

# A Journey of Faith: Father Steve Maddaloni

By Paul McAvoy, Photography by Charlene Graham

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus first calls his disciples by telling the fishermen to "put out into the deep" after an unsuccessful night at work. The passage ends with a haul of fish that nearly sinks the boats — and Simon Peter, James, and John leaving their work behind to become committed followers of Jesus. Aptly, this story illustrates the call that men throughout the ages receive to the priesthood — men like Father Steve Maddaloni, who will be ordained to the priesthood on June 25, 2016. Like the early disciples, Father Maddaloni was a man who was happily working in his chosen field when he, too, received a call that he couldn't ignore.

"It was a really scary situation," Father Maddaloni said with a laugh, "I was 47, and I [was worried] I was too old for this, to make this kind of change!"

Father Maddaloni was born in Queens, but moved to Nesconset when he was young. "We weren't a super-Catholic family," he said. "We went to church every week, but we didn't say grace before meals. However, my mother taught me prayers, the Our Father and Hail Mary, and every Christmas we said prayers in front of the manger before we opened our gifts." Growing up, being a priest was not on Father Maddaloni's radar, but he took his faith seriously and was always a practicing Catholic.

After high school, Father Maddaloni went to college to study business, and landed a job at a larger company doing market research. He did that for a few years, enjoying the time he spent working with clients, and found out that he liked the human side of the work. In his 20s, a chance came up to live in Italy. And while there Father Maddaloni happened to find a job teaching English to Italians. He was surprised at how much he enjoyed it. The classroom seemed a natural place for him, and though he still considered himself a businessman, the experience led him to rethink his career.

"I wanted work that was rewarding," Father Maddaloni said. "So I decided to become a teacher. I was 32 at the time." Father Maddaloni got a job at East Meadow High School teaching English as a Second Language and loved the work. He already knew from his background in business that he enjoyed working with people, and teaching was a way to help people and make a difference in their lives. While he was building a career as a high school teacher, God's plan for Father Maddaloni's vocation began to emerge. A conversation here or there, or a thought about the priesthood, and soon Father Maddaloni was considering if he might have a calling. "I was in my 30s," Father Maddaloni said, "[and] I was talking to a priest when he said to me, 'Do you think God is calling you to a special role in the Church?' And that was the question that got me thinking about it. It was a disruptive kind of question, because I was already teaching, already happy, so I started to think about [the priesthood] — but I found that I was thinking about it way too much, all the time. So I pushed it aside for a while, and said maybe I'll come back to it later."

During this time, Father Maddaloni found he continued to be drawn to the Church in new ways. A chance to take a graduate course at Immaculate Conception Seminary soon turned into a few courses; the next thing he knew, a master's degree was in hand. While there, he also met many good men who were studying to be priests. Throughout his 30s, though he thought he had set the question aside, priesthood still was in his thoughts. "I had a life that I really liked and a job that I loved, so it was scary to think about. ... There was also this impression that seminary was for younger guys, and it meant closing the door forever on marriage." Though the reasons to resist kept cropping up, so did the feeling to pursue it. It was almost a decade later when a

student of Father Maddaloni's was interested in the priesthood and it got Father Maddaloni thinking about it again. "So I gave it one last shot, and talked to a priest about it. It was in that conversation when I realized God really was calling me, and it wasn't going to stop." In that moment, Father Maddaloni knew that he had to follow this calling further. He applied to be a seminarian for the Diocese of Rockville Centre and was accepted.

"When I made the decision, it was a strange experience to tell people," Father Maddaloni said. "I had to tell colleagues, friends, and family — and some people had no inkling that I was religious! But, ultimately, people have been very supportive."

Father Maddaloni enrolled at Pope St. John XXIII Seminary in Massachusetts, a seminary for men with later vocations in life. There, he met former professionals, doctors and members of the military. Overall, he was very impressed with the men who were taking their vocation seriously and studying towards the priesthood.

"I'm with guys who have lived interesting lives and made the decision that [seminary] is where they want to be. They are people who are committed, and holy, and trying to get holier...it's a great experience and I'm very happy here," he explained.

After years of wondering if this was God's plan for him, Father Maddaloni has gained a sense of peace in pursuing his vocation. "Looking back now, I'm extremely happy that I did it," Father Maddaloni said. "Although I loved the life I had, I don't feel like it's been wasted. God calls people at different ages, and I think he calls older guys for a reason. The experience we've had in our lives is helpful to the priesthood."

Today, as Father Maddaloni prepares for his ordination, he is looking forward to becoming immersed in parish life. He has helped at parishes in Massachusetts throughout his studies and also on Long Island during the summers. "I love preaching and breaking open the word of God. ... I love being with people and helping them see God more clearly, and I find that helps me to see God more clearly," Father Maddaloni said.

To older men who may be considering if they have a calling, Father Maddaloni understands what they might be dealing with. "It's scary, especially if you're entrenched in a life that's going well, but, in the end, it's doable."

"I had to sell my house, I had a mortgage and a career and I was dating — I couldn't imagine leaving all these things," Father Maddaloni said. "But, in the end, you can. You'll never be completely happy unless you do the thing for which you're made. And I'm incredibly happy I'm doing this thing."

