

## **To serve Christ the shepherd**

### ***Father Benjamin Roberts ordained a priest for the diocese***

by KATIE MOORE

staff writer

CHARLOTTE — A smile spread across the face of priesthood candidate Benjamin Roberts as he processed down the aisle at the start of his ordination Mass. That smile remained a permanent fixture throughout the ceremony.

“It was a glorious day,” said Father Roberts, who formally dedicated his life to serving the Lord, the church, and the people of God as he was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Peter J. Jugis at St. Patrick Cathedral in Charlotte June 6.

During his homily, Bishop Jugis reminded the candidate of the importance of “daily conversation with Jesus in prayer.”

“It is Christ’s love which changes and perfects a priest,” said Bishop Jugis, thus making “the commandment of the Lord possible — to love as he loves, to serve as he serves — because his love and grace have first been given to the priest, to purify and perfect him.”

“Through the Lord’s sanctifying grace, you become a sacrament of Christ the High Priest, capable of acting in the Person of Christ,” Bishop Jugis told Deacon Roberts. “You are consecrated as a true priest of the New Testament to serve Christ the teacher, priest and shepherd.”

“It was a powerful thing,” said Father Roberts reflecting on the moment Bishop Jugis and priests of the dioceses laid their hands on him during the Mass. “My whole life has been preparation for this,” he said.

### **Father Benjamin Roberts**

Father Roberts was born in Charlotte and grew up in Lancaster, S.C., where he attended a Lutheran church.

Following high school, he began training to be a Lutheran minister. He studied Lutheran theology under the guidance of Rev. Andrew Weisner, campus pastor and chaplain at Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory.

Rev. Weisner introduced him to Father Conrad Kimbrough, a retired priest for the Diocese of Charlotte.

“Around the time that I started thinking about converting to Catholicism, I started thinking about the priesthood,” recalled Father Roberts.

“Father Kimbrough was really helpful in helping to discern my vocation, not only by talking, but by showing what it means to be a priest,” he said.

Father Roberts was received into the Catholic Church and confirmed by Father Peter Fitzgibbons at St. Philip the Apostle Church in Statesville Oct. 30, 1999.

After a year of working in a soup kitchen in inner city Chicago, Father Roberts entered the seminary under the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Buffalo, N.Y., where he earned his undergraduate degree in philosophy from D'Youville College.

Next he entered his novitiate, a yearlong spiritual retreat in preparation for vows. During that time, Father Roberts discerned the call to become a parish priest. He left the novitiate in March 2005 and in August began formation for the Diocese of Charlotte at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia, Pa.

Father Roberts has been assigned to St. Paul the Apostle Church in Greensboro.

He said that he is most looking forward to performing sacramental ministry.

“I love administering the sacraments,” said Father Roberts, particularly “celebrating Mass and celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation.”

“I always carry a purple stole,” he said, a practice encouraged by one of his mentors. “The sacrament of reconciliation is that important.”

### **Ordination Mass**

Concelebrants of the ordination Mass at St. Patrick Cathedral included Abbot Placid Solari of Belmont Abbey; Msgr. Mauricio W. West, vicar general and chancellor; Father Christopher Gober, diocesan vocations director; Father Robert McDermott, dean of men at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary; and priests serving in the Diocese of Charlotte. Also in attendance was Bishop Emeritus William G. Curlin.

During the rite of ordination, Father Roberts promised to fulfill the office of the priesthood. Kneeling, he placed his hands between Bishop Jugis' hands in a promise of obedience to him and to his successors.

The congregation was invited to join in prayer for the church, its people and the priestly candidate as he lay prostrate before the altar.

During the rite's most solemn moment, Father Roberts knelt before Bishop Jugis, who laid his hands on his head. The celebration of the sacrament of holy orders was completed as the bishop extended his hands over the kneeling candidate and prayed the prayer of consecration.

Father Roberts was then vested with a stole and chasuble — outer garments of the priestly office. Bishop Jugis anointed his hands with sacred chrism and he was then presented with a chalice and paten signifying his role as celebrant of the Eucharist.

The newly ordained Father Roberts then joined his brother priests to concelebrate the Mass, thus opening a new chapter in his life.

“Christ’s earthly ministry is continued in the priest,” said Father Roberts. “That is a truly humbling experience.”

“It is this beautiful experience of the great mercy of God that he has called me to share in his life in this way,” he said.

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