



Religious Communities serving in Diocese of Metuchen

Part 4: Brotherhood of Hope

Community members strive to help men, women hear call of Christ

The founding charism of the Brotherhood of Hope is taken from 2 Corinthians 12:8: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Father Philip Merdinger, founder, said it was offered to him by the Holy Spirit in the context of a retreat in January-February 1978 with the Servants of the Word, an ecumenical brotherhood of lay men living single-for-the-Lord in Ann Arbor, Mich. He was there to learn about new forms of Christian family associations which included couples, children and single people.

Ordained a priest in 1964 for the Archdiocese of Newark, he became involved in the beginnings of a Catholic family association — the People of Hope — out of which came the impetus to found a brotherhood of lay Catholic men somewhat according to the pattern he had seen in the Servants of the Word. The community began Sept. 14, 1980, the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross. That's when Father Merdinger professed first temporary vows with laymen John Murphy, Paul Helfrich, Stephen Quense, Paul Mascia and James Minogue.

(Father Merdinger, since-ordained Father Helfrich and Brother Stephen are members of the community; and Murphy is now a member [and was superior of] the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal — now known as Father Bernard Marie Murphy.)

The community's first apostolic work was campus ministry at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, where it evangelized to others to a deep relationship with Christ and the power of the Spirit.

About 10 years later, their life and mission extended to Florida when Bishop John Smith invited them to serve in his then-diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee. Soon after, they began campus outreach at Florida State University in Tallahassee.

Working with a team of priests, laity and religious, that mission has borne abundant and lasting fruit: graduates in strong marriages, singles serving in their parishes or starting youth outreaches, and solid vocations

to the priesthood and religious life.

Through an unexpected and random encounter with Cardinal Bernard Law in 1995 (on the front porch of their home in New Jersey), the community was invited to establish a headquarters in Boston, where they received canonical approval in 1998.

In 2000, two members were ordained priests in Boston, and the community began outreach to college students at the Catholic Center at Boston University, where they still serve.

During its silver anniversary year, Cardinal Seán O'Malley invited the community to begin evangelistic work at Northeastern University in Boston.

That same year, Bishop Paul G. Bootkoski asked the Brotherhood to return to its roots by serving again at Rutgers.

The community's charism of the All-Sufficiency of Jesus Christ is enfolded in a community of Catholic celibate men in private vows of chastity, poverty and obedience in a fraternal common life. The charism is expressed in a principal com-

mon mission of university evangelization and disciple formation for the next generation, a mission in which at least three brothers work together.

The brothers have especially taken up the image of the Church as the family of God as expressed in the constitution *Lumen Gentium*. Their commitment to the Church, like that to a family, is a total dedication in love. Their love for the Church springs forth from their love for Jesus Christ, the head of this family. Just as one would never find the head apart from the body, so the brothers in this family are committed to never abandoning or willfully harming the Church in any way.

The brothers have consistently emphasized the need for holiness of life, through a deep desire for the soul to be conformed to Christ. They have a strong commitment to daily personal and communal prayer, recognizing that "apart from Him we can do nothing." Any holiness that is manifested in their lives finds its source in communion with the Blessed Trinity

and the sacramental life of the Church.

Other ways in which the community witnesses to the Church as mystery includes the promotion of a culture of discernment wherein men and women are taught to hear more clearly the call of Christ for their state in life. As older brothers to the young,

and furthermore as consecrated religious, we make it our solemn duty to help young people find their life long call. We firmly believe that if every young man and woman that we serve discovers God's call for their lives all of humanity is blessed!

— **Written by the Brotherhood of Hope**



By Brother Parker Jordan

The reflection by Brother Parker, left, shown with Brother Ken Apuzzo at his final vows ceremony at Holy Family Parish, Sacred Heart worship site, New Brunswick, was published in the Brotherhood of Hope's Fall 2014 newsletter

It was seven years ago this summer I was standing at the foot of a 50-foot cliff, overlooking South Branch Pond in Baxter State Park, Maine. I wasn't planning on jumping in. But after watching two other brothers jump in, I felt the gauntlet had been thrown and the challenge laid before me. So I decided to climb up and check things out. Once I got up there, I realized that there's really only one way down. So as I stood there, knees shaking, I prayed, "Lord, help me to dive into you." And I jumped in.

The Lord has been answering that prayer ever since, culminating in a very deep way this past July 5 (2014) as I took the plunge and made vows to God of chastity, poverty and obedience to the Brotherhood of Hope for the rest of my life. It was in the moments leading up to making these vows that the Lord gave me a very particular grace.

There is a very powerful point of prayer before a religious brother makes his final vows where he lays prostrate

Reflection by a Brotherhood of Hope

before the altar. The entire congregation unites with him in prayer as they kneel and ask for the intercession of those who've gone before us, the Saints in Heaven. As I lay prostrate before the altar, I could feel the very foundations of the Church shake as the entire congregation knelt in prayer. It was at that moment that the Lord spoke to me and gave me an image.

Sometimes in our relationship with the Lord, there can be seasons of both trials and grace. During certain seasons, it may feel like we're walking through a shallow brook of God's grace, other times a moving river. As I lay prostrate before the altar, I felt as if I had just dove into an ocean of God's grace and love for me. I knew He was assuring me through this grace that He would always be there with me and that I had nothing to fear in giving my life over to him. And I experienced Him say this to me, "Try and plumb the depths of my love for you. See if you can."

It is with this boundless confidence in the Lord that I believe He wants me to live the rest of my life. His love continually "Blows my categories," revealing to me again and again He really is trustworthy. So if the Lord is calling you to dive into Him, know that He'll never leave you and that He's always going to back up your decision to follow him with unbounded grace. As Brothers, we strive to proclaim that Christ is All-Sufficient, that he alone can satisfy the deepest desires of the human heart.

Trusting in His All-Sufficiency, I count it a total privilege to take this plunge and place my life in the hands of my Beloved Master and Most Dear Friend.