

# COMPANIONS OF CHRIST

DIOCESAN PRIESTS LIVING IN FRATERNITY

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## 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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## From the Superior's Desk

Dear friends of the Companions of Christ,



"The Companions of Christ is a community of diocesan priests living in fraternity." This is the most common answer that we give to someone who asks "What is the Companions of Christ?"

This concise statement only begins to explain the reality which we are called to live, which is in fact much deeper. We have experienced that living in community whenever possible not only supports and strengthens us in our priesthood and but is an expression of the communal nature of the Church and the priesthood. Recently Pope Benedict XVI expressed the same reality in two statements on the importance of community life for the priesthood. First, in his book *Light of the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010) when responding to a question about celibacy he said, "I believe that celibacy becomes a very meaningful sign, and above all becomes possible to live, when priests begin to form communities. It is important for priests not to live off on their own somewhere, in isolation, but to accompany one another in small communities, to support one another, and so to experience, and constantly realize afresh, their communion in service to Christ and in renunciation for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven" (p. 149).

Second, the Holy Father gave an address to the Fraternity of St. Charles at the beginning of this year (February 12, 2011). In it Pope Benedict points out that priestly fraternity is not simply a support but an expression of the nature of the priesthood and the Church: "Communal life is not first of all a strategy for responding to these needs. Nor is it, in itself, only a form of help in the face of the solitude and weakness of man. All of this may certainly be true but only if it is conceived and lived as a path for immersing oneself in the reality of communion. Communal life is in fact an expression of the gift of Christ that is the Church, and it is prefigured in the apostolic community from which the priesthood arose. What the priest in fact administers does not belong to him. He rather participates with his brothers in a sacramental gift that comes directly from Jesus. Communal life thus expresses a help that Christ provides for our life, calling us, through the presence of brothers, to an ever more profound conformity to his person. Living with others means accepting the need of my own continual conversion and above all discovering the beauty of such a journey, the joy of humility, of penance, but also of conversation, of mutual forgiveness, of mutual support. 'Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum' (Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity) (Psalm 133:1)."

Indeed it is good and pleasant for brothers to live in unity. We in the Companions of Christ have experienced exactly this reality of which Pope Benedict speaks. Communal life expresses a help that Christ provides for our life. It calls us to deeper conversion each day through the presence of our brothers. As we continue to develop and live our communal life, the Companions of Christ deeply appreciate your prayers and support.

Please be assured of our prayers and support for you as well.

Fr. Jon Vander Ploeg

Superior, The Companions of Christ

## Eight New Priests for the Companions of Christ.

This Spring the Companions of Christ in St. Paul welcomed four new priests. Fr. Cole Kracke who is assigned to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church in Hastings, MN. Fr. Nathan LaLiberte who is assigned to St. Stephen's in Anoka, MN. Fr. Jonathan Kelly who is assigned to All Saints in Lakeville, MN. Fr. Tony O'Neill who is assigned to St. John Neumann in Eagan, MN. And in the Archdiocese of Denver there were also four Companions of Christ priests ordained. Please pray for these newly ordained priests that we may be faithful to the way of life God has given us in our respective assignments and the Companions of Christ.



## A Holy Thursday Homily: "What Is a Priest?"

by Fr. Michael Johnson



"Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." With these words, along with his exhortation to "do this in memory of me," when he took the bread and wine into his sacred hands at the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Holy Orders – the Sacrament of the Priesthood.

The institution of this Sacrament causes me to reflect on and ask the question "What is a Priest?" It is a question that many people answer, by answering the similar, but very different, question, "What does a priest do?" What a priest does changes with times and seasons. What a priest *is* remains the same for all eternity. So, "What is a priest?"

Out of curiosity, I Googled the words "Catholic Priest" and the results made my heart sink. My heart sank because alongside a *few* authentic articles or web pages that could actually help people develop a deeper appreciation for this Sacrament of the Church, there appeared links to news articles of priests accused of sexual abuse, stories of priests maligning the very Church which they promised to serve faithfully on their ordination day, and web pages written and dedicated to priests confused about celibacy and sexuality.

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My heart sank because I have given my life to what should be the among most noble callings a man could receive and yet a few of my brother priests have defaced the image of Christ that they received upon their ordination, an image which they should re-present by their actions and ministry but do not. Because of the sinful actions of a few, many people in our culture have a very negative answer to the question of what a priest is.

My heart sank further when I continued reading and saw how people, who I am ordained to serve, pitied me because they think celibacy a silly requirement and throwback to a dead tradition and thus of no importance to my ministry. My heart sank further when I read how people look at a priest and are only able to see in him an affront to woman's equality. These people seek to answer the question of "what is a priest?", not by learning what the Church teaches or seeking to understand God's workings in this world, but rather they answer the question of what is a priest only according to the terms of this secular world.

And so we come to tonight, when we as a Church *celebrate* the institution of the priesthood. It is a Sacrament that we should celebrate; even in the face of those who do not live up to its high calling or severely misunderstand it. I am proud of being a priest, and I am proud to serve with so many of my brother priests who have for two thousand years faithfully handed on what they have received.

I am proud to follow in the footsteps of priests who have suffered martyrdom at the hands of tyrants, like Blessed Miguel Pro and St. Edmund Campion, in order to preserve the Tradition of our Church. I am proud of to be in the line of priests, and serve among brother priests, who, like St. Francis Xavier and the North American Martyrs, have traveled to the farthest reaches of this world preaching Christ and carrying on his work even in the face of torture and death.

I am proud to serve alongside heroic priests who have faithfully and lovingly ministered to their parishioners day after day, year after year, following the example of St. John Vianney and St. Philip Neri. I am proud to be a brother among priests who have given their lives to the service and care of the poor, following the examples of St. Damian of Molokai and St. Maximilian Kolbe, even in the face of their own hardships, sufferings, and ultimately their own deaths.

These men are the authentic face of Christ in the priesthood. They are priests of God molded into the image of Christ as both priest and victim. They are men who have been transformed into the person of Christ the Head – *In Persona Christi capitis* - not only through Laying on of Hands when the Sacrament is celebrated by the bishop, but have allowed their very lives to be transformed into the image of Christ in what they say and what they do; carrying Jesus Christ to those people to whom they were sent; in and through their very presence. They are men who understand that they were called by God to serve and not to be served.

The highest expression of this is when the priest takes into his hands the bread and wine and speaks those words, which no one aside from God alone can claim the right to utter, saying, "This is my body that is for you." They are both Christ's words and the priest's words. This is *my* body, given up for you.

So what is a priest? St. John Vianney, the Patron Saint of Parish priests says it best, "The priest continues the work of redemption on earth. . . . If we really understood the priest on earth, we would die not of fright but of love. . . . The Priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus."

# The Companions of Christ Summer Conference – 2011



This summer the Companions of Christ from Denver and St. Paul and Minneapolis came together for their largest summer conference ever with 43 attendees. 23 priest members and 20 seminarians who are interested in the Companions of Christ spent 5 days at Broom Tree Retreat Center in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in early August to discuss evangelization in the Charism of the Companions of Christ. Mr. Curtis Martin, founder of FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) and Dr. Jonathan Reyes, director of Catholic Charities for the Archdiocese of Denver, spoke about key aspects of evangelization in parish life.

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