

THE COMPANION

Companions of Christ Newsletter - Winter 2023



LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

A few weeks back I reached out to one of my brother Companions via phone to get his counsel on a significant discernment I was making at my parish. The conversation blessed me and brought both light and encouragement. I sought him out not only because he is an experienced and wise pastor, but because I know him to be a man of prayer who is courageously open to the Holy Spirit.

As Companions of Christ we aspire to live life “on the way”—not from a position of comfort and safety, but extended in mission, following the Lord and attempting to live by the Spirit of sonship we have received (cf. Rom 8:15). The example of Philip in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 8:29-38) serves for us as an example to aspire to, so that even in the various pastoral responsibilities entrusted to us, the structures and programs we inherit at a particular assignment, we desire to be led by the Spirit.

Not only do we strive to let the Holy Spirit animate our discernments, decisions, priorities, and the use of the precious and limited gift of time, but also to animate our lives of prayer and praise. In fact, I feel most a Companion when, gathered together, we lift our hearts and voices to the Lord in praise and worship. Praising God with my brothers, through all the seasons and difficulties of priestly ministry, is deeply liberating. It frees us from the false burdens that cause gloom, and it renews us in the joy of trusting in the gracious will of the Father who is Lord of Heaven and Earth (cf. Mt 11:25). In praising the Lord with my brother-priests, I feel most a beloved son of the Father, and my identity as a priest is strengthened.

This issue of *The Companion* shows a few of the many ways the Holy Spirit is leading the Companions of Christ: attracting and encouraging missionaries and vocations, strengthening diocesan

priests in their parishes and assignments, and inspiring ministry in new and unexpected ways.

Our Rule articulates what life in the Holy Spirit means to us in a beautiful way that confirms and causes us to aspire to the charism we have received. I am so grateful to belong to a community of brothers who follow the Lord with such goodness and joy. He is doing amazing things in our midst—things we would never have imagined on our own.

I hope you find His action in our lives as exciting as we do, and I pray that He is moving in your life, too!

Peace in Christ,
Father Peter Williams
Moderator



Above, Father Peter Williams incenses the altar at the 2022 Companions of Christ Summer Conference. On the cover: All of the Companions gather at the altar for the Eucharistic Prayer during Mass at the summer conference.

LOVE OF LATINO MINISTRY BEARS FRUIT IN NEW ASSIGNMENT

At first glance, Father James Stiles isn't an obvious choice for pastor of the Church of Saint Stephen-Holy Rosary in Minneapolis. Ordained in 2015, he most recently served in a cluster of rural parishes in the southwest corner of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. The churches of St. Mary in LeCenter, St. Henry in St. Henry, the Nativity in Cleveland, and Immaculate Conception in Marysburg/Madison Lake serve small communities of mostly English-speaking parishioners—with one weekly Spanish Mass for the area's small Latino population. By contrast, Saint Stephen-Holy Rosary is an urban parish comprised of at least 90 percent Latino parishioners of more than a dozen ethnicities (primarily from Mexico and Ecuador)—and the previous pastor is newly ordained Bishop Joseph Williams.

"I'd be lying if I said there wasn't a feeling of having big shoes to fill," laughs Father Stiles. "The Lord worked through Bishop Williams, and this parish is so alive! But I've been able to trust in God's providence—the question is, what does the Lord want to do through me?"

Father Stiles took Spanish in school but never put it into practice until he visited Guadalajara, Mexico, while at the Saint Paul Seminary. For two months, he was immersed in Mexican culture and language, and he quickly developed a love of the people he met.

"We were living with host families—I really wanted to engage people in conversation and understand them, so I threw myself into it," he says.

After Father Stiles was ordained a deacon, he served at the archdiocesan mission parish in Venezuela, JesuCristo Resucitado, and has ministered to Spanish-speaking populations ever since. He was assigned to St. Stephen-Holy Rosary in September, and with the new assignment comes new challenges.



Father James Stiles celebrates Our Lady of Guadalupe with parishioners at Saint Stephen-Holy Rosary in South Minneapolis.

"I'm having to learn the cultures of the people I'm serving to a much greater degree," he says. "The culture and language are often a little different depending on where they are from—and while parishioners immersed in American culture might say, 'We're going to set this goal, and these are the steps to reach it,' here everyone contributes, but it's less institutional and formal. Things just come together."

"Also, the majority of my parishioners are hard-working, but they're not making much money. How do you have a fruitful mission when you don't have the financial means? And going from speaking Spanish 10 percent of the time or less to conducting more than 90 percent of conversations in Spanish is definitely a challenge!"

Nonetheless, Father Stiles is excited for the future of his new parish.

"Virtually every Mass is standing-room-only," he says. "I've never experienced that before, and I'm reaping the fruits of something I didn't plant. But there are still hundreds, maybe thousands, of souls in this area that have yet to be invited to come to know Jesus. There's real hope and excitement for inviting more people to Christ and His Church!"



EVANGELIST

Connections run deep between NET

If that community was the soil that NET, SPO, and the Companions came from, the Holy Spirit was the water.”

In the early 1980s, a group of young men with ties to this community began to feel the call toward living single for the Gospel. These men became the first Companions of Christ, and a number of early Companions also served as NET missionaries.

“I graduated from Saint John Vianney College Seminary in 1983,” says Father Kevin Finnegan, who was one of the first five Companions. “The following fall I served as a NET missionary; meanwhile my classmates continued their seminary studies. After serving as a missionary, I worked for NET and then SPO. At the ordinations of 1987, I remember thinking, ‘I could be lying on the floor of the Cathedral getting ordained.’ I realized, however, I was exactly where God wanted me. I totally let go of being a priest, surrendering that and saying yes to being a Companion of Christ.”

In 1990, Finnegan moved to Michigan to live with Jeff Huard (now Companions priest Father Jeff Huard), who was the head of a men’s house there, to witness their community and formation firsthand. At the end of that year, Bishop Robert Carlson began a conversation to see what it would take for the Companions to become priests for the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. After several weeks, initial statutes and seminary agreements were developed, then approved by Archbishop John Roach. Finnegan and his housemates entered major seminary that September.

“Across all of these organizations you see a shared sense of community, evangelistic mission, and charismatic spirituality,” Berchem says. “I think the reason the Companions are attractive to young men discerning priesthood is the added sense of priestly fraternity and accountability. The easiest person to fool is yourself, so to be yoked and accountable to other men leads to holiness.”

This call to Catholic community and evangelization is not limited to those with a vocation to Holy Orders.

“One of the great blessings of those early days was learning that we’re all called to be holy—not just priests and religious, but lay people, too,” Father Finnegan says. “I was a lay person for over half of my life. I believe this is the age of the laity—NET, SPO, Communio, FOCUS (the Fellowship of Catholic

For 30 years, the Companions of Christ have striven to live out parish priesthood in fraternity and community in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis—yet, of the 30+ Companions priests, roughly half come from outside the Archdiocese and many from out of state. What has drawn these men to Saint Paul and helped them hear the call to priesthood? In many cases, it’s been NET Ministries.

ROOTED IN RENEWAL

NET (National Evangelization Teams) Ministries is a missionary organization based in West Saint Paul that calls youth into deeper relationship with Christ via traveling retreat teams, parish discipleship teams, and the acclaimed YDisciple program. Each year, NET recruits young adults from across the country to train as missionaries.

According to founder Mark Berchem, NET, the Companions, and Saint Paul’s Outreach (SPO, a ministry of young adult missionaries living in community and evangelizing their peers on college campuses) all trace their origins back to the Charismatic Renewal of the 1970s.

“At that time, the Saint Paul Catholic Youth Center staff experienced a pretty radical movement of the Holy Spirit and an explosion of faith and energy in their personal lives: a desire to be alive in the faith, to pray and read the Scriptures, and to relate more intentionally in communities,” Berchem says. “They formed a small community—the Community of Christ the Redeemer.

S AT HEART

NET Ministries and the Companions

University Students) are all ministries founded by lay people. As a priest, I have the privilege to minister alongside such wonderful lay faithful.”

CASTING A WIDE NET

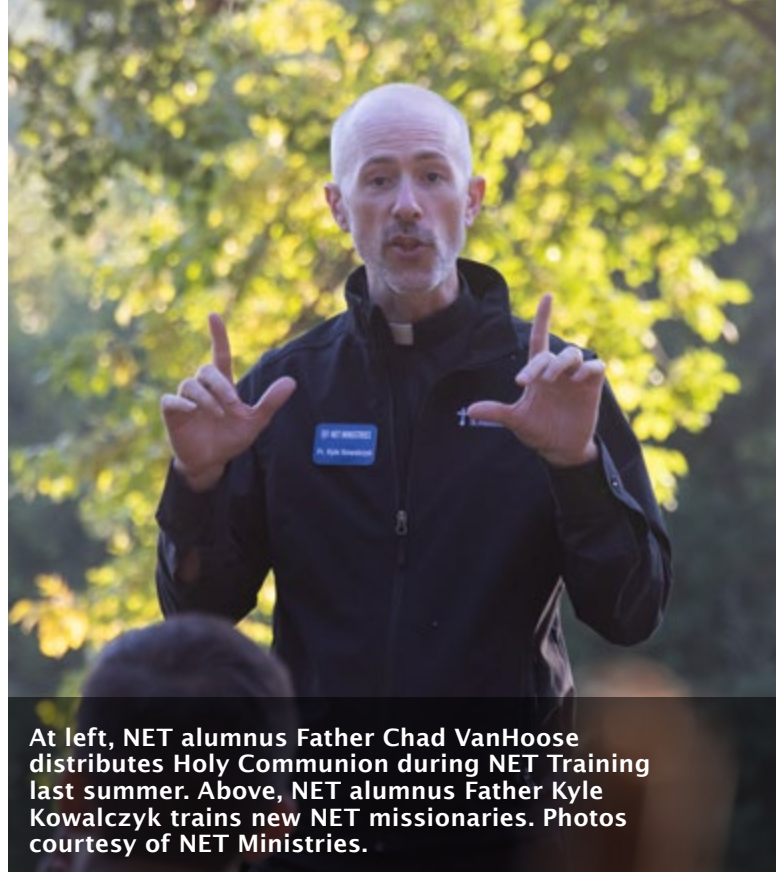
Every year a new influx of NET recruits is trained in prayer, evangelization, and discernment. If a young man who joins NET hears a call to priesthood, it’s not uncommon that he finds himself talking to Companions. As a result, NET missionaries who feel a call to priesthood often stay in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis specifically to live out their diocesan priesthood as Companions of Christ.

“There’s never been a formal relationship between the Companions and NET, and even now, some of our youngest members aren’t aware of this history,” says Father Chad VanHoose, a former NET-ter and current Companion. “Father Finnegan came from Chicago and served on a NET team in the 1980s. I came from Kentucky to serve on a NET discipleship team in Faribault in 2005, with Father Finnegan as my pastor and Father Brian Park, who came from Texas to serve on NET, as my supervisor. The next year I joined the NET staff as a supervisor, and Father Brian was my roommate. Companions also came to NET training each year, so every step of the way, I’ve been influenced and inspired by them.”

For the first 24 years of the Companions’ existence, all of the NET alumni who became priests were from outside the archdiocese. Not until 2016, when Father Joe Zabinski was ordained, did NET Ministries have a “homegrown” Companions vocation.

Since then, more Archdiocesan natives have discerned priesthood with the Companions, in part because of connections to NET:

- Father Timothy Sandquist, Father Nathan Hastings, and Father Josh Salonek served as NET missionaries.
- Father Salonek, Father Connor McGinnis, Father John Utecht, and several current seminarians who are discerning the Companions hail from parishes served by NET discipleship teams.
- Additional vocations to the priesthood and the Companions stem from parishes served by NET alumni priests.
- And NET alumni Companions continue to help with NET training, so incoming missionaries continue to get to know them.



At left, NET alumnus Father Chad VanHoose distributes Holy Communion during NET Training last summer. Above, NET alumnus Father Kyle Kowalczyk trains new NET missionaries. Photos courtesy of NET Ministries.

PAST AND PRESENT COMPANIONS WHO ARE NET ALUMNI

Father Michael Becker	Father Brian Park
Bishop Andrew Cozzens (before episcopal ordination)	(current NET chaplain)
Father Kevin Finnegan	Father Josh Salonek
Father Nathan Hastings	Father Tim Sandquist
Father Kyle Kowalczyk	Father John Utecht
Father Tom Margevičius	Father Chad VanHoose
	Father Jon Vander Ploeg
	Father Joe Zabinski

“The transition from NET to the Companions is easy, since the spiritualities are similar,” Father VanHoose says. “But the real impact of NET training, I think, is transparency: to be fully known and fully loved by God and by your team lends itself to vocational discernment.”

“From NET’s perspective, we have no formal strategy for vocations. We’re focused on helping young people fall in love with Jesus and turn over their lives to the Lord, then equipping them for mission,” Berchem says. “As that leads them to see how God is using them, it leads them to ask, ‘What does God want from me?’ The beauty of having Companions priests involved in NET training is that, as these questions arise, young men see guys not that much older than them who understand and speak the language, and they think, ‘I’m going to go talk with them, listen to their experience and opinions, and learn who they are and how they live.’”



APPOINTMENTS

FATHER TOM MARGEVIČIUS
 Pastor, Churches of Saint Mary (Le Center), Saint Henry (Saint Henry), the Nativity (Cleveland), and Immaculate Conception (Marysburg)

FATHER MATTHEW NORTHEMSCOLD
 Sacramental Minister, Church of Saint Vincent de Paul (Saint Paul)

FATHER JAMES STILES
 Pastor, Church of Saint Stephen-Holy Rosary (Minneapolis)

SYNOD ROLES

FATHER MICHAEL BECKER
 Vicar of Charisms, Archdiocese-wide

FATHER KEVIN FINNEGAN
 Vicar of Evangelization, Deaneries 9, 14, and 15

FATHER TONY O'NEILL
 Vicar of Evangelization, Deaneries 7 and 8

FATHER MARC PAVEGLIO
 Vicar of Evangelization, Deaneries 2 and 3

FATHER CHAD VANHOOSE
 Vicar of Evangelization, Deaneries 1 and 4



From top right: Father Brian Park led a mission trip to the Mustard Seed Community in the Dominican Republic; seminarian Joseph Wappes and Companions priest-candidate Father Sam Gilbertson visited the Church of the Visitation in the Holy Land; Father Tom Niehaus also visited in the Holy Land; Archbishop Bernard Hebda and Father Michael Barsness attended the installation of Father Tom Margevičius as pastor at the Church of Saint Mary in LeCenter. Bottom two photos courtesy of Sarah Denn.

HOME AT LAST

Father McGinnis finds joy in having a people of his own

Father Connor McGinnis does not seem like the youngest priest serving in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. His confidence around the altar belies his age and natural introversion.

It doesn't hurt that his vocation extends back to grade school. He and his younger brother attended All Saints Catholic School in Lakeville beginning in kindergarten; by 3rd or 4th grade, he had befriended their pastor, Bishop (at that time, Father) Lee Piché, and associate, Father Robert Pish, with whom Father McGinnis shares his birthday.

"By 5th grade, my call to the priesthood was a deep-seated conviction," he says. "I know people sometimes go through more struggle and discernment of their vocational call, but mine was remarkably stable."

His vocation began to bloom as he moved to Academy of Holy Angels in Richfield for middle and high school. He attended a Steubenville Youth Conference and began to make his faith his own.

"I loved apologetics in particular," he says. "Sometimes that manifested itself as, 'People on the internet are wrong, and I need to fix that.' I've learned since then that's not usually the best place to start!"

His love of academics and the Catholic intellectual tradition and his desire for community led him to visiting a Dominican order, but in the end, parish priesthood won out.

"I had a strong attraction to communal living and seeking to follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. While I ultimately felt called to stay in the Archdiocese, these desires continued, and the Companions provided a concrete way to live them out," Father McGinnis says. "There were three Companions associates in a row at my home parish: Father Jonathan Kelly, Father Marcus Milless, and Father Chad VanHoose. I also got to know others while in seminary, including Father Michael Becker (former rector of Saint John Vianney College Seminary) and Father David Blume (archdiocesan vocations director). All of these priests were models whom I wanted to emulate."

"The shared life together, the men who are in it, and the rule we follow have all been immensely formative for



Father Connor McGinnis prays during the Ordination Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Paul in May 2022. Photo courtesy of Dave Hrbacek, *The Catholic Spirit*.

me," he says. "Now it's a matter of trying to live out the ideals of the Companions with ever-greater depth."

In the end, a sense of community—of belonging to a particular Body of Christ—matters most to him. Last summer he was assigned as the parochial vicar for St. Michael Catholic Church and School in St. Michael. He lives with two other Companions: Father Brian Park, pastor at St. Michael, and Father Joe Zabinski, parochial administrator at the Church of St. Albert in Albertville.

Besides the sacraments, Father McGinnis says the best part of priesthood so far is seeing different ministries at work and how he can support them. His first week at St. Michael, playing gaga ball and leading Adoration at Extreme Faith Camp (EFC), was like a homecoming.

"EFC seemed like a fitting intro to this parish. It reminded me of the All Saints after-school program—it kind of felt like home!" he says. "My teaching parish was wonderful, but even spending 40-60 hours a semester there, you still have the sense, 'These are not my people'...Now I have a parish and a people of my own."

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PRAY FOR VOCATIONS

Please join us in praying for more vocations to priesthood, religious life, and the diaconate for the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis—and for all priests and seminarians discerning the Companions of Christ. **God bless you!**



Father Tom Niehaus and Father James Stiles on pilgrimage together in the Holy Land. Photo courtesy of Sarah Denn.