

## Five La Salette Athletes Seek Priestly Calling

Reported by Fred Kroner in *News Gazette*

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OLIVET – Michael Middlemore, the son of a former police officer, considered a career in law enforcement. The top scorer on the La Salette boys' basketball team, he also contemplated pursuing a sport in college.

He eventually settled on a different path, but one which two other basketball teammates and two additional members of the Lions' rugby team will seek to follow.

They will enter the seminary in October with hopes of becoming priests, religious brothers or Benedictine monks.

Middlemore, John Alladin (rugby), John Carlisle (basketball), James Golightly (basketball) and John Schiltz (rugby) are among the 14 seniors in this year's graduating class at La Salette. They are finalizing plans to enter St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary, in Winona, Minn., this fall.

They will be joined by two other classmates who have not been involved in athletics this year: Michael Janis and Joseph Maki.

### **From humble beginnings**

This wasn't the idea when the young men arrived at La Salette.

"The thought of the priesthood was there," Golightly said, "but I didn't feel strongly inclined to it."

The Indianapolis native, in fact, wasn't originally enthusiastic about attending an all-boys boarding school for four years.

"At first, when my parents brought up the idea, I was like, 'No way, man,'" Golightly said.

His mind was changed after meeting headmaster Father Michael McMahon and learning about the mission of La Salette.

"It is about becoming a man and learning how to be a disciplined human being who will not crumble under pressure, but can act with a self-confidence that is not only beneficial to oneself but edifying to others at the same time."

### **'Solid gentlemen'**

Virtually all students at La Salette enter as freshmen. Middlemore, however, came in as a junior in the fall of 2008 at the same time his brother, Joseph, started as a freshman.

There are no televisions or Internet access in the student dorms and limited cell phone use, details that require a time for transition as well as help to promote personal growth.

"The scheduled life at La Salette helped me make a clear decision about my future," said Middlemore, who grew up in Post Falls, Idaho. "This school takes you away from everyone else and

forms you into a young, solid gentleman, teaching you how to act and to consider the challenges that you will have to face in later years."

### **Establishing priorities**

Middlemore's basketball coach this season, John Spezia, said he had "no doubt" his scoring leader (16.2 scoring average) could play the game at a higher level had that been his desire. It wasn't easy for the 6-foot-2 Middlemore to say no to sports.

"Making a choice that affects the rest of your life is rather difficult," Middlemore said. "I have dedicated a lot of time to basketball, and there is no doubt it is my favorite sport."

"Basketball is not everything in life, and there are much more honorable and worthy goals than playing basketball for a college. It is tough to leave sports behind, for I like to be an active person, but one cannot always choose the things that are pleasurable or fun to do."

### **Seeking the seminary**

In the first four years since La Salette relocated from Michigan to southern Vermilion County, 16 students have chosen to enter the religious life.

The fact that three of the top six players on this season's basketball team are doing so makes the Class of 2010 unique.

Schiltz, from Nicholville, N.Y., said these decisions help illustrate similar characteristics of the teenagers.

"This shows me that these guys care about helping everyone else instead of themselves," Schiltz said.

Carlisle recognizes that choosing to enter the seminary wouldn't be an option for many peers at other high schools.

"James Golightly made the decision first. We talked about it together when we were considering it, but in the end we each had to make the big decision ourselves," he said.

### **Voice of experience**

Father McMahon understands the choice from both sides. He was a three-sport athlete in high school who went on to play basketball at Yale, where he served as team captain.

As the spiritual adviser for many of the La Salette students, he long ago considered how he would respond to potential queries from those who were torn about which path to pursue.

"I posed myself the question 20 years ago: 'What advice would I give to a young man like myself? What would I, as an objective observer, advise?' "

The answer, he said, has been clear, "Follow Christ and bear witness to him. As a former athlete, and one who 20 years ago made this same decision, I can surely empathize with them."

### **Influential leader**

His words – and his example – have carried weight with those from La Salette who have faced daunting questions about their futures.

"Father McMahon has played an incredible role," Schiltz said. "He has been my 'father' away from home because he is always ready to give a hand to help me out or is ready to correct me whenever I need it.

"He also is someone that is a very honorable role model to look up to because he is not like some fake leader who tells you one thing and does another, but one that leads by example."

To that, Alladin added an amen.

"It is often said that actions speak louder than words," said Alladin, who grew up as an only child in Arcadia, Calif. "This especially applies to Father McMahon. What he does for the school and the sacrifices he makes for his students are examples which should be followed."

Golightly said Father McMahon's influence is not restricted to one particular aspect of student life at the school.

"He has helped me with everything from my prayer life to my jump shot," Golightly said.

In Carlisle's opinion, Father McMahon's role "is a monumental one."

He witnesses daily examples.

"The single most important thing he's done is constantly demand excellence," said Carlisle, from Nicholville, N.Y. "Whether it's in the pain and sweat of the P.E. field, or the daily routine of jobs, he demands that it be done 100 percent and that it be done the right way.

"Although at times it seemed like he was never satisfied, looking back I realize that he demanded excellence of us so that we learn to demand it of ourselves. While he is in a position of authority over me, I nevertheless consider him to be one of my closest friends."

### **Setting the pace**

Those individuals who are answering their personal call to serve are ones whom Father McMahon believes will continue to make a difference.

Carlisle is following the lead of his brother James (La Salette Class of 2006), who is now in his fourth year of seminary studies.

"In 10 years of teaching high school boys, there are few students that stand above the rest, and John is in this category," Father McMahon said. "His virtue and piety are solid and manly. He is trustworthy and responsible with an above-average intellect, which he diligently applies to his studies.

"John is a bright light in an excellent class and a recognized leader."

Carlisle was a three-year starter in basketball and rugby, despite entering LaSalette with what Father McMahon said were "little to no basketball skills."

He leaves with a legacy that will last.

"He spent countless hours in season and out to improve his game," Father McMahon said. "In recognition of this extraordinary discipline and heart, we have named the Academy's 'Hammer Award' after him.

"This award is given annually to the athlete who displays an uncommon work ethic and desire for improvement."

### **Finding a path**

Interestingly, Father McMahon said La Salette is "not a minor seminary with the direct goal of preparing men to enter the religious life. Rather, its purpose is to form solid Catholic men, zealous and generous."

The fact that outside distractions – such as video games and girls – are not present while opportunities to attend Mass occur daily, makes it easier for the students to focus on long-term plans.

"The environment is set up to form men, plain and simple," Golightly said. "Some of the reasons that more young men from La Salette try the priesthood is because they are in an environment that is conducive to thought and prayer, which is the key to finding God's path for you."

Carlisle said with the focus on discipline and "doing the right thing as opposed to doing what feels good or what's easier," the result is "to form men of character and principle."

He added: "While I in no way felt 'pushed' to pursue the priesthood, the La Salette system, which stresses doing God's will in all things, prepared me to make the decision when the time came.

"As for the sacrifice involved, it is tough giving up all the world has to offer. One is only truly happy and at peace when he is doing God's will, and thus the reward of the priesthood far outweighs the sacrifice."

### **Impacting lives**

The path the La Salette athletes chose will require six to 10 years before they can receive the sacrament of holy orders, although after about 18 months they will receive the cassock (religious habit). Carlisle recognizes the quest may not become reality for each of them.

"When one enters the seminary, it's not a guarantee that he'll make it all the way to the priesthood," he said. "Some find out it's simply not for them, but I want to give myself to it 100 percent."

Golightly said there are different directions his commitment could go.

"Although I plan to enter the seminary, the thought of teaching cannot be totally ruled out," he said. "There are priests at La Salette who teach, so I still might have an opportunity to get the best of both worlds."

To a person, the young men are looking ahead to the good they can accomplish.

"People just seem to be indifferent to everything," Schiltz said. "The church is in a bad situation, and hopefully all of us can help work together to make it the place where all things can be restored in Christ as the king of the world and of our own hearts."

Golightly said the challenges are awesome, but so, too, can be the rewards.

"So many things are happening right now that people are losing their faith in God and choosing the path of evil," Golightly said. "People try and rationalize their motives for doing an evil thing and feel justified just because 'everyone else is doing it.'

"I want to try and bring the truth to people about the world that they are living in and help them come to the realization that they cannot live good lives without the help of God and until they realize that we are just going to have a world where morality is being turned upside down."

Middlemore seeks to do his part." The world cannot be changed by one man alone, but by everyone doing what he is supposed to be doing to the best of his ability, then a whole lot can hap-

pen," he said.

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