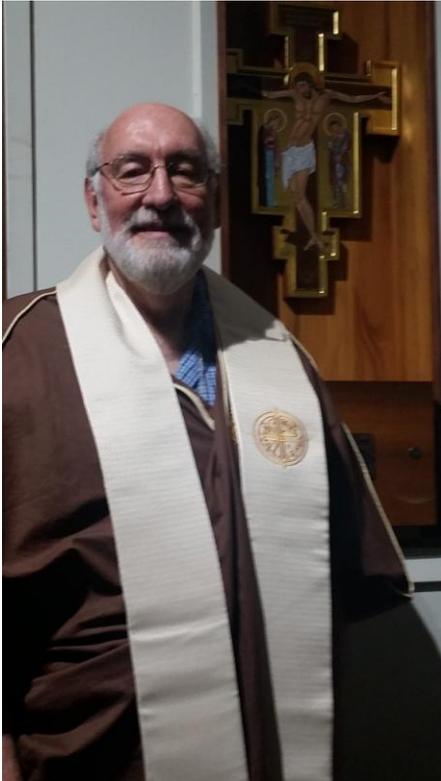


# Welcoming Our New Priest and Postulant

## Spring 2018



**Richard Mickelson** was born in Rice Lake, Wisconsin into a Catholic family (his father had been raised as a Lutheran but had “converted” to marry his mom.) At age five, his family moved to the Black Hills area of South Dakota where he was raised and attended Catholic Schools. The majority of those years were spent in the community of Rapid City. His father and mother instilled in him a love and appreciation for the outdoors and nature. These experiences formed the beginning of his contemplative spiritual life. Richard felt some pull towards the priesthood in High School, however, after a month of discernment he decided the material life was more important. He continued on that track until his late 40’s.

He received BS and MS degrees in Chemical Engineering from South Dakota Mines. He also has an MBA from Texas A&M Kingsville. He was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Corp of Engineers at his BS graduation and was called to active duty in 1969 after working briefly for the DuPont Company. During active duty, he served in the Viet Nam war. The war had a profound effect on his perspective of the violence we humans do to each other. After returning to the US, he completed his MS and went to work for Celanese, a global chemical company where he worked for 30 years in manufacturing positions and in Marketing/Sales/Business Direction. This time in his life provided him with opportunities to visit cultures in Western Europe and Asia. He retired to Fredericksburg with Cydney, the love of his life, in 2003. The move to the Texas Hill Country was a spiritual blessing for him. For the first time in life he made time to slow down and savor life. He met Ron and Karen in a supper group which eventually led to Praxis weekends at The Way of the Wolf. Richard began working with a spiritual director in 2009 and continues his spiritual journey today.

Service has always been a passion in his life. Upon retirement he became certified to teach and spent nine years teaching high school math. He has served his church and community in many capacities over the years including leading/serving on three school boards, serving and leading vestries, participating in the Community of Hope, participating in parish search committees, and teaching many semesters of Sunday school. In 2009 Richard was drawn to the work of the Dr. Lynn C Bauman and has actively sought the Wisdom path since that time. In union with Debbie (Gorden) and

Tom (Christofferson), he began a Wisdom School at St Barnabas in 2014. He was confirmed in the Episcopal Church in 1983. He has been a member of St Barnabas church in Fredericksburg. He took vows as a monk in April 2015. He is extremely grateful for all the teachers he has encountered on the path some recognized at the time and some not until much later. He entered the Priesthood of the Order in 2018.

He is married to Cydney Mickelson and they have a blended family of four children and three grandchildren. Richard and Cydney have recently moved back to the Dallas Fort Worth area (McKinney) to be closer to their children and grandchildren. His interests include time with the family as well as traveling, all things outdoors including enjoying wildlife and reading.



**Joel Barson** was raised Jewish in Philadelphia. From his earliest years he experienced spiritual yearnings. Hebrew school provided some initial outlines and imagery to his inclinations, but his first deep encounter with the divine came in a conversion experience to Christianity that took place during the summer between his freshman

and sophomore high school years, on a park bench in Center City, Philadelphia.

At the University of Pittsburgh, Joel experienced his first spiritual night, when he questioned the relative good of a Christianity that sought converts above all else. Stepping away from his youth groups and most of his associations, college was an inadvertently contemplative period, and a ripening one. For the large part solitary, going to concerts, shows, and lectures, his prior experiences marinated. During this time, he also had had exposure to Chabad (ultra-orthodox) synagogue services, and learned the laying on of tefillin (an element of the Jewish “office” in which scripture is wound around the body and on the forehead, during prayers). He studied the Talmud in his Pittsburgh apartment. He spent a mysterious year studying Thomistic metaphysics with enigmatic figure that approached him in the university library and identified himself as a former Carmelite monk. It was also during this time that he first read the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Seven Story Mountain*. Thomas Merton’s mention of Carthusian monks awakened in Joel a fascination with monastic spirituality.

After college, Joel moved to Michigan where he first worked as an editor for a scientific organization before stumbling into the affordable housing world. His earnest searching

continued over many years, but other spiritual markers included his marriage to Leah in a Jewish Reformed-Renewal Temple, where meaningful worship was emphasized, and where the congregation chanted *nigun*, or single-syllable chants; it was also during that time that Joel encountered the Human Kindness Foundation, and the work and writings of Bo Lozoff, which continue to be formative.

In his early thirties, Joel walked into the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, where his fragmented spiritual self began to be knit together. The experience of vulnerable, open-hearted and open-minded Eucharistic community was the hospital in which his spirit life was mended. He was baptised at the Easter Vigil that year by Rev. Joe Summers, whom Joel considers to be a model for what a fleshy, fully-embodied, heart-centered, fierce and fragile, living, changing Christianity should be.

A treasured memory from the night of his Baptism is about his Jewish wife, Leah. She baked the communion challah for the vigil service. As Joel was pulling out of the driveway, Leah gave him a thumbs-up and said: “**Baptism or bust!**” Leah’s humble and loving support has been one of the most important elements in Joel’s journey.

Later that year he was confirmed in the Episcopal Church. In the years that followed, he was occasionally invited to preach, he became a Eucharistic Visitor, and officiated morning worship when the Vicar was away. Leah began co-leading the Sunday School during this time. It is to Leah and Joel’s amusement that this means there are Sundays, now-and-again, when he is leading worship and she is leading the Sunday school, and two goofy Jewish folks are running the church on the Lord’s day! Joel is presently the Senior Warden of the congregation.

It was also during these years that Joel met Alison Hine, and later Lynn Bauman. Alison would become Joel’s spiritual ferryman, guiding him across a dark night experience, and into a deeper immersion in the divine. Alison’s spiritual direction provided guideposts and pointers through the pathless places in his soulcape. Joel became a regular participant in Alison’s Practice of Presence Circle and Contemplative Communion Practice. And at Alison’s invitation, Joel discerned his call to become a monk in the OOOW. Joel’s gratitude to Alison for her shamanic, devout, irrelevant, wise, sensitive, and agile guidance is beyond expression.

Also during these years, Joel met Lynn Bauman, through retreats he led at Alison’s home and then the Small House. In Lynn, Joel experienced a living nexus of the Abrahamic faiths. For Joel, Lynn points to a new land of spiritual unity possible within Joel’s heart, and in the world. Lynn is also a beloved friend.

Joel works for a Supportive Housing Organization in Ann Arbor, where some have called him the chaplain of his agency. He is frequently called on to lead memorial services, and treasures the invitation he experiences to be with people in times of transformation. His agency is a pioneer in the Housing First Movement and a leader in the Harm Reduction Movement, both of which manifest a radical acceptance of people where they’re at. This includes housing folks coming out of chronic homelessness,

typically with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder. They supply clean needles, safe crack use kits, and use countless other tools for honoring and affirming people's dignity at exactly where they're at in their life and journey. The most important of these is relationship.

Finally, Joel is very interested in the intersection of contemplative practice and mental illness. He suffers from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, including "pure O" or debilitating intrusive/offensive thoughts, as well as checking, contamination, scrupulosity, and other compulsions. Being part of an OCD support group has proven to be an integral part of his spiritual work, and is incorporated into his Rule of Life.

This outline brings his story up to the moment of his postulancy vows, which Joel considers the third numinous milestone in his life, after his conversion and baptism.