

# THE COMPANION

Companions of Christ Newsletter – Winter 2025



# NO ONE SHOULD GO IT ALONE



Above: Father Peter Williams presides at Sunday Mass at Saint Ambrose Catholic Community in Woodbury (Hilda Berdie Photography, for Saint Ambrose). On the cover: Father James Stiles, Father Marc Paveglio, and three other Companions ventured to Florida for vacation this winter.

It may surprise you, but a priest never leaves his humanity behind. While it's true that the Sacrament of Holy Orders provides real graces to live out our vocations as priests, we have the same needs as the people we serve: food and water, shelter and rest, friendship and community, love and understanding.

It's been my experience that one of the biggest changes from seminary life to parish priesthood is that the man must be much more intentional about relationships, particularly with other priests. In seminary, the sense of community is built in, but once you are ordained and assigned to a parish or post, you quickly realize the importance of intentional friendships with other priests. As the adage goes, "No one understands a priest like another priest."

When I first became a priest, I was so excited, and I remember getting my first couple of checks and thinking, I can't believe I get paid for this! But as beautiful and fulfilling as priestly life is,

I quickly realized that, if I wasn't careful, I could lose my grounding in the fullness of ministry. It became more and more evident that to be a fruitful and effective priest, my feet must be firmly planted in my deepest identity as a beloved son of God. And I needed priest-friends—brothers with whom I can be vulnerable, experience encouragement, and be held accountable, who would remind me who I am.

One of the great blessings of the Companions of Christ is the brotherhood's willingness to sacrifice in order to live authentic and intentional community as diocesan priests. Certain aspects of our Rule are essential to sustaining our fraternal bonds across a sprawling and diverse Archdiocese—in particular, our celebration of the Lord's Day each Saturday evening. Eating a meal, praying together, and sharing our hearts and our gratitude with each other strengthens the community and buoys each individual priest for Sunday Masses and the week ahead. This connection with the Lord and with each other sets the tenor for everything we do in our individual assignments.

It's not always easy to fit community life in, but the old saying, "You keep the rule, and the rule keeps you," is instructive. We are made for community and communion, and our shared life as shepherds enables us to better love and serve the people entrusted to our pastoral care.

Please pray for us and know of our prayers for you!

In Christ,  
**Father Peter Williams**  
Moderator

# REMEMBER THE SABBATH

## Companions celebrate the Lord's Day to rest, reconnect, and refuel

Celebration of the Lord's Day is one of the most cherished aspects of life in the Companions of Christ. The Rule of the Companions of Christ explains in detail *how* the community approaches the Sabbath; according to Father Jake Anderson, the reason *why* is simple: Many people struggle to do it well.

"In Hebrew, *shabbat* is typically translated 'to rest' but another translation is 'to stop,'" says Father Anderson, who serves as pastor of the St. Lawrence Newman Center at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. "Nothing marks the other days of the week as distinct or different. The Lord's Day celebration requires us to cease from our work, to come together as a community, and to usher in each Sunday as a unique event."

"Americans are not good at stopping. The analogy I use with college students is this: When was the last time you actually stopped at a stop sign—like, all four wheels quit turning, and the vehicle rocked forward, then rested? For many people, Sunday can be like that: more of a pause, with Mass as the only thing that distinguishes it from the rest of the week. Mass is necessary, of course, but not sufficient!"

For priests, keeping the sabbath can be a challenge since they are required to celebrate Mass. Most try to limit other activities and meetings on Sundays, but ministry is a 24-7 calling. In order to enter into the Sabbath in a real way, Companions gather on Saturday evening, after celebrating their vigil Masses.

"Typically, we start with simple appetizers and conversation. We rotate responsibilities: One brother cooks, and another assists with serving, setting the table, and things like that," Anderson says. "Once we are all gathered, we go to the chapel for Evening Prayer, then head in for the meal itself. The Rule specifies a particular prayer before dinner—it would be easy to go straight to 'Bless us, O Lord...' but the Lord's Day prayer is essential because it slows you down and captures the theology of what we are doing."

During the opening prayer, the Lord's Day candle is lit with words from the opening of the Gospel of John. Mealtime discussion is facilitated by a leader, so that everyone participates in a single, edifying conversation.

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The Lord's Day may look different from week to week, but a consistent, prayerful format draws everyone into deeper communion.



Facing page, left to right: Father David Blume, Father Josh Salonek, and Father Tom Niehaus are on loan to the Diocese of Crookston. They serve St. Philip Catholic Church and School in Bemidji, as well as Bemidji State University (above).

# MEN ON A MISSION

## Three archdiocesan Companions bring support and fraternity to the Diocese of Crookston

A year ago, Archbishop Bernard Hebda announced he would be sending three Companions of Christ priests from the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis on mission to the Diocese of Crookston. The loan of three priests raised eyebrows, however, the Archbishop cited four factors supporting his decision:

- **The need is real.** The largely rural diocese in northwest Minnesota has fewer than three dozen active priests spread across 66 parishes and eight schools, and most are approaching retirement age.
- **The Archdiocese has been blessed with vocations.** Last spring alone, 13 men were ordained as priests for the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis.
- **Other dioceses support the Archdiocese.** Especially with requests for seminary faculty, other bishops have been very generous in sending priests when asked.
- **The Companions of Christ are a draw for priests.** More than a dozen Companions came from outside the archdiocese, the state, and even the country to serve as priests here.

“Having been a member of the Companions of Christ, I spoke with their moderator, Father Peter Williams,”

says Bishop Andrew Cozzens of the Diocese of Crookston. “We dreamed about this as a missionary opportunity for the Companions. So many of them come from outside the Archdiocese that there is already a missionary spirit among them. Plus, they are diocesan priests, so they are here to build up the diocese, not to grow their religious community. I know all the brother Companions, so I knew that it would be a great fit and uplifting for the diocese”

### Chosen Few

The Companions serving the Crookston diocese were selected primarily for practical reasons. Three is the minimum number of Companions comprising a household, and St. Philip Catholic Church and School in Bemidji could accommodate and keep three priests busy. An experienced pastor and senior Companion was necessary to lead the mission; a veteran priest with experience in college ministry was required to pastor the Beaver Catholic Community at Bemidji State University; and a younger priest with strong experience as a Companion and an associate would support parish ministries, especially the Catholic school. Among the Companions available, Father David Blume, Father Tom

Niehaus, and Father Josh Salonek were chosen.

“All 34 Companions would have said yes—we were just the first three to get phone calls,” says Father Niehaus. “Before I joined the Companions, I served as a priest for 11 years in the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, and my first three years were connected to the Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Newman Center at Winona State University. So the opportunity to come to Bemidji and serve the college student population is awesome!”

“I was in my ninth year serving as Director of Vocations for the Archdiocese and as it turned out, it was really the best year I had known,” says Father Blume. “The Lord caught me by surprise—I never expected anything like this! For me, this has been a big move, but I have settled in, and I love seeing what God is doing through us and in the lives of our parishioners.”

“I think I ended up on the list because of my assignment at St. John Neumann in Eagan—I had the opportunity to serve as an associate there for three years, so I had a bit more experience as an associate and in the life of the Companions,” Father Salonek says.

Their assignment may be in Bemidji, but the mission is bigger: The Companions are also exemplars of priestly community and try to make connections wherever and whenever they can.

“When we gather for the Lord’s Day on Saturday evenings, we invite our brother priests from the region to join us for a meal, prayer, and fellowship as much as possible,” says Niehaus. “A lot of priests outside of the Archdiocese are spread out across two, three, or four parishes, so neighboring priests might be 30 or 40 miles away. We’re trying to connect with them and provide some encouragement. So far, we’ve had a great response because of how isolated they can be.”

### First Fruits

One year into their mission, all three men see the fruits of the mission taking shape. For example, whenever possible, the three priests concelebrate Mass together, including the Tuesday evening Mass for college students and the Wednesday morning school Mass—and people are noticing.

“Doing these things together is a small decision for us, but the community at St. Philip has really been moved by it,” Salonek says. “We have our own lanes that we’re working in—but we’re all ministering to the same people. Some people might connect better with Father Tom, who’s a great singer, or more with Father Blume’s wisdom and age, and yeah, the school kids like seeing me roller-skate with them. But we are all presenting the same gospel. That’s a profound reality!”

“Jumping right in at the beginning of the semester and getting to know students, faculty, coaches, and staff

and seeing things grow has been great,” says Niehaus. “The number of students participating, the fervor and excitement, is really life-giving, and I thank God for that. I’m grateful for our FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) missionaries, for their great efforts and for how that calls me forth as a priest. It’s almost like, ‘Am I allowed to have this much fun in ministry?’”

“St. Philip’s is a parish that is very much alive—it has many ministries and so many wonderful people,” Blume says. “Serving as pastor, I also see the challenges up close, but I am also encouraged by the love people have for their Catholic faith, their parish, and their school. There are a lot of people who live in the broader Bemidji area, but the strong connections people have with their parish and one another make it feel like a small town. I like that!”

One year in, Bishop Cozzens has no regrets in inviting the Companions up north.

“The reports coming from Bemidji are overwhelmingly positive,” Bishop Cozzens says. “I constantly hear about what a gift it is to have the Companions there and the joy and fresh energy that they’ve brought. The people I know feel like they have received a great blessing.

“Personally, I have been sent here on mission, too, by the Holy Father, so to have brothers joining me in that mission and that some opportunities to be with them to share life together has been a blessing.”



## THE LORD'S DAY, Continued from page 3

Guests might be encouraged to share their vocation or conversion story. Just before the end of the meal, everyone shares a round of thanksgiving. Conversation continues during cleanup, then the Companions and their guests return to the chapel for Night Prayer.

“Each piece is important,” says Anderson. “It’s often a poverty of diocesan life that you see so many acts of God, but life is so busy that you don’t have opportunities to share them. And the Night Prayer readings are emblematic of keeping watch—night is when temptations come, and we truly seek to be resting securely in the Lord.”

For Anderson, the simplicity of a shared meal, conversation, and prayer belies the great spiritual fruit born in his priesthood and parish.

“Speaking to priests about taking a day off, Bishop Cozzens would always say, ‘Ask yourself truly in your heart: At the end of this day that is committed to rest, is your soul more gathered or scattered?’” he says.

“Cooking a meal or sitting at table together might sound ridiculously simple, but we’re doing something together we can delight in. To share bread together—that’s the root of what *companion* means.”



**Top:** Fathers Nathan Hastings, Joe Kuharski, and Chad VanHoose celebrate with Sister Rosalind Gefre, CSJ, at a Saint Paul Saints game at which Sister Rosalind was honored. **Above:** Father Jake Anderson and Father Peter Hughes enjoy fishing in Florida in January. **At right:** Father Joseph Wappes plays around after ordination during a visit to his *alma mater*, St. Charles Borromeo Catholic School (Jordana Torgeson, for *The Catholic Spirit*, June 20, 2024). **Top of facing page:** Father Chad VanHoose and his parents, Paul and Julie VanHoose, visited with Bishop Andrew Cozzens at a NET Ministries Alumni BBQ at the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis last summer.

## APPOINTMENTS

**FATHER DAVID BLUME**  
Pastor, Saint Philip (Bemidji)  
and St. Charles (Pennington),  
Diocese of Crookston

**FATHER MICHAEL JOHNSON**  
Pastor, Church of Saint Jude  
of the Lake (Mahtomedi)

**FATHER TOM NIEHAUS**  
Parochial Vicar, Saint Philip (Bemidji)  
and St. Charles (Pennington),  
and Pastor, Bemidji State University  
Newman Center, Diocese of Crookston

**FATHER JOSH SALONEK**  
Parochial Vicar, Saint Philip (Bemidji)  
and St. Charles (Pennington),  
Diocese of Crookston

“I didn’t want to be alone in the priesthood. I want to share my life with others who know my life—with other priests.”

— **Father Josh Salonek,  
Companions of Christ**



## NET MINISTRIES ASSIGNED FULL-TIME CHAPLAIN: FATHER CHAD VANHOOSE

As a lay apostolate, NET Ministries has carried out its mission for 43 years, challenging young Catholics to follow Jesus Christ and embrace a life of community in the Church. Many priests have served the apostolate throughout the years, and many men have gone from NET missionary to priest; now I am blessed to be NET’s full-time priest chaplain.

I once heard that priests, having received the sacrament of Holy Orders, bring “holy order” to the ministry of the Church. I experienced this as a parish priest for the past seven years, and now I am experiencing it where I worked for six years as a layman. In some ways, I am the same person that moved to Minnesota in 2005 to serve with NET. I have the same temperament and many of the same natural and spiritual gifts. The difference is something that I’ve been savoring in mystery: In my 13-year break from NET, I received six years of seminary formation, a master’s degree, a certificate in spiritual direction, and seven years of priestly ministry—but the main difference is my configuration to the person of Christ.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1581, states, “[Holy Orders] configures the recipient to Christ by a special grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he may serve as Christ’s instrument for his Church. By ordination one is enabled to act as a representative of Christ, Head of the Church, in his triple office of priest, prophet, and king.”

In this role, I see ministry needs and opportunities differently, and I am able to serve in unique ways, offering my prophetic voice. In my priesthood, I bring a regular sacramental and liturgical life to NET, and I am free to accompany the missionaries and staff relationships and offer fatherly guidance. All of this fuels and provides “holy order” to the apostolate. I am grateful to pour out my life in new ways in the place where I learned how to be a disciple and apostle of Jesus.

— **Father Chad VanHoose**



# The Companions of Christ

DIOCESAN PRIESTS LIVING IN FRATERNITY

PO Box 16239

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# Lenten Morning of Reflection



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[COMPANIONSOFCHRIST.ORG](https://COMPANIONSOFCHRIST.ORG) TO  
RSVP AND SEE THE SCHEDULE



**Holy Spirit Catholic Church**

**515 S Albert St, St Paul**

**Saturday, March 8 | 9:00am - 12:30pm**