

# Oratorian priest installed as pastor of Holy Trinity Parish at Mass

By Chris Donahue  
Associate Editor

BRIDGEWATER – A childhood that was nurtured by caring parents, the witness of now-brother priests, and a day of evil that shook a nation were among the factors that led Oratorian Father Jeffrey M. Calia to the Catholic faith and only a few years later, to the priesthood.

On Sept. 8, Father Calia took another step on his faith journey when Bishop James F. Checchio installed him as pastor of Holy Trinity Parish.

During a Mass at which he presided, the bishop led the Rite of Installation for Father Calia, the fifth pastor of the 70-year-old parish.

Concelebrants included Father Calia's brother priests from the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri and Msgr. Gerard H. McCarren, Father Calia's spiritual director when he studied at Immaculate Conception Seminary, Seton Hall University, South Orange.

In his homily, Bishop Checchio said he once heard then-Pope, now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI say to a group of priests, "The first task of a priest is to be a believer and to become one ever new and ever more. The most lofty and important thing a priest can do for people is to first be what he is – a believer."

In the end, the priest is the man who, despite all his failings, defects and even his sins, with certainty he says to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."

"This is what matters to all of us because it answers the questions of someone with whom you believe. Certainly, as your bishop, I want you to know without a doubt that I believe. I also happily entrust you to another believer, a priest, as your pastor, Father Jeff Calia."

Father Calia was born in 1980, grew up in Hazlet, and graduated from Raritan High School in 1998. He credits his parents, Ruth and Jerry, for teaching him by example to be respectful and compassionate towards others. He also cited "special gifts" from his maternal grandparents – from his grandmother, a devout Lutheran, the seeds of Christian faith; and from his grandfather, a life-long interest in auto racing.

While studying at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, he was introduced to Catholicism by his girlfriend and her family. Attending Mass with them and participating in community service activities at the Catholic Center at Rutgers helped him find a spiritual home. After participating in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, he was received into the Church at the Easter Vigil, April 14, 2001.

Father Calia said by the time he graduated from Cook College in 2002 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Policy, Institutions and Behaviors,

he was beginning to consider a vocation to priesthood and community life.

"I was profoundly affected by the work of the Oratorians in campus ministry and by the experience of community at the Catholic Center, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks," he said. "While working on campus as a research aide, I spent time in discernment with the Oratorian community, and in August of 2004 I left my job to enter the novitiate of the Oratory."

In 2005, Father Calia began studying for the priesthood at Immaculate Conception Seminary, Seton Hall University, South Orange. Five years later, he received a master's degrees in Pastoral Ministry and Systematic Theology, and was awarded the Pope John Paul II Medal for academic achievement.

He was ordained to the priesthood by then-Bishop, now Bishop Emeritus Paul G. Bootkoski May 29, 2010. He served for eight years as parochial vicar at St. Peter the Apostle University and Community Parish, New Brunswick, where the Oratorian community lived and served from 2006 to July, when they were reassigned.

In retrospect, Father Calia said one of the defining moments of his life was the 9/11 attacks.

"Each year I become more and more convinced that this event was a catalyst for my vocation," he said. "Just the realization of the power of evil, and the need to be on the side of good, to be an agent of mercy and peace in the world. It really got me thinking about where my life was headed and how I was being called to live for others rather than for myself."

Father Calia said what he enjoys most about being a priest and a member of the Oratory is "seeing someone's life change for the better because of their developing faith, and being able to accompany and encourage them on that path."

As for the challenges of being a new pastor, he said the biggest is "taking on an array of administrative responsibilities."

What he enjoys most, he added, is getting to know people. "It's a privilege to share in the most profound moments in the lives of families — birth, marriage, death, moving into a new home, etc. All of these milestone events provide an opportunity to encounter the love of God and participate more fully in his plan for our lives."

At a reception, Father Calia's mother said her son has a way of drawing people to him. "There always was a spark of compassion for other people," she added. "He was always very aware of the people around him and always concerned if he saw someone struggling or saw someone unhappy or facing an issue so I guess it is no wonder he is where he is now."



Above, Bishop James F. Checchio, third from right, is shown with (from left): Father Gerard H. McCarren, Oratorian Father Thomas A. Odorizzi, Deacon John Phalen, Oratorian Father Jeffrey M. Calia, and Oratorian Father Peter R. Cebulka at a Mass of installation of Father Calia as pastor of Holy Trinity Parish Sept. 9. Left, Father Calia poses with his mother, Ruth Stives, at a reception at the Rev. John Pringle Parish Center.

—Frank Wojciechowski and  
Chris Donahue photos



Above, during the Rite of Installation, Father Calia pledges to work with the clergy, staff and members of the lay ministries at Holy Trinity assisted by Oratorian Brother John Fredy Triana Beltran, a seminarian for the oratory. Right, at the reception, Father Calia poses with a papal blessing that was a gift from the Theresa DeGuzman family. DeGuzman, executive assistant, diocesan Vicariate for Administration and a member of St. Peter the Apostle University and Community Parish, New Brunswick, said the blessing was given to thank Father Calia for the pastoral care he gave to her family as a parochial vicar at St. Peter's.

