

# Hitchhiking for Christ

*Friar Antonio to be ordained to priesthood Dec. 6*

Story by Janet Marcel  
Photos by Lawrence Chatagnier

Friar Antonio Maria Speedy hasn't been hitchhiking his way around the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux just because he needs transportation. He uses the time spent with those he encounters on the road to live out his ministry of evangelization by helping them to seek the will of Christ in their own lives.

Friar Antonio will be ordained to the priesthood is Saturday, Dec. 6 at 10 a.m. at the Cathedral of St. Francis de Sales in Houma with Bishop Shelton J. Fabre as the ordaining prelate.

The 38 year old was born and raised in Adelaide, South Australia, of Maltese immigrants, Alan and Rita Farrugia (deceased). He has one sister, Natalie.

He attended Matriculation at Mercedes Catholic College, Adelaide, South Australia; received a bachelor's degree in visual communication and illustration from the University of South Australia; attended the Catholic Institute of Sydney, NSW, Australia; and received a master's of divinity degree from the Lateran Pontifical University in Rome, Italy.

While backpacking in Europe in 1999, Friar Antonio met the founder of the Community of the Little Friars and Nuns of Jesus and Mary, Friar Volantino. After listening to Friar Volantino speak and experiencing a few weeks of prayer in their lifestyle, Friar Antonio says he began to understand God's will. "Through the Word of God, the teachings of the Catholic Church and Volantino's most remarkable story of conversion and authenticity of witness, the seed of faith began germinating within me to where I soon found the certainty of my call to consecration."

After his first encounter with the community and the consequent signs that he says the Lord clearly gave him, he decided to consecrate his life as a friar. Friars have a radical desire to imitate Christ in each and every detail, deeply aspiring to do so also by

consecrating the Holy Eucharist and celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation, says Friar Antonio.

Upon his return to Australia he began discerning with a priest. They thought that maybe the Lord was calling him to diocesan priesthood, so he entered the seminary in Sydney in 2002. He left the seminary in 2003, returned to Italy and began his formation as a friar. He then re-entered the seminary at Calabria's Southern Italian Pontifical Theological Institute in 2005, and completed his studies in Rome at the Lateran Pontifical University where he was instituted as an acolyte.

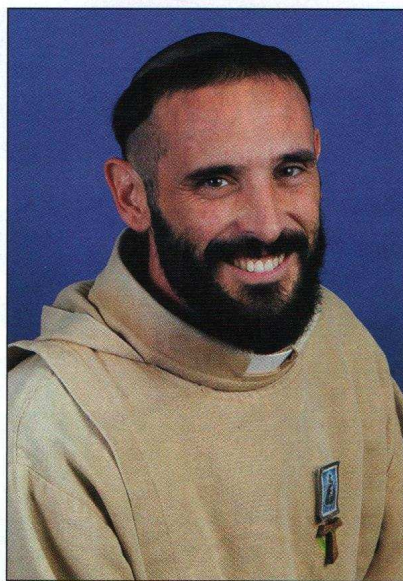
Friar Antonio first came to Houma in August 2010 after an extensive search for a bishop willing to have his community in their diocese. Being the first brother in his Italian community to have English as his native tongue, he knew he would be called to missionary work in opening their community in an English speaking country.

"In 2010 we were ready to open a new community, so Friar Volantino asked me to begin looking for a bishop in the English speaking world who would like to welcome us into their diocese. Happy about this prospect I began searching in countries of my own interest – Ireland, Philippines, India, Africa, etc.; however America at that time was not on my heart. After some insistent and sincere requests of Sister Effatà, we began sending

emails to almost all the dioceses of the United States. America began showing the most interest and respect for our

charism where out of the 195 dioceses, six answered us positively – Houma-Thibodaux being one of them. After a period of discerning some remarkable signs and also in speaking with Bishop Sam G. Jacobs over the phone, we finally agreed to come to Houma to meet him and his diocese. We came to a conclusion that we'd try working on establishing a community while in the mean time I'd complete my studies toward priesthood in Italy."

In October 2012, Friar Antonio returned to ➡



Friar Antonio Maria Speedy



Houma where he began six months of parish life with Father Mitchel Semar at St. Lucy Church parish in preparation for the diaconate. He was ordained a transitional deacon by Bishop Sam G. Jacobs Feb. 15, 2013.

After his ordination to the priesthood, Friar Antonio will be celebrating weekend Masses on an as-needed basis for priests of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux. During the week he will continue his ministry of evangelization.



“As we entrust ourselves totally to the Lord’s providence hitchhiking our way through the diocese and the whole world, our apostolate for excellence is found while in the vehicles of those who stop to give us a ride,” explains Friar Antonio of his ministry. “We hope that our total dependence on God will make them reflect on the futility of worrying about worldly goods as Jesus says, ‘Do not worry and say, What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What are we to wear? All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.’ And that there is only

one thing we need to be worrying about, ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (especially by partaking in the eucharistic banquet’ (Luke 22:19), ‘and all these things will be given to you’ (Matthew 6:31-33). We playfully remind our drivers that stopping for gas is not optional but necessary for their vehicles’ function; and therefore for our soul’s peace, function and perseverance toward our ‘final destination.’ It’s also necessary to make time for Christ by seeking his will in frequently consuming the Eucharist in the

Catholic Church and confessing ones sins.”

Other ways Friar Antonio lives out his ministry of evangelization is by giving witnesses at schools and retreats to try to encourage youth to follow the Lord’s teachings and dedicate their skills, time and talents to serving him and his people with their life. He also goes out onto the streets to invite people to the “Answering Basic Questions of Faith” evenings that are held at 6 p.m. every last Thursday of the month at Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Church in Houma (recommencing in January).

Through their attempts to live in evangelical poverty, simplicity and professionalism, his community’s mission is to invite those they meet along the streets to go to confession and to receive holy Communion (or to live a more sacramental life). Friar Antonio says, “I look forward to priesthood in a special way to also be able to offer that sublime and divine sacrament of reconciliation to these people in need, many of whom have wanted to confess with us there on the spot.”

The Community of the Little Friars and Nuns of Jesus and Mary celebrated its official canonical approval recognized by the Catholic Church at a diocesan level as a public association with an Episcopal Decree on May 30, 2014. This approval is in anticipation of the

community becoming an Institute of Consecrated Life. Friar Volantino, the founder and servant general of the Little Friars and Nuns of Jesus and Mary, Sister Veronica, the mother servant general of the sisters; and Sister Stella, the vice servant general of the sisters will attend Friar Antonio’s ordination to the priesthood.

Friar Antonio will celebrate his first Mass Sunday, Dec. 7 at 6 p.m. at Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Church in Houma. ✠