other day I read and it

was the feast of...oh...can't think of it right now, anyway, he was but he was a priest who when, he became a priest who went to Rome at one of its lowest points in history where there were so much hedonism and debauchery and everything in Rome, and he never wrote a book, he never taught a class. But he converted the city of Rome and most of the clergy there by his example and his love. Philip Neri. That's who I think, yeah his feast was just last week. And I read this article about him and I just think that's a saint I didn't know particularly, we used to have a parish of St. Philip Neri in Coleman and. I thought all right, we got lots of saints. That, just that that little that that just really made me think of him this powerful example. Hey, Cam, I'm in a meeting. Oh, okay. Thanks.

**Cam** 50:52

Yeah.

**Father John Sarge** 50:53

My nephew in Canada.

**Tyler Provow** 50:55

No problem.

**Father John Sarge** 51:03

Yeah.

**Tyler Provow** 51:06

How about anything about you know, all of us lay people, you know, we see the priest up there every Sunday and, you know, shaking hands after church and stuff. But what's something about the pastoral life that, you know, behind the scenes, a lot of people may not really realize?

**Father John Sarge** 51:23

I just, I just want to go back to the previous...

**Tyler Provow** 51:27

Yeah, sure.

**Father John Sarge** 51:27

Francis of Assisi is certainly one of my favorite saints to you know, I guess that's, that would be one that I, I would really, having been to a Assisi a couple of times, you know, while I was studying in Eur...in Italy. That's a powerful experience, powerful place. I think of Ignatius Loyola. You know, his intellectual acumen, his sharp approach that influences theology to this day so much, I think so that those would be two other saints. Okay. This question was?

**Tyler Provow** 52:15

Yeah, what's something kind of about priestly life that, you know, a lot of people might not realize?

**Father John Sarge** 52:27

I guess it's, I don't think a lot of people understand our life. You know, not having the personal family as such, although we, we depend a lot on the families of our parish, you know, to provide a haven for us, you know, a little test of how real we are, and so forth. So I, I, maybe they don't realize how much we need them. If people think, well, we need priests. Priests need the people. And I guess, in my parish days, I used to, I used to love in...I'd be in one sense, I dread because of the energy it took, but the other it always came back: visiting the sick, the homebound, was such a powerful experience for me, you know? I forget who it was, might have been Bishop Povish when he was teaching in the seminary here, St. Paul's, gave...they used to those guys just because they were, had been parish, most of them. They'd give us some advice, as a seminarian and you're always remember this. And it was, you know, when you go into a parish, visit the sick, take care of the young kids. And you'll do all right. People will know, they'll notice. And they'll tell each other and they'll talk about it. And it's true, I sometimes if I's...having a bad day, going to visit the few of the shut-ins, you know, see their faith, their goodness, just you could be inspired by them. So how much we depend upon them how much how much their their love and support means, you know, to a priest. I don't know whether the pastor was a day where priests their own.... We all have our own best friends in ministry and from the seminary and all that. But so they're part of a support group. And, and we had a series of support groups, I think the longest lasting one at the diocese, and half of them have died now but the support of other priests was important. But I just think that, you know, when you're...and it's not just you don't want flattery, but it's like, I love preaching. And I can, I think I can tell when, when something has happened. You know, I'm preaching. But it means a lot when people are coming out of church and said, "wow, you are on fire today. That was a, that was a good one. I never heard that." You know, I really, those things encouraged me, I think when they, when they like you. Yeah, but it's more than being just good Joe, that they can play golf with or invite to dinner and have a few drinks with. You...that was important to me always having some frien...family in the parish where I could go visit, they they helped me and supported me a lot. We just in general, the support of the parish, their warmth, and their encouragement. You know, this is, this is good. We like belonging to this parish. That was really important stuff and I don't know whether they realize how important they are, to a priest's mental health and well being.

**Tyler Provow 56:18**

Yeah, I'm sure a lot of them don't. Yeah, that, you know, we all need that personal connection, and it's not something that I would have necessarily thought of so.

**Father John Sarge 56:27**

Yeah. Yeah, it, uh, you know, what, I can't imagine what it would be like, if, if the people of a parish just kind of rejected you, or "can't we get somebody else in here?" There would be tough, you know, or even if they're just sort of indifferent. Boom. But the warmth of people and their enthusiasm and, and their willingness to try things or do things, you know, for each other, and for the wider community and the for the parish, those are, those are important support items, I think. Funerals. I mean, you think they might be depressing or grim, but they're often if, if, if people come out of there and say, "Thank you, that was really good. you spoke like you knew'em." A lot of times you don't really know'em, and you get older people who've been in a way or in a nursing home or whatever, and you just didn't get to know them real well, but if the if the family feels some comfort, you know, that can be I guess, it's just having



a sense that my ministry means something to them. You know, I can't imagine what it would be like to feel totally rejected or like you're, you're not helping.

**Tyler Provow 58:04**

Yeah.

**Father John Sarge 58:05**

You know, you're making it worse when you get some of that from a couple of people here and there but by and large the people are really good and are grateful for for the ministry though. It's it's been a very fulfilling life. Wonderful life.

**Tyler Provow 58:22**

Sounds like it. Sounds like you've had quite a journey.

**Father John Sarge 58:25**

Yeah. We had we did a, had a class reunion prep my class in Rome this past summer. We got together at St. Meinrad's in Indiana. I've never been there before. But anyway, there were 16 or 17 of us, I forget how many there were about...we were a small class in Rome, one of the smallest in a long time. We started out with only like 42, they used to start with 70 or so every year. On my first year there we were the smallest class all the time I was there. And 36, 38 maybe got ordained I don't know. But we had a...it was a good get together of finding encouragement. And I sometimes when you, if you go to like a place like Rome, sometimes there are different groups within their class ahead of me. And Rome, was at the kind of the peak of of change and of sort of progressives and more conservatives and, and they divided themselves up into two groups, the Jets and the farts. The Jets are these wild ass people who wanted to, you know, really change the church and changed the world and it was Vietnam and it was all kinds of stuff was going on? And, and the other ones were very traditionalist and straight laced, you know, my class never had those divisions. But I always thought there were some more conservative elements than what I had come from and where I had gone by working in, you know, in the poor areas of Saginaw, and so forth. But I tell you, it was amazing. 17 of us were there, a lot of, a number of us have died now, and some are their health was poor. But we...just the conversations we had, and the consensus that you felt about our ministry and being grateful for it, and the people and it was a remarkable experience to...for me this summer. And we had a couple of guys that couldn't make it. But we got on the internet and had a, back then we we're talking and one of the guys asked, the question was, they were all ordained in December of our last year there, so they were actually ordained a year and a half ahead of me. I had to come back into a year of Diaconate so their 50th was last year. And so was, "is your priesthood been what you expected? Or how is it different from what you thought would be? Did you, did you anticipate what it would be like?" And we all said, "No." It was very, very different from what we had. And there was some, some, another question we asked was, "what's your biggest disappointment or something?" And the kind of answer that got a lot was that the church's abandoning us, turning away from Vatican II, and the spirit of...that governed our ministry for the la...50 years. And, and that, it just isn't what it was, like, as we went through those 50 years now, there's kind of an attempt to rein us in or to change direction and seminaries have changed, and all that stuff. That was kind of discouraging, in one sense, but encouraging that almost everybody there, kinda say, yeah, we feel, in some ways that the, what we had been, you know, programmed or direct, you know, the direction we



had felt was that the future has been trying to tamp down, you know. We're too old, it's too late to change us. But I think that it was interesting to me to find out how, even the guys that I thought would be kind of conservative, were more progressive and hopeful for the future, like, like that and wanted, and thought we'd lived through a great time and were a little discouraged about some of the directions we're going now. And some of its ebb and flow, what's gonna happen like, like in American politics, one group is going to be in and the other is going to be out for a while, it's never seems like it's never permanently one or the other. But to feel some of that in the priesthood is, is interesting, too. I mean, you get the divisions there, too, about the priests who are excited, thrilled with what Francis has done, or a lot of what he's done and others, you just, I mean, you get bishops saying and he's destroying the church. And that's kind of hard to take, you know, especially if you tend to, like what he's said, you know. You can question all the decisions or directions or whatever, but basically, I think, you know, church is a field hospital, you know, get the smell of the sheep on you. We're not here to condemn or that's not it. That's the kind of ministry that I think my my classmates again at this summer all embodied that I think, interesting.

**Tyler Provow 1:04:48**

That would be very interesting. Well, I appreciate the time you've given us today, Father and for all the service that you've given to the diocese here in Saginaw. Before we let you go here, is there anything else that you would like like to add about your time here that you want the people to know, anything like that?

**Father John Sarge 1:05:04**

I guess I just I have always felt very grateful to have been a part of the Diocese of Saginaw and the Presbyterate. And we haven't always...we've gone through some some tough time when I was first here. Some of the guys who were my age now, when I came back, you know, I think they were "awe, was a church going to hell in a hand basket, you know, what is going on here? What are these guys up to and what do they want?" But I found that over the years, we ended up getting along and appreciating each other, we still had, might have had different views, we kind of roll our eyes at each other at times. But there was a, there was still a camaraderie. And, and I think, I think we were very gifted during critical years of my early to mid-priesthood with Bishop Reh and Bishop Untener. They, they had a powerful influence on me, and I think the Presbyterate and the Church as a whole. So I think those I just feel very blessed. For the 50 years. Could I have imagined where we would go or where we would be or what I would think about some of these things. And now, it's so much better than I would have imagined, I think. And it's, it can be scary at times, but I think I've seen enough of, to be hopeful. And to believe that it's God's church, not ours, you know, and he'll...God will get us where, where we need to go or straighten this up when he asked to however. So I'm, I'm grateful. And I, I just think I've traveled around the country, visited other places and talked with other priests and my classmates and so forth, I just think, "Wow, very fortunate to been here." And very grateful for the time, the heart of that 50 years when I was at my best, health wise, and, you know, understanding coming to understand better ministry and so forth. It was a rich, rich time. And I don't know that I could have picked a better time to many if I...if I'd had a choice. You know, I'm very grateful for, for, for being part of Saginaw and for the brothers that I've had in the priesthood and for the brothers and sisters, in ministry, you know, some incredible women in this had of been part of this diocese. We had such a group of nuns here for so many years, but we've got so many lay people too, you know, the ministry program and others that have done

theology and worked in parishes. It's just, it's been a remarkable place to be and I'm grateful wouldn't have chosen anywhere else.

**Tyler Provow** 1:08:15

Awesome. Well, thank you again, it was a pleasure to talk to you today a father.

**Father John Sarge** 1:08:18

Thank you for those questions.