

# COMPANIONS OF CHRIST

DIOCESAN PRIESTS LIVING IN FRATERNITY

## In This Issue...

New Deacons ordained for the Companions of Christ and a New Rector of Saint John Vianney Seminary

## The Companions of Christ:

- Consist of diocesan priests and seminarians living in community;
- Were established as a Public Association of the Faithful by Archbishop John Roach in 1992;
- Embrace obedience, chastity and poverty according to their Rule and Statutes;
- Invite Catholic men who are interested in the priesthood to learn more about us;
- May be found on the internet at [www.companionsofchrist.org](http://www.companionsofchrist.org);
- Is a tax deductible non-profit organization and accepts contributions.

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## Merry Christmas from the Companions of Christ

Dear friends of the Companions of Christ,



Praised be Jesus Christ! Recently we concluded the year of the priest. It was a good opportunity to reflect on the nature of the priesthood and the gift that priesthood is to the Church. One of the tremendous blessings of priesthood is the connection to the sacramental life of the Church and the People of God. The priest gets to stand in a unique place in the sacraments and other pastoral encounters. He is privileged to bring Christ to the people and to walk with people as they encounter Christ in the various moments of their lives. Some of these moments are very intense and painful while others are some of the most joyous of a person's life.

In the Companions of Christ it is a gift to have brothers who seek to live an ideal together and walk with one another in fraternity in the various rich encounters of priestly ministry. We appreciate all your prayers and support as we look to live as brother priests in the Companions of Christ. Be assured of our prayers for you

Fr. Jon Vander Ploeg

Superior, The Companions of Christ

## Summer Conference



This August, the Companions of Christ priests and seminarians gathered for our annual summer conference at Broom Tree Retreat Center, South Dakota. This year, instead of following the normal format for our summer conference by bringing in an outside presenter to speak to us, the Companions of Christ priests and deacons each offered a reflection on various aspects of our life together. The purpose for this change was to allow our community to meditate

and reflect upon the charisms that have become central to our identity as the Companions of Christ, and then once we have reflected upon these aspects of our charism to provide insight into how they can become a deeper part of our life.

Together we reflected on themes which we have seen as central aspects of our charism: supporting spiritual renewal in diocesan priesthood, fraternal life, the cross in our life, the way of holiness according to the evangelical counsels, the role of Mary in our life, docility to the Holy Spirit and the New Evangelization. Two priests or deacons were asked to offer a reflection on the charism in general and then how they lived that aspect of the charism in their life and ministry. After each presentation, all present at the conference spent time in prayer about how this aspect of our charism finds expression in our own life and ministry and we had the opportunity to share this with each other. The result was clear among us in our joy in embracing the life God has called us to. Please pray for the Companions of Christ that we may be faithful to our charism.

# 2010 Summer Household

by John Wehrly

The Summer Formation Program of the Companions of Christ was held again this past Summer. This year in “summer household,” as it is informally called, we were led by Frs. Cozzens, Margevicius, and Huard. There were ten of us seminarians participating: Byron Hagan, Nate Tucker, Andy Jaspers, Brian Park, John Wehrly, Paul Haverstock, Tim Skinner, David Gockowski, Jake Anderson, and John Powers. We were all from the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis, and most of us are in the early stages of seminary formation.



The best way to understand the program is as an introduction to committed, Christian fraternity. But that is not the only focus of the program. The program’s foundation is friendship with Christ, which is the center of all fraternity, and it was at the heart of our summer.

The summer household has a rich communal prayer life that allows us to grow deeper in friendship with Christ. Our day begins at 6:00 a.m. when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed in the St. Mary’s Chapel at the Saint Paul Seminary. We chant Morning Prayer, have fifteen minutes of expressive praise, and conclude with 35 minutes of silent, personal prayer. Mass is celebrated at 7:15 a.m. and we are off to our daily duties by 8:00 a.m. We also have Evening Prayer at 6:00 p.m. and a LORD’s Day celebrations every Saturday. It was a blessing to have a scheduled time each day to be with the Lord.

The household also had a rich fraternal life that helped us to grow in love and friendship with one another. All of the men lived in households, five men at the Marshall House with Fr. Cozzens, and five at the St. Paul Seminary with Frs. Huard and Margevicius. Here we lived in committed service to one another: we cooked for each other at communal meals; had assigned chores; met regularly in fraternal sharing groups; and had plenty of informal time together as friends. This life teaches us love. Relying on one another and being relied upon begets an attitude of patience and service. Living the Christian life in close quarters requires humility, respect, and a readiness to forebear and forgive. And participating in fraternal sharing groups encourages a spirit of honesty and vulnerability that is essential to true friendship. I understand now why Christ called the Twelve to live in fraternity with Him before He sent them on mission: they needed to learn how to “have love for one another.”

A third aspect of our growth this summer came through the formation seminars that Fr. Cozzens gave once a week. The six sessions comprised a Life in the Spirit Seminar. This culminated at the end of the summer, when several of the Companions Priests gathered with the Household to pray for a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Several of the men are new to this work of the Holy Spirit, and we are filled with hope about His work.

One highlight of our summer was a road trip Lord’s Day to Divine Mercy Parish in Faribault with Fr. Kevin Finnegan—a member of Companions of Christ. Newly-ordained Deacon Nate Laliberte was assigned there for the summer and newly-ordained Fr. Eric Lundgren is the associate pastor. We had a packed rectory and had an excellent meal together. Then Fr. Kevin took us to tour the new church. It was a rich time of fellowship, and a welcome excursion away from the city.

Please pray for us as we continue to follow Christ through this formation program.

## Handing On What is Received

by Fr. Michael Becker



Fr. Michael Becker

I am grateful to God and to Archbishop John Nienstedt, for the privilege of serving the Church as the Rector of St John Vianney College Seminary. Through the efforts of Fr Bill Baer, as well as the other priests and lay staff, SJV has in place many excellent traditions and a strong rule of life. Every day the seminarians recite their pledge, “Men in Christ, Men of the Church, Men for Others.” Rising for 6:15 a.m. Morning Prayer each day can be challenging for a young college student, especially when many of his peers on campus are at times enjoying the night life. But these seminarians desire to follow God’s calling, to grow in virtue and the art of prayer, to learn their treasured Catholic faith, to follow in the path of other priest heroes. I for my part would love nothing less than to give the Church saints. I yearn that each seminarian would pursue God with all his energy, that his heart become inflamed with divine love and zeal for souls, that his mind be ever intrigued to discover new insights into God and the economy of grace . . . that preaching the Gospel be his passion . . . that his joy and consolation be the holiness of God’s people. That in fact is the heart of a priest.

Much of what I have to offer comes from God through the blessing of my own priestly community . . . this community, “The Companions of Christ.” Inspiration to choose the narrow road of poverty, chastity and obedience, appreciation for fraternity with its gifts of encouragement and accountability, habits of prayer, self-denial and spiritual reading, creative evangelization . . . , all these and more I receive from the Companions of Christ, and in turn share with St John Vianney College Seminary: “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received” (1 Corinthians 15:3), once wrote St Paul. Without the Companions of Christ, in truth, I would have little to offer. Still, I am empowered to carry a torch and light the road for tomorrow’s Church leaders. It is an honor and a grave duty. I am already enjoying teaching Theology (“Morality” and “Prayer” this semester) and counseling men in their discernment of vocation and personal areas of growth and healing. I offer Rector Conferences on subjects such as Chastity, Christian Speech, and Ecumenism. I will sometimes enter the field of competition and play with the seminarians a game of frisbee football or basketball. On those occasions I like to remember Brett Favre, who is just four years younger than I, but still going at it (playing with men half his age). May he, and I, survive to enjoy life without crutches. These are just a few of the things I do on a practical level here at St John Vianney College Seminary.

Gospel fruition proceeds from bonds of love. Jesus Christ began with twelve. Married couples begin with two. Religious communities and lay institutes start small, and cover the earth. The Companions of Christ are a priestly fraternity of hope for our Church. Between us there is a bond of charity, shared also with you our brothers and sisters in Christ. Together we fulfill the petition of Jesus Christ Himself, “May all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20,21). This bond of charity is the source and goal of our fellowship. I thank God for the gift of my brothers in the Companions of Christ. I thank God for you our benefactors and friends. I leave you with a quote from John Henry Cardinal Newman – now “Blessed Newman,” who while speaking the truth of his own vocation in the Church, spoke the simple truth about all of us: “I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.”

## Deacon Jon Kelly’s summer placement in Venezuela



On May 1 of this year Jon Kelly, Cole Kracke and I were ordained Transitional Deacons at the Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis. The ordination was celebrated by Archbishop Nienstedt. After our ordination, we were assigned to Archdiocesan parishes for the summer before beginning our final year in the seminary.

Our Archdiocese has a mission parish in Venezuela, which we had visited during the previous summer. I remember during that trip, I experienced the desire to return for my diaconate placement. Those in charge with my formation also thought it was a good idea and so I arrived in San Felix, Venezuela the third week of June after spending two weeks in a language school in Guadalajara, Mexico.

San Felix is located in a beautiful part of the country with many waterfalls and national parks just outside of the city limits. It was literally a jungle before the discovery of oil and other natural resources in the 1950s, which created jobs for many. But after the first generation of building there were fewer jobs available and unemployment became a problem. Today in San Felix, there is over 70% unemployment. While poverty and violence are severe realities for many, I was constantly moved by the faith and joy of the people even amidst suffering.

Fr. Greg Schaffer and Fr. Thomas McCabe, priests of the Archdiocese who serve the mission, inspired me by the way they selflessly meet so many needs of the people. I continue to be grateful for the significant amount of time they spent mentoring and introducing me to their lives in the mission.

Some highlights of the summer include baptisms, leading communion services in the neighborhood chapels and visiting the sick with the Legion of Mary. It was quite challenging since my Spanish is fairly basic and Venezuelan Spanish is not entirely similar to the Spanish I learned in the classroom in Mexico, but there were many joys and the majority of the time the language did not prove to be a barrier.

One experience that made an impact on me occurred when Fr. Tom and I met at a family’s home one evening during the summer for a weekly Bible study. The evening went on as normal until just before we left. One of the family members began to explain to us that they had been robbed during the past week, explaining that the thieves had stolen their air conditioner, television, and some jewelry. Fr. Tom and I expressed anger about the incident, but I will always remember the mother’s reply. She said with such peace, “It’s okay. Do not worry about it. They can’t take anything from us. There is nothing we have that they can take from us that matters.” May we all live with such detachment.

# Deaconate Ordination

by Tony O'Neill



On May 1 of this year Jon Kelly, Cole Kracke and I were ordained Transitional Deacons at the Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis. The ordination was celebrated by Archbishop Nienstedt. The weeks leading up to the ordination were hectic and busy however all the men who were ordained that day spoke of the peace that they experienced during the ordination itself. Particularly poignant for myself was the moment when we prostrated ourselves while the litany of saints was sung. It was a profound moment of experiencing God's presence and his promise of continued grace and help in my ministry. It was also a time when I felt a great thankfulness for the way that God has worked in my life and has led me to where I am now.

This summer I served in Nativity of Our Lord parish in St. Paul. It was a wonderful experience of serving the people of God through preaching, baptizing, assisting at Mass as well as visiting the sick and shut-ins.

Deacon Cole Kracke spent the summer ministering in St Joseph's parish in West St Paul and Deacon Jon Kelly spent the summer in Venezuela at the Archdiocesan mission parish in Puerto Ordaz.

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