



My name is Jose Jaime Nieto Bautista and I am 30 years old. I was born and raised in the city of San Juan del Rio Queretaro, Mexico by my mother Maria Del Carmen Nieto Bautista. I am an only child by my parents, but I do have a half-brother from my father's side. I did not have any contact with my brother until a year before I moved here to Arkansas. My mother had a total of eleven siblings, five sisters, and six brothers. My maternal grandmother passed away when I was five years old and was one of the most painful deaths I had to deal with in my life. Even at my young age, I was really affected by the departure of such a lovely lady. My maternal grandfather passed away while I was here in Arkansas, and I had to give the sad news to my beautiful mother. I still do not know how I was able to stay strong to deliver such sad news while at the same time dealing with my own sorrow. On the contrary from my father's side, I only had the chance to meet my paternal grandmother, who still lives in San Juan Del Rio, but unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to get to know my paternal grandfather.

I have always been close to my mother, so when the time came for her to move to the United States, it was heartbreaking for both of us. She had to move first, to be able to offer me a better life because the economy in Mexico was not sufficient to support us. Two years later I moved to Arkansas after living with two of my aunts, one of them lived in San Juan del Rio, and the other one lived in Puerto Vallarta Jalisco. When I arrived, I entered Southwest Junior High to finish the ninth grade before going to Har-Ber High School, where I graduated in 2008.

When I first started school here, it was somewhat difficult because of the language barrier. I knew basic English, but I was not very good at having a conversation or understanding all the information the teachers were explaining. I had help from other classmates and bilingual teachers. When I moved to Har-Ber High School, I was placed in the English Second Language (ESL) program, where I spent a year and a half. This program helped me to have better conversation skills, and I had the opportunity to start practicing my English. In my Senior year, I was able to join the swim team and I was excited to finally do what I loved the most, be in the water! After graduating from High School, I spent six years working to save money to be able to go to college. I only was planning on working a couple of years but had to stay at work longer to help my mother with the house bills.

I spent 6 years working at Boomerang carwash which I enjoyed. It did not require much effort but helped me develop my speaking skills communicating with the customers. This job also helped me to develop leadership skills. Because I was a fast learner, my managers always asked me to train the new hires. When I had five years working with the company, they awarded me with a bonus check for five hundred dollars for being such a loyal and hard worker. I was also promoted from a part-time attendant to a full-time attendant, and then to assistant manager. After a long six years, I made the decision to join the seminary and went back to school.

Joining seminary has been one of the most difficult decision I have ever made. I was afraid because I was away from school for six years and I felt a little insecure, but the harder thing for me was leaving my mother alone. I was the only financial support for her, so it was hard to give up taking care of her. Even though it was difficult, my mother always supported me in my decision of responding to God's call. She has been the back bones of my discernment process. My response to the call was just the beginning of a whole journey full of challenges.

For six years I had not touched a book and I did not know how hard college was going to be. I started back at Pulaski Technical College for two years before I transferred to the University of Arkansas, LR, for my last two years, to finish up my philosophy degree. We also took summer classes a couple of times and attended some classes through Skype calls at St. Gregory's campus to stay on track. After Graduation I moved on to my last four years of Theology at Assumption Seminary in San Antonio, TX.

Through my vocational discernment, there have been several priests that have helped me, but Fr. Mauricio has been my primary role model. He was my spiritual director for the first four years of my formation while I live at the house of Formation. Msgr. Scott Friend has also been a fitting example of the holy priestly life. My spiritual journey has often been a challenge to me, and thanks to Fr. Mauricio and my counselor Dr. Simon I have grown spiritually. Now that I am at Assumption Seminary, I have Fr. Luis Corneli as my spiritual director and Dr. Grace as my counselor. Continually working with them has helped me to grow in formation to become the better version of myself.

One of the things I had to work on in the beginning was my relationship with God, the Father. I was unconsciously projecting my biological father to my heavenly Father. Because my father was never in my life, I was projecting my resentment to God the Father, and at the same time, I struggled to trust in him. Now knowing that God the Father has been always there with me in my tough times, I have developed a better relationship with him, and at the same time, I have grown in trusting in others the same way I learned to trust in God.

Through my first four years of formation, God has shown me many things in the many ministries that I have done. One of my favorite ministries was taking Communion to the elderly living in retirement homes. I had the chance to meet wonderful and loving people who taught me that trusting in the Lord and enjoying every minute of life is the best thing I could do. I also helped as an interpreter to Latinos in a free clinic offered by the Catholic Charities. Here I felt blessed because I was able to work with many nursing and medical students who were offering their time to help the doctors offering health benefits to the Latinos that could not afford it. I also taught Confirmation classes and pre-Communion classes to kids at Our Lady of Good Counsel and enjoyed working with the kids. Lastly, during the summers, I have been blessed to help in the Catholic Charities Summer Institute (C<sup>2</sup>SI) which consists of teaching the youth about social problems and community service by helping those in need. We visited several homeless associations and institutions. This included hands-on service. The Catholic Charities Institute also offered speakers throughout the week that spoke about social problems such as, abortion, immigration, death penalty and many more hot topics. I loved this program because I learned so much and at the same time, I had the opportunity to again work with the youth. God has blessed me with so much in each of my ministries.

On a more personal note, I consider myself to be outgoing and extroverted. It is easy for me to relate to others and instantly click with them. Fr. Mauricio told me once that I have a good and loving heart, something I struggled to accept and believe in the beginning. When God first called me, I did not know about all these gifts. I discovered them once I started opening my heart to others. At this point in my life and in my vocation, I believe that God is showing me and calling me to be even more vulnerable, so I will love the way He loves, and the way Jesus showed us to love. Msgr. Scott has told us multiple times that being vulnerable will also bring us pain and suffering but when we offer that pain and suffering to the Lord everything becomes worth it. I consider myself as a vulnerable and sensible person, and I know that God has given me these gifts to be able to connect with and understand others.

One of the hobbies that I enjoy doing the most, that also helps me to relax, is painting. I have been painting for the past six years and I love it. I never took painting classes besides high school art classes. I started painting because one of my brother seminarians, Emmanuel Torres, was painting for the Taste of Faith fundraiser that we have during summer. He encouraged me to give it a try and after I did, I was really pleased with the outcome, so I continue to enjoy painting for our dinners to thank all the people that support the vocations in our state. During my time living at the House of Formation, I took a basic drawing class which I loved because it sharpened my painting skills and techniques. I have learned that painting is another gift that God has given me.

I am currently in my second year of Theology at Assumption Seminary Campus in San Antonio, where I attend classes at the Oblate School of Theology. I will be obtaining my Master's in Divinity when I graduate. As I see the date of my Diaconate ordination coming closer, (May 2021) I cannot help but get nervous. It is not like being afraid of ordination or doubting my vocation, rather, is the feeling of not letting anyone down. I want to learn as much as I can and be the best version of myself that I can be to serve the people of God. I do know that I will never stop learning and that it is impossible to be completely ready for ordination. I do strongly believe that as the time draws near God will continue to strengthen me to serve him as he wants me to and not as I want to. It fills me with excitement to start thinking about sharing this special moment with all of you, my family from St. Raphael. Until then, I will continue doing my best in my studies to give the best I can to the people that God places at my care. I ask you to continue praying for me, and my brother seminarians, as we continue this journey, so we can be the best shepherds you all deserve Thank you for all your prayers and support, they mean a lot to me.

Sincerely;

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