



# The Baltimore Beacon

The Redemptorists of the Baltimore Province

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## Provincial Ponderings



Dear Brothers and Sisters:

The months of July and August have (and will) see the Baltimore Province celebrate two priesthood ordinations. Brian Vaccaro was ordained to the priesthood on July 23 and Royce Thomas will be ordained on August 13. We thank God for the gift of these two newly ordained Redemptorists!

Often, I am asked about the number of vocations within the Congregation, and based on this summer, it might look like the Redemptorists are doing well. Indeed, we are thankful for the response to God's call of these two fine young men—but the “harvest is plentiful and laborers few.” Indeed, at present our Province will not celebrate another priesthood ordination until at least 2028. Our vocation directors, Denis Sweeney, Peter Linh, and Br. Gerard are working tirelessly and I'm sure they have been asked countless times: “How many vocations do you have?”

The work of a vocation director is just one part of cultivating vocations. Besides praying to the Lord of the harvest that more young people generously respond to God's call, every Catholic can encourage vocations. The prompting of a grandparent, a parent, a co-worker, or a friend might be what

someone needs to respond to God's call.

Why are we afraid to ask a young person, “Have you ever thought of being a religious? Have you ever considered being a priest?” I know if a Redemptorist had not asked me that question when I was in the seventh grade, I would never have responded. I was all set to be a professional basketball player, and if that didn't work, I was going to try to be an astronaut with NASA (yes, I know—both lofty goals). But one day during seventh grade religion class, a young Redemptorist walked in and invited us to visit the minor seminary at North East, PA, for the weekend.

A weekend of religion: no sane seventh grader would ever do that. But he told us we would leave on a Friday and return late Monday. My hand (and the hands of numerous classmates) went up. Missing two days of school was enough to get my interest.

From that moment, God continued to use various people in my life to encourage me to join the seminary. I gave up my idea of being the next Michael Jordan or Neil Armstrong and traded it in to be the next Alphonsus Liguori. All because someone had the courage to walk into a classroom and ask whether anyone there would consider being a religious.

I look back on my call to be a Redemptorist and see that there was no burning bush like Moses saw, there was no visit from the Angel Gabriel as in Mary's case, no Son of God walking on the seashore making a personal invitation as He did for Peter, James, and John. But there were flesh-and-blood people who asked, who encouraged, who inspired me.

I went on a weekend just to get away from school and came back touched by the Spirit of God that I saw in the students and the Redemptorists who staffed St. Mary's in North East, PA. I have purposely not mentioned names since there were so many who encouraged and inspired me, and I don't want to forget anyone. Their faces and names are in my heart, and as I thank Mary for giving me the gift of perseverance, I also utter a prayer of thanks for those who supported my vocation, most especially my parents for allowing me to follow my dream.

Many of us reading this are either Redemptorists or have a special place for the Redemptorists in our hearts. We are better people because of one or several Redemptorists who have allowed us to experience the face of a loving God.

I say this in all humility: we Redemptorists are a great group of men. Why would we not invite someone to join the ranks of the Redemptorists? Perhaps there is a person you know who needs a little push. (Perhaps an invitation to miss a few days of work or school is all he needs!) The job of vocations is not just that of the Province's vocation director or Redemptorist confreres, but of anyone reading these words.

There is so much we as Redemptorists would love to do, but the “harvest is plentiful and laborers few.” Don't be afraid to pray for vocations! Don't be afraid to ask someone if he or she ever considered a vocation! May Our Mother of Perpetual Help be with all those considering God's call in their lives, and may she always be with them, offering them the grace of perseverance.

*In the Spirit of the Redeemer,  
Paul J. Borowski, C.Ss.R.*

## Upcoming 2022/2023 Dates

**Saturday, August 13, 2022 at 11 a.m.** Priesthood Ordination for Royce Thomas, C.Ss.R. at St Anthony's; Guapo Cap-de-Ville Main Rd; Point Fortin, Trinidad. Archbishop Charles Jason Gordon (Port of Spain, Trinidad) will be the ordaining Bishop

**Sunday, September 11 - Friday, October 7, 2022** XXVI General Chapter ; (Phase 2 -- Canonical Phase); Rome, Italy

**Mid-September, 2022** Convoking of the XVIII Provincial Chapter

**Thursday, October 6, 2022,** First Nominating Ballots for Provincial, EPC & Chapter Delegates go out

**Tuesday, November 29 – Thursday, December 1, 2022** Province Convocation at San Alfonso Retreat House; Long Branch, NJ [*Thursday, December 1, 2022 will be Provincial Candidates Day*]

**Monday, February 13 - Wednesday, February 15, 2023** Province Retreat (Southeast Region) at St. Alphonsus Villa; New Smyrna Beach, FL; Anthony Gittens, CSSp, is the retreat director and the theme will be: Missionary Discipleship.

**Thursday, February 16, 2023** Province Jubilee Celebration (Southeast Region)

**Monday, March 13 – Friday, March 17, 2023** and if necessary Monday, March 20 – Friday, March 24, 2023

XVIII Baltimore Provincial Chapter at San Alfonso Retreat House; Long Branch, NJ

**Tuesday, May 30 - Thursday, June 1, 2023** Province Retreat at San Alfonso Retreat House; Long Branch, NJ Anthony Gittens, CSSp, is the retreat director and the theme will be: Missionary Discipleship.

**Saturday, July 15, 2023 at 11 a.m.** Province Jubilee Celebration: Mass & Luncheon at Sacred Heart of Jesus; Baltimore, MD

**Tuesday, October 17 - Thursday, October 19, 2023** Province Convocation at San Alfonso Retreat House; Long Branch, NJ. Anthony Gittens, CSSp, is the presenter and the theme will be: Intercultural Living.

## Communications Updates

• Daily Audio Podcasts on the readings of the day may be found, in either Spanish or English, at [redemptorists.net](http://redemptorists.net).

• Weekly Video reflections on the upcoming Sunday readings (Cycle C) may be found on Facebook: [facebook.com/RedemptoristsBaltimore](https://facebook.com/RedemptoristsBaltimore) or YouTube: [youtube.com/BaltRedemptorists](https://youtube.com/BaltRedemptorists). These videos are released each Wednesday.

• Saturday, August 20: On-line video service "Praying with the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help."

## Upcoming EPC Meetings

Future EPC meetings will begin at 9:30 a.m. via ZOOM until further notice

- No August Meeting
- September 7th – 8th
- October 19th – 20th
- November 16th – 17th

- December 2nd (San Alfonso; Long Branch, NJ)
- January 18th – 19th
- February 8th – 9th

## Care of Our Common Home

A group of 25 Redemptorists, Partners in Mission (PIM), and friends throughout the North American Conference met online last Saturday

to discuss raising environmental consciousness and share concrete ways to address the climate crisis.

"Our gathering was hosted by Fr. Cristian Bueno, chair of the Commission for Social Ministry, Justice, Peace and Integration of



Creation (SM-JPIC) in Rome,” explained Fr. Francis Gargani of the Baltimore Province, who coordinated the meeting in North America. “The climate crisis is real. The clock is ticking. If we don’t address it and save our common home, nothing else will matter.”

The meeting followed a worldwide gathering of Redemptorists and PIM in Rome last February, and Fr. Cristian’s first session with the Asia-Oceania Conference. “They are at the forefront of this movement because they are experiencing the horrors of climate change. The island nation of Malaysia is suffering with natural disasters and typhoons, and the land is being eaten away by the rise of the oceans,” he said.

Fr. Francis was impressed with the level of awareness of participants,

which included a few experienced social justice experts: Fr. Paul Hansen of the Province of Canada, who has been involved with justice and peace issues on the international level for many years; Matthew Marquardt, Redemptorist Associate and founder of Catholic Conscious in Canada; Van Bensett, Life Directions project director in Chicago who serves on the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Commission on Ecology and is working on Ladauto Si gardens in the inner city; and Kevin Cawley, C.F.C., Ph.D., an Edmund Rice Christian Brother who serves as executive director of the Thomas Berry Forum for Ecological Dialogue at Iona College.

After a powerful address by Father General Michael Brehl, participants shared initiatives in which they are already participating. In addition to common thermostat control, water conservation, and recycling efforts, initial suggestions include reducing energy use by at least 20 percent within the next year or two, and reviewing the investment portfolio with a social conscience. Participants followed up by sharing helpful resources available from various agencies throughout the North

American Conference.

“Our challenge is to bring enthusiasm to our local communities to make real lifestyle changes,” Fr. Francis said. He



has already scheduled a presentation by Kevin Cawley and Sr. Kathleen Deignan, CND on October 1 in Washington, DC.

Fr. Cristian and the SM-JPIC have drafted a proposal on the Congregation’s response to Ladauto Si and the seven-year platform for parishes, dioceses, and religious orders to implement Ladauto Si. Plans are to refine that document during the next few years and issue it as an official statement at the next General Chapter.

*Kristine Stremel*

## Update from the Novitiate in Mexico

Thursday, July 14th, 2022, marked the beginning of a new era in the Redemptorists’ North American Conference. Nine young men from the units of Canada, the United States, and Mexico began their novitiate together in the former St. Alphonsus Seminary in Tlalpizahuac, Mexico, just outside of Mexico City.

This is the first joint novitiate since Mexico joined the Conference in 2019, and the first time all units will be doing a stage of formation together. The novice director is Father Javier Moran Morin of the Mexico Province, while his assistant is Fr. Matthew Allman of the Baltimore Province. They are joined on the formation team

by Brother Tito López Cartagena of Mexico.

The novices are Marco Antonio Ortega Morales, Edwin Rolando Hernández Ávila, and Abel Ríos Alba of Mexico; Gabriel Yun Zhang, Mark Suez, and Benedict Nicholas of Canada; Hieu Minh Bui of the Extra



## Novitiate, Continued

Patriam Vice Province; and Nhan Tran Do, and McQuain Clovis of the Baltimore Province. It is not simply an international group of novices, but a very intercultural one as well. By birth, two novices are from Vietnam, one is from China, one is from the Philippines, and one is from St. Lucia in the Caribbean. It will be an exciting time as all find their place in the shared Redemptorist mission and charism. The novitiate conferences will be conducted in English, while prayers and community life will be a mix of English and Spanish. The novitiate began with an eight-day retreat led by Father Dennis Billy of Baltimore. Please continue to keep the novitiate community in your prayers.

*Javier Moran, C.Ss.R., and Matthew Allman, C.Ss.R.*



From left to right: Hieu Minh Bui, Tito López Cartagena, C.Ss.R., Gabriel Yun Zhang, Abel Ríos Alba, Mark Suezo, Mc Quain Clovis, Benedict Nicholas, Nhan Tran Do, Edwin Rolando Hernández Ávila, Marco Antonio Ortega Morales, Matthew Allman, C.Ss.R., and Javier Moran Morin, C.Ss.R.

## Update from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines



Much of June saw the necessary cleaning inside of the Sandy Bay Church in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The SVG Fire Service graciously lent a hand (and hose!) to help get the job done. Faithful volunteers continue to be present and enthusiastically work to see the project through to completion. Priming the walls has now begun and a paint color has been chosen by parishioners. All of these practical changes continue to bring new life and love to the rebuilding efforts. The progress is a

great blessing for all involved and the community.

*Kevin R. Murray, C.Ss.R.*



## My History with Partners in Mission (PIM) continued from June 2022

After my experience with lay-missionaries in Aguas Buenas, I was stationed in the retreat house and we offered a wide variety of retreats. We had over 40 lay presenters for these retreats, many of them professional people who volunteered their time and experience. We, the professed religious were there for counseling, Sacrament of Reconciliation, prayer services and the Eucharist and liturgies, which were always an important part of the retreats and our ministry there.

In 2000, we invited Father Juan Manuel Lasso, our former Superior General and considered the founder and now the key promoter of PIM, to come to Puerto Rico and give a workshop/retreat on this subject. He gave four presentations: “The Hour of the Laity in the Church,” “A New Alliance between Redemptorists and Laity,” “The New Face of the Redemptorist,” and “Lay Missionaries of the Most Holy Redeemer.” His presentations were excellent and treasured as an explanation of his vision of the new Redemptorist family composed of Laity and Professed Religious. St. Alphonsus would be proud of him for leading the Congregation into a brighter future, which is only now beginning to be fully realized.

My next appointment was to the parish of St. Agustin in San Juan. We had an empty convent which we converted into an inner-city retreat and counseling center where we offered retreats and counseling services at no charge. It was there that we decided to start our PIM group.

There were 10 or 12 parishioners who accepted the invitation. We gave them a space in the Rectory that they could call their own.

As always, our pastoral reality determined our mission. Most of the parish consisted of five public housing apartment buildings. We took it as our PIM mission to go to visit them and invite them to our regular church services. When the government demolished one of the housing developments, we celebrated an outdoor mass to say goodbye and “blessings on your way” to the residents. I always believed that our PIM group was an important continuation of something that was very evident in the Puerto Rican soul, which was the desire to be actively involved in the mission of their church.

After Puerta de Tierra, I returned to the States and was stationed at Mount Saint Alphonsus Retreat Center. Most of the retreats that we offered were given by paid members of our staff – quite different from Puerto Rico! When I became director there, I decided that we needed to form a PIM group. After a period of formation, we decided that their mission could be offering retreats to those that had left the Church and were looking for a way back home. It was based on material we received from Liguori Publications and similar to a retreat that our Lay Missionaries offered in Puerto Rico.

Over the year, we gave these retreats at the “Mount”. The attendance was small, but the retreats were powerful.

Years later I met one of the men who made this retreat. He had just come out of Mass, and you could see that he had the same joy in his heart that he had that Saturday night. These retreats bring people back to life, a kind of Resurrection, and the laity, like PIM, are the right ones to call them forth from the grave. The testimony of their faith in action is so convincing. And when all the team got down on our knees and humbly asked their pardon for anything the Church may have done to cause their leaving, it would bring tears to our eyes. It followed an important aspect of these retreats which were modeled on Jesus’ many meals with the outcasts of his time. They were all about acceptance, forgiveness, healing, and compassion. No one was condemned nor denied a place at table. This is how I see PIM. They are a group of committed laities reaching out, as St. Alphonsus did, to the most abandoned, to other laity who may be unwelcomed by their church community, or even worse, wounded by them. We learned that these PIM retreats, and PIM itself, were all about reaching out to the wounded and being compassionate.

Now I am here in another Retreat Center, in Canandaigua, NY, destined to be transitioned to lay administration in a year or so, and I am trying to form a circle of PIM to continue our mission. So far, we have almost 20 persons coming to our hybrid meetings, some in person and some by Zoom. But more on this later. For now, I am asking your prayers.

*Tom Travers, C.Ss.R.*

## The Redemptorist Parish Retreat Final Homily

He came to this country over 190 years ago as a missionary priest, eager to learn any new language and trek the immense continent, seeking out the

ordinary people. He came bundled with plenty of Good News for poor immigrants like himself. He came as a Redemptorist.

As he crossed the vast ocean, he dreamed of mounting any pulpit, stepping down any street, stopping into any hovel just to reach them,





Fr. McGowan gives the final homily of the retreat.

seemed always to be there. His church and his rectory were open from dawn to dusk. Like his people, he too, lived a family life. He prayed and ate and laughed and lived in a home with his Redemptorist family. He waited on tables, washed dishes,

and never really left them. And for hours, he sat in the forgiving darkness of confessional closets, waving away sins like flies and making things right again.

And in all those churches, he made sure there was a special place for the Lady and the Child in the golden icon - The Mother of Perpetual Help. He led them to this perpetually helping Mother who then pointed them to her Son. He made sure she was all over the parish. He had her framed and placarded, plastered and papered, leafleted and even wafer-ed. His people knew who she was.

He was always with his people, forever available. He looked on his parish priest days as days of privilege, wonderful moments of grace and life. He heard the laughter of their weddings, graduations, and baptisms. He tasted the tears of their sickness and death, their mistakes and sins. He got them out of trouble and into heaven by walking with them as one of them. And they grew old together.

In recent years, he would often be asked, "Are you a Redemptorist?" He would nod and ask, "How did you know?" and he would be told, "I can tell. I just know. There's something special about you."

*John McGowan, C.Ss.R.*

to touch them, to save them. He expected to go out from a large monastery as he did back home and walk, ride, or coach across the new world, preaching powerful and persuasive missions. Never in his life had he experienced what the American Church calls "the parish," not until he landed on American shores. Although he would always see himself as a missionary at heart, for the most part he became a Redemptorist parish priest.

He was like so many of the other good American parish priests, but there was something different about him, something unique, something special. Was it because he was like the people? Was it because he was one of them, talked like them, used their words, knew their first names? He

did the shopping, and even sat around at night telling stories.

He built gray gothic churches in the middle of their cities and coupled them with schools and halls, convents, and rectories. Since he dreamed big, his edifices were big, and rose like rockets from the streets of Manhattan, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, St. Louis, Brooklyn, Toronto, Houston, San Francisco, Miami, Winnipeg, and Edmonton.

In those places, he pointed his people to the golden tabernacle door and fed them daily with the Bread of Life. He held his mission cross high so they could gaze on such great redeeming love. He told them of the enfleshed God who became a baby for them, loved and died for them,

## The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand The final homily after our Coming Together Days at West End

John Collins' announced to us a few weeks ago - "Instead of a Province Picnic, let's have three 'Coming Together Days' in early July." In these past three days we here at West End

have announced to each other that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand for each of us. So here we were. Back together in person again. We talked, walked, laughed, prayed, told the same

old stories again, and almost forgot how good it is to be together.

The last few years could be divided in three stages.

*Coming Together Homily, continued on pg. 8*

STAGE ONE: Pre-pandemic years 2018, churches half empty, the Pandemic of SECULARISM had been in full sway – empty pews in our churches – the inactives – the NONES.

STAGE TWO: March 2020 – a complete lockdown, the ACTUAL PANDEMIC began. “Stay home, wear masks, practice social distancing.” Churches closed, dispensation from participation in Sunday Eucharist. No Funerals, few baptisms, work, and school done at home. No missions – convocations – picnics – No Province retreat.

STAGE THREE: Post pandemic - 2022 and onward. We are trying to return to some kind of NORMAL. We know that “NORMAL” will never exist again. We plead and pray that the folks become active again and the churches fill up.

As someone recently remarked “the Church has left the building.” 2019, 2020, 2021 have not been our favorite years. But we were together again during these days! Someone remarked: “Not many guys here”. But the reality is we don’t have as many as we used to.

At present we are 116 priests – 7 brothers in the Province.

All kinds of plaudits and thanks and applause have been handed out to FIRST RESPONDERS – people who got us through Covid 19 – the heroes – Doctors – Nurses – EMS, etc. The unmentioned and unnoticed heroes of the pandemic have been the priests. We need to congratulate the many C.Ss.R. rectors and superiors and pastors of our Province who kept us alive and well during these awful years.

Any Rector, Pastor, Provincial here today can tell us stories of all the

blood, sweat, tears, and worries that kept them awake at night and kept us afloat. It’s not a picnic to be in charge during ordinary normal years. Their work has been heroic, and we should never stop thanking them.

What priests in general had to endure can be seen in several areas:

1. Since the clergy abuse issue, all priests were looked at with suspicion. It’s been a difficult time for priests but we as C.Ss.R. priests have weathered the challenge of negative publicity, financial fallout, and diminishing vocations by our continual steadfast service to the Church and God’s people.

2. Despite the decrease in parishioners’ attendance – the lockouts, the closings and clusterings – we Redemptorists have constantly worked with staff, catechists, and parents in finding ways of evangelizing. During these years we as a Province courageously and creatively responded with new technology. We videoed missions, novenas, triduum, and Sunday homilies. We made the Redeemer well known – His Mother too – along with Alphonsus, Gerard, Clement, and Neumann. Our daily podcasts continued each day by our reaching into the hearts and homes.

3. The new asceticism for priests has been in the number of virtual meetings we have had to attend. We have been patient and generous with our time in this area. “ZOOM is busting out all over.”

4. The drop in parish collections and the mounting administration requirements priests have had to deal with although not trained as administrators or financial planners. Our pastors, rectors, and priests have done a tremendous job navigating

through the challenges of Covid-19.

5. The change in the approach to marriage. Most couples who come to get married are already living together and not participating in the life of the church. Nevertheless, we priests have tried to prepare these couples with pastoral sensitivity and an opportunity for evangelization.

6. The challenge of fewer priests available and doing the same amount of work. 75% of laity did not experience the impact of fewer priests available to serve. The impact was felt mainly by the priest himself.

7. We priests have had to face many cultural issues: abortion, what marriage is, transgender issues, immigration, race relations, a divided and polarized country, and the volatile nature of things. Despite all this, each of us has uplifted an incredible number of people through our homilies, feeding them with Eucharist. We comforted them with visits and anointings, consoled them in their losses, encouraged them in their desolation and suffering. We have been an instrument of grace and forgiveness, offered help to the needy. We Redemptorists found ways to live-stream Masses and celebrate parking-lot liturgies. We found ways to hear confessions – ways to do smaller funerals – ways to reach out to those in need of anointing. We found ways to open our parishes and invite people back to full participation. We priests were not perfect but despite all the challenges, we have remained committed, generous, and faithful, and have done tremendous ministry day after day.

So we are heroes of the pandemic, too. It’s been good to be back together again.



## Coming Together Homily, Continued

In conclusion I paraphrase Oscar Hammerstein II lyrics from the musical Carousel:

“This was a real nice CONFRERE BREAK

We’re mighty glad we came  
The vittles we et were good you bet  
The company was the same  
Our hearts are warm – our spirits are full  
And we are feeling fine

We had a real nice CONFRERE BREAK  
And we’re all mighty glad we came.”

*John Mc Gowan, C.Ss.R*

## Updates from St. Peter the Apostle, Philadelphia, PA

The director of religious education at St. Peter the Apostle in Philadelphia, Sr. Carmen Torres, embarked upon a leadership role for her community’s general council. She was given the parish’s blessing on June 26. Fr. Richard Bennett, C.Ss.R., acknowledged her work here at the 9:30 a.m. Mass and there was small reception for her afterward. She will continue to volunteer with the RCIA process.

*Patrick Hayes, Archivist*



## Updates from Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Brooklyn, NY

On June 24, The Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Brooklyn, NY held a procession in honor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. It started around 7 p.m. in front of the Basilica and ended there after walking around six blocks of the parish.

*Karl Esker, C.Ss.R.*





## Ordination of Brian Vaccaro, C.Ss.R.



Many C.Ss.R. priests came to concelebrate the ordination - one of the first major events since Covid.



The ordaining Bishop was the Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge, Bishop of the Diocese of Arlington.



Fr. Brian Vaccaro distributing communion to his mother, pictured above.



## Ordination of Brian Vaccaro, C.Ss.R.

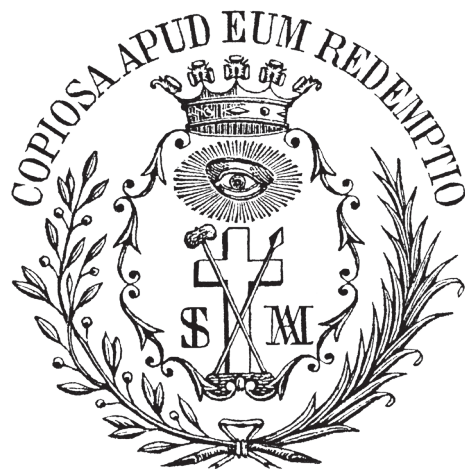


“I want to be one of God’s holy priests. One who brings the Good News of Jesus to our world; one that helps people to deepen their relationship with God; and one that helps people to experience God’s love, mercy, and concern for them in their lives. As a Redemptorist, I will do this in a unique way in my ministry among the poor and most abandoned of our world.” - Brian Vaccaro, C.Ss.R.

Pictured below: Brian Vaccaro, is the third member of his family to become a priest, joining Fr. Christopher Vaccaro and Fr. Stephen Vaccaro, priests of the Diocese of Arlington.







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