

The Present Moment

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January 2007

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FROM THE EDITORS ...



by *Raymonde Jetté and Fernand Turgeon*

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to bring you this 2007 edition of *The Present Moment*. Each new edition gives us a glimpse of the Voluntas Dei members who work in many different areas throughout the world, with only our apostolic objective in mind: to “Create Peace and Brotherhood in Jesus Christ.” In this way, we continue to inject “the power of the evangelical counsels into the human and temporal values.”

In this issue you will find an article from the United States District-in-Formation. And you will also have a report of the visits made by Jacques Harvey and Michael Craig.

The year 2007 will note the following events:

- ♦ The 70th anniversary of ordination of our Founder, Father Louis-Marie Parent, O.M.I.
- ♦ The 60th anniversary of Pope Pius XII’s encyclical *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, officially creating secular institutes in the Church. A

symposium will be held in Rome on February 1, 2, and 3, to mark the event. Father François Hamel will attend as a member of the World Council of Secular Institutes executive (2004-2008).

- ♦ The 55th anniversary of foundation of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate.

We are en route to the 50th anniversary of foundation of our Institute (1958-2008), and in 2008 (June 15-22) will be held the International Eucharistic Congress. The Congress theme is *The Eucharist, God’s Gift to Man*. This great event will take place in Québec City which will be celebrating its 400th anniversary.

We thank all those who have collaborated in the production of the present issue of *The Present Moment*. We hope you enjoy it! ⚙

The Present Moment

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FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

Between a loud-mouth and a prophet ...

by *François Hamel*



Whenever I am asked to explain what is a secular institute I refer to the fact of secular consecration as it is rooted in baptismal consecration. We – members of the Voluntas Dei Secular Institute – are familiar with this consecration by vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience lived in the midst of the world’s realities. However, I always make it a point to indicate the close link between secular consecration and our prophetic calling. By anointing the newly baptized with holy chrism, the minister of baptism welcomes us among a royal, priestly, and prophetic people.

Throughout the history of the Church each period stressed one or another of these aspects. It seems to me that consecration in the midst of the world leads me to develop my relationship with the world as a prophetic one.

There have been several prophets in sacred history, the greatest of whom is Jesus. His way of living challenges me, as a secular consecrated person. Jesus never imposed himself on his contemporaries, but because of his relationship with the Father, he left his mark. He chose to convince rather than constrain others. He left everyone totally free. He urged the sinful woman not to sin anymore, and he invited the rich young man to make himself poor. He restored their lost dignity to those who approached him.

I believe that secular consecration is a love story: love of God and love of the men and women who surround us. In our daily lives, like Jesus we attend weddings, we share meals with our friends, we work

together, and we share with one another. If I take my prophetic role seriously, I must look at the world as it really is, with its good and bad sides, and not look at it as I would like it to be. I live in the midst of the world, and I must denounce everything that seems to be contrary to God’s project.

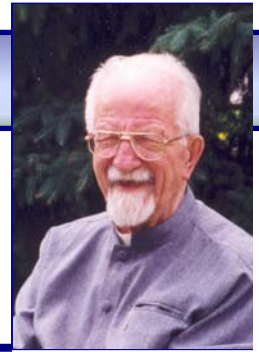
We Voluntas Dei have the basic values given to us by our Founder, Father Louis-Marie Parent. These values are the spirituality of the Three Fives, team life, having a positive attitude, the present moment,

and Christian contacts. Being positive helps me view today’s world not only as a battleground or a heap of ruins, but also and especially as a building site, that of the Kingdom of God present among us each time I employ the

verb TO LOVE in the present tense. The world needs credible witnesses, and a real prophet is the one who chooses to make his action fit his word.

As a member of a secular Institute, I want to deepen my understand of what it means to be a prophet, to be prophetic. In several places I run the risk of disturbing those around me because I denounce what is contrary to the Gospel message. Like Jesus, however, my aim is not to force others, and I do not want to manipulate others in any way, whether in my professional, priestly, or social life, and even less so in my fraternal life with the other members of the Institute. I do not want to force myself on others. My only way of imposing on others is through the wisdom of my actions and words, rooted as they are in meditation, mental prayer, and fraternal meetings with others. We should be able to see the difference between a loud-mouth and a prophet! ✨

“It seems to me that consecration in the midst of the world leads me to develop my relationship with the world as a prophetic one.”



The team

by Father Louis-Marie Parent, o.m.i.

It is an easy thing to form a team, but living in a team is difficult. As soon as we accept others into our lives, we must accept the humility of sharing with others, as well as respect for the personalities of our teammates, which invites us to love our neighbours with their limits and their shortcomings. It is an instinctive thing in all of us, we all want the team, we accept help from others, but everyone would have to be an angel, not to have anything to apologize for, to endure, and to forgive. The team would be more acceptable to us if all we only had to receive, and if the teammates did everything in their power not to disturb our peace and quiet.

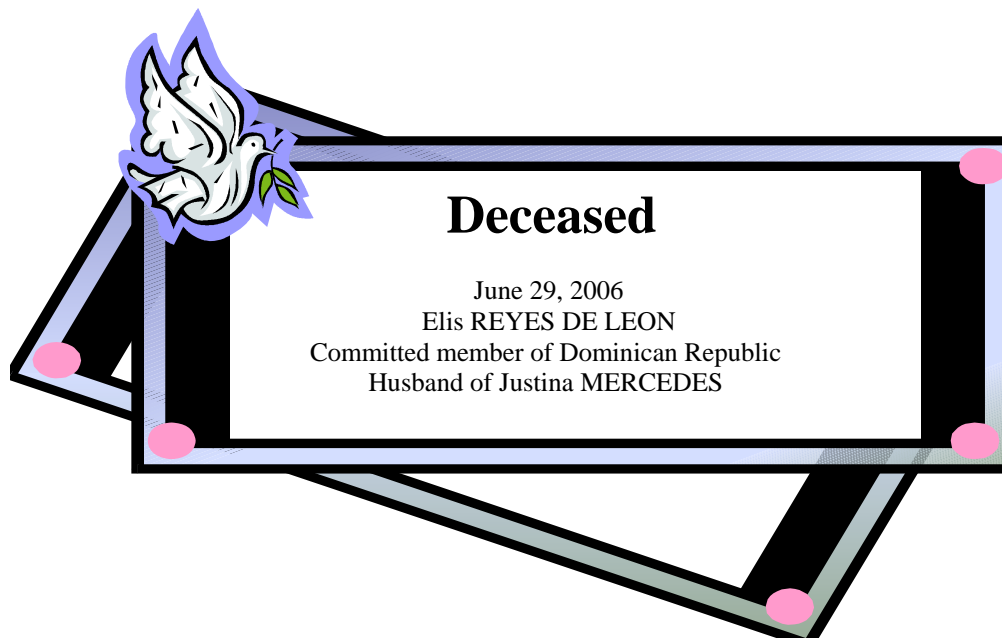
The team is alive to the extent that its members know its guiding principles, its responsibilities, and the effort required, keeping in mind all the time that all must unite for the common good.

Christians must more and more study the requirements of the first commandment of God:

“Love God and your neighbour.” In order to love God we must create a wide space in our hearts for the lovable neighbour as well as for the one who is unpredictable or malicious. As Christians we give others the right to settle in comfortably in us. We must accept this principle, otherwise our efforts in life will focus on craftily running away from problems and fleeing from those who create them.

To be a true team member we must love those who are with us, we must work with enthusiasm, double our generosity and forget ourselves. In other words, we must believe in a common objective which cannot be reached by ourselves alone, but which is within the grasp of a united team. Christ did not want to save the world all by himself, he wanted to be helped by a team of apostles and of an entire Church. ✿

From: *Le Père nous parle...*, vol. IX, No. 4, p. 41; No. 5, p. 57; No. 7, p. 82.



NEWS FROM HERE AND THERE

by Raymonde Jetté and Fernand Turgeon



Central Council

Members of the central council held their plenary meeting in July. At this time Bishop Louis Ling Mangkhanekhoun was visiting in Canada. Bishop Ling is a member of the Voluntas Dei Institute and vicar apostolic of Paksé, Laos. The council seized the occasion of Bishop Ling's visit to offer him a pastoral ring and a pectoral cross. This past August, Bishop Ling was invited as a guest of the United States District in Formation, to attend its annual congress.



Fr. George F. Hazler – Bishop Louis-Marie Ling

Visits of the Director General, François Hamel, to India, Sri Lanka, and Laos, from January 6 to February 14, 2006.

Visit to India, where the Institute has 201 members. François first met with Father Joseph Thannikot, regional director, and his council.

In the days following, he had other meetings:

Meeting with George Majo, dean of students at Bethel, and the minor seminarians.

Eucharistic celebration presided by Bishop Joseph, during which celebration stability was given to three members.

Meeting with Mr. Ambrose Sessaian, a member of the council. He talks about the history of the India Region.

Meeting with the team at Rameswaran; the team includes ten couples.

Meeting with Fr. Sengol, parish priest in the diocese of Bangalore. He works with the *dadit*, a caste of the "untouchables" in India.

A visit to the 14 students at the Pastoral Orientation Centre.

The last day in India was spent meeting with the teams of the Thiruvananthapuram Sector.

Visit to Sri Lanka, where the Institute has 100 members:

The director general's visit to Sri Lanka is reported in Fr. Lloyd Shanthikumar's article, on page 9 of this journal.

Visit to Laos

In Laos we have only one member: all strangers were expelled from the country in 1975. Louis Ling Mangkhanekhoun is vicar apostolic of Paksé. With Louis are Father Antoine and five young men who are considering becoming priests... perhaps members of the Institute? A young Laotian is presently in formation in Sri Lanka, with the members of the Institute.

Visit of Father Jacques Harvey, director of the Vocation and Mission Office, to Cameroon and Congo Kinshasa, from November 22 to December 8, 2005.

Visit to Cameroon

Jacques visited there to meet prospective candidates to the Institute and the local animators who are supporting them. Upon his arrival at Douala, he was met by Benjamin Mouzon, an aspirant in the Institute since 2005.

Bishop Bala of Bafia is favourable to the establishment of the Institute in his diocese. According to him there should be someone already formed, to supervise the formation of candidates to the Institute. Two seminarians have been accepted as aspirants.

Visit to Congo-Kinshasa

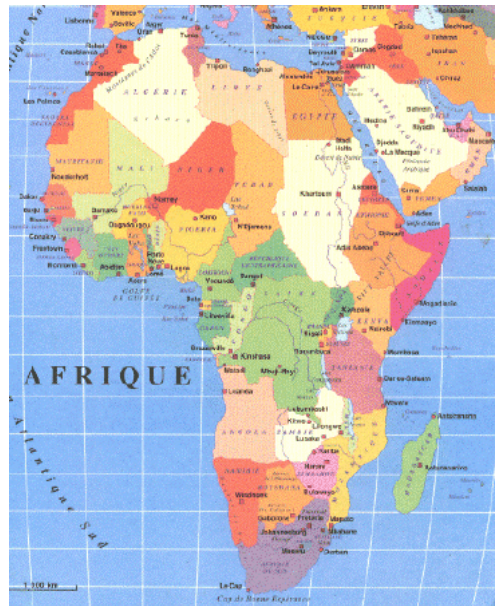
In the Congo it is a priest, Father Blaise Ngolo, who ensures the member formation. Father Blaise has the true *Voluntas Dei* spirit. Formation of the young adults has been undertaken, and that of couples will shortly begin. Cardinal Etsou of the archdiocese of Kinshasa appreciates Father Blaise's work for the Institute.

Visit of Father Michael Craig, general councillor, to Ethiopia and Uganda, from January 27 to 31, 2006.

Visit to Uganda

Michael visited the Kampala team of eighteen members who meet together every week to study the

spirituality of the Institute with the local animator, Father Kato. The team is composed of two celibate laymen and eight couples. Michael points out the strong involvement of the members in their parish communities. These modest people built their village church with their own hands, and are very involved in the liturgy. According to Michael, the Institute's spirituality as lived by them and their involvement indicate that the Institute has a good potential for growth in service to the Church of Uganda.



Visit to Ethiopia

Michael was greeted by Bishop Beran-Yesus of Addis Ababa, who is extremely satisfied with the Institute's presence in Ethiopia. The local animator is Terfa Dinka. The first team was formed in 2004 and meets weekly to pray and reflect on the Institute's spirituality. Besides, with the Volunteers of god, the members of the Institute look after abandoned elderly people: they visit the sick and bring them communion.

A second team has been in existence since 2005, in the western part of the country. It is composed of nine couples, all of them catechists. A third team was formed in October, 2005, in the southern part of the country: the team comprises ten couples, all of them catechists or teachers.

The Institute has been warmly and enthusiastically welcomed, in Ethiopia. The *Voluntas Dei* group is acknowledged by other religious groups and missionaries.

Reports of the visits of Fathers François Hamel, Jacques Harvey, and Michael Craig are published in abbreviated form on the Institute's website: <http://www.voluntasdei.org/>

Colombia

During the year the members of the Region studied the formation guides. They are always most appreciative of the writings of our Founder, Father Parent.

Participation in the retreats and team meetings was excellent. These get-togethers help the members progress on their daily walk in the Voluntas Dei spirituality. They continued this year to promote vocations.

The Colombia Region would like to work on the following project: spreading the Voluntas Dei

spirituality on the Internet. Promotion of our website could be made through parish bulletins or by sending the information to the dioceses of our country.

Haiti

Having completed his studies in the Dominican Republic, Jean-Marie Luc was ordained to the priesthood last spring.

Dominican Republic

Several members of Altagracia District have received their stability.



Canada

During 2005-2006 the Canadian District worked at highlighting the role of sector animators. Meeting in November 2005, the sector animators reflected together on their role according to the Constitutions and the formation objectives according to the Canadian District statutes. Sector animators have the responsibility of providing for formation and ongoing formation at the different stages of formation, that is, of aspirancy, probation, vows or commitments. As each member is called to evaluate him-herself, the sector animator supports the member in this undertaking and judges whether the latter has sufficiently assimilated the contents of the guide, and its implication in his/her daily life.

The main project for 2007 is the Canadian District Assembly to be held from May 17 to May 21, 2007, in Québec City. All the pertinent committees have already been formed, and the council chose the following as the Assembly meeting: "Living the Reality of the Present Moment... in Hope." During 2006-2006 every member will be called on to contribute to this Assembly through prayer and reflection.

Justice, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Spirit! (Rm. 14:17)

André Côté
Director, Canadian District

Chile

The Chile Region continues to grow each day in the Voluntas Dei way of life. The 2006 National Meeting was held in La Serena, the town where the country's most northerly team is located.

At the meeting we experienced wonderful moments of fellowship, happy to be together. Nearly everyone from all over the country was there: from Chilian, Linares, Santiago, Voña del Mar, and La Serena. The theme of the meeting was "Vocation and Mission." We studied together the challenge of being, through our consecration, a presence of God in the midst of the world. We want to live like the Virgin of the Annunciation by being an instrument of Christ and by keeping our hearts open to the will of God.

At this meeting which took place March 25, we joyfully celebrated the diaconate ordination of Marcos Alejandro Guerra Romero, who had just completed his seminary studies. His sense of belonging to the Institute is marked with docility to the Holy Spirit to walk in the presence of God and do His will. He is a man of service who go to others with joy and enthusiasm. His priestly ordination is planned for sometime in the coming months.

In our region we are blessed to have new priestly vocations. Three young men – from Rancagua, Andacollo, and Coquimbo – have applied for aspirancy, after becoming acquainted with our Institute and spirituality.

The young men are Manuel Lizana, Mario Araya, and Jimmy Veliz. Their coming brings with it the challenge of having a *Voluntas Dei* house of formation. Consideration of this is made in a prayerful spirit. We are seriously contemplating the project.

Our region would like to become more and more autonomous, and it works at finding and developing new vocations. We want to live the 5-5-5 as well as our consecration in the midst of the world.

We remain united to the entire Institute throughout the world, and we hope that all of our members' projects be a faithful reflection of the will of God, and that it be a source of our personal sanctification and allow us to sanctify the world today.

Fr. Manuel Cornejo
Director of the region

India

The dawn of the year 2005-2006 was a precious moment for India Region, as on the re-opening day itself, the results for the Plus II examinations were available telling us that all the 9 students who appeared from our Bethel have successfully come out with one Distinction and 5 First Classes.

Rev. Msgr. George Paul, the Episcopal Vicar of Trivandrum Archdiocese, celebrated the Foundation Day of the Institute with Holy Mass in the absence of His Grace Most Rev. Dr. M. Soosipakiam. Our Region was blessed during the year with the visit of our General during January 2006. The visit of Very Rev. Fr. Dunstan helped us to prepare for the visit of Father General. Three of our seminarians could receive Stability during the year, that too two at the hands of our Father General. Br. Innasi Mudiappan received the Holy Orders of Diaconate and Priesthood during the year.

Four different classes were conducted for the benefit of married couples with eminent personalities both priests and lay persons on family matters. The construction work at Vellarappilly is progressing and the ground floor of the building will be ready for occupation in one or two months. The construction once completed, at least two batches of major seminarians could be shifted to the new building. The construction is being financed by the bank loan floated, which could be repaid with the financial help we expect from Germany and other helping agencies. During the year under report we had 12 new candidates. With ordination of Innasi Mudiappan and Antony Rebello, the Region is marching towards self-sufficiency in the matter of priests.

We expect 5-6 more ordinations during 2006-2007 and hereafter, we would be having ordinations every year. Thanks to the timely guidance and financial help extended by various agencies, the Central Administration and other friendly regions like Dominican Republic, Sri Lanka, etc.

Ambrose Sesaian
Regional Councillor - India

Sri Lanka

The Sri Lanka Region consists of three sectors – Colombo, Jaffna and Mannar.

The strength of the region is 93 – Stability 22, Vows 06, Commitment 36, Probation 15, Aspirancy 14.

François Hamel, the director general visited Sri Lanka Region from January 21 to February 04, 2006. During his visit, he met all the members in their respective Sectors, the major seminarians and the Bishops Jaffna, Mannar and Kandy, and the Archbishop and the Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo. The director general, while addressing the members, emphasized on the nature of our vows of obedience and poverty. He urged the members to contribute financially in a possible manner towards the formation of the seminarians. He explained about the administrative stage, district-in-formation, and invited the members to consider becoming a district-in-formation.

During his visit, François Hamel, the director general, visited the damaged house of the Voluntas Dei and the adjoining parish church, which is dedicated to Our Lady of Velankanni at Muhamalai, with the permission of the Sri Lanka Army; he was able to obtain the damaged statue of Our Lady of Velankanni and the Altar Stone. The Altar Stone is handed over to the Sector Animator, Jaffna. The director general had a special intention for the statue. He wanted to bring the statue to the central house and place it in the chapel of the central house and to request everyone visiting the central house to pray for peace in Sri Lanka; He promised that the statue will be sent back to Muhamalai once peace is restored in Sri Lanka. Hence, the director general requested Dunstan to bring the statue of Our Lady of Velankanni to the central house when he goes there for the central council meeting.

Pierre Marois visited Sri Lanka together with François Hamel from January 21 to February 4, 2006.

The Voluntas Dei Seminary, Ampitiya was opened by Fr. François Hamel, the director general and was blessed by Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Vianney Fernando, the bishop of Kandy on January 27, 2006.

S. Anton Mariathas is assigned as an assistant pastor at St. Lucia's cathedral, Colombo 13.

The Voluntas Dei minor seminary and the regional office at Kochchikade were moved to a place of our own on March 01, 2006.

The statutes for the Sri Lanka region, directory 2006 for Sri Lanka region and the Voluntas manuel (prayer book) for the minor seminarians were printed and distributed to the members.

The country is experiencing the escalation of violence and violations of the Cease Fire Agreement from both parties on the wider scale. It all began with some sporadic incidents; now it is growing into what could be called supposedly a war between the Government and LTTE. Explosions of claymore mines are a daily event; shooting, bombing, shelling are becoming almost frequent exercise; several people are kidnapped and some others are missing. The people from the vulnerable areas fled permanently or take temporary shelter in what they consider safer place; they leave their homes, especially at night and take refuge in the nearby churches.

The families of the Voluntas members too are affected by this recent incidents. All our members in Jaffna and Mannar sectors, and to a certain extent, in Colombo sector live in stress and tension.

The family of the niece of Fr. L. Sebastian Croos, was brutally murdered by unidentified gunmen on June 7, 2006 night; the incident came to be known by the villagers on the following day early morning. The murdered family consists of father, mother and two children of 9 and 7 years old. The father and the two children were stabbed in different parts of the body and were hung; the mother was raped and stabbed to death. This was informed to all the IVD members in Sri Lanka and to the director general. The Voluntas in Sri Lanka express our sympathies and condolences to the bereaved family members of Fr. L. Sebastian Croos and assure them of our continued prayers for all their dear intentions.

In addition to this, there was an early morning attack on the Navy in Pesalai, Mannar, supposedly by the LTTE; this, according to the government was repulsed causing heavy loss and casualties to the LTTE. In this exercise, the Government Forces began to bomb and use the artillery shelling. The villagers had to flee their homes and took shelter in their parish church, Our Lady of Victories, a new church blessed last year. Unfortunately, a hand grenade was flung into the church killing some and injuring several civilians. People are scared to stay in their homes and take shelter in their parish church. This is registered in this Annual Report as some of our members, married couples, live in Pesalai. On inquiry from Pesalai, I learn that no Voluntas member is physically injured, though they all live in tension take refuge in their parish church.

We commend all our members and the citizens of Sri Lanka to your prayers. ✿

A.R. Lloyd Shanthikumar
Regional Director ~ Sri Lanka

Ordinations ~ priesthood

Guillaume MABILU M. LADISA ~ Haïti

Lycius LECLERC ~ Haïti

April 22, 2006

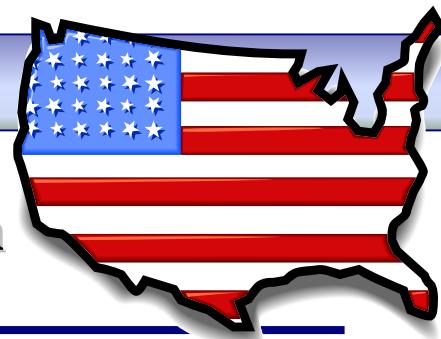
Mudiyappan INNASI ~ India

April 23, 2006

Jean-Marie LUC ~ Haïti

June 17, 2006





History of the United States Region

The Institute was known in the United States by 1959. The first American to join the Institute at “La Salette” (Trois-Rivières) was William M. Sheehan of Boston, who remained with us 2-3 years.

The first Americans to join as extern members were three priests from Cleveland, Ohio, among whom were Fathers John Connor and Norbert Duda. They joined in 1959.

Leo Grégoire, from Massachusetts, joined the Institute at La Salette in September of 1960. In 1961, William McGowan from New Jersey also came. David Simpson came that year from Cleveland to begin his studies; he went on to do his theology at

St. Paul Seminary in Ottawa. That same year the Institute welcomed Philip Oliver from Rhode Island as a layman in the Institute. Phil would go on to serve on Father Parent’s first central council.

Around 1962 Alfred Irving came to the Institute from Rhode Island, to study for the priesthood. He was ordained in 1971; he has since left the Institute and is now a priest in the diocese of Portland, Maine.

Thomas Furlong, an American from Massachusetts teaching and working in Montréal, joined the Institute in 1972. ✨

Léo Grégoire

Here is the history of the Institute in the USA prior to 1991. Having had experience of secular institutes in Holland and England during the 1970s and having been driven by the creativity of the post Vatican II era I felt called to make the vocation known and if possible to join an institute. My experience also included the fact that I had two uncles who were consecrated seculars. My kindly bishop, Patrick Casey of Brentwood, England gave me permission to come to Catholic University in Washington, DC to study social work with the specific intention that following my studies I would join a secular institute. He was a wise man and stressed that if I was to join an Institute I would need to have a profession.

To my surprise I could not locate an Institute in the USA. Through a friend I heard about *Voluntas Dei* and decided to investigate it further. I was encouraged by Fr. Tom Furlong to join the English team in Montreal. I began to travel up and down to Montreal and became friends with a young seminarian who was also a member of the same team and was later to become the Father General, François

Hamel. It was always my expressed intention to bring the Institute to the United States. At various times there had been individuals from the institute living in the United States but no one had initiated a foundation here. From late 1984 through 1985 I continued the exploration of the Institute and the potential of having a foundation in the USA. I remained a member of the Montreal team.

In early 1986 I was given permission to start a team in Maryland which was subsequently named the "Chesapeake Bay Team" So I started the Institute in the United States. Almost immediately Bill and Ruth McClellan joined the team and they are members to date. The Chesapeake Bay Team became the mother team from which the group in New Jersey and Michigan grew.

Because I was a member of the Montreal team, the foundation here in the USA remained, at least initially, under the direction of the Canadian District. Later when we became a region we were, according

to our constitutions, placed under the direction of the Central Council. I was later designated the region director by the Central Council and remained so until I was elected to the Canadian District Council at which point, George Hazler took my place.

Spreading the vocation of secular consecration, especially to the laity, has always been my goal. ✨

Michael Craig

United States Region ~ George F. Hazler

Interested priests and couples in the United States (Michigan and New Jersey) began to form as early as 1990-1991 through informal monthly meetings in Maryland with Rev. Michael Craig, I.V.Dei. Shortly thereafter these observers began to participate in the annual Summer Congress in Canada and after several meetings in Canada began to apply for Aspirancy. United States Members began to be accepted as Aspirants in 1990 and from these few humble beginnings we developed into a Region.

We are always most grateful for the support and encouragement received from the Directors of the Canadian District from the Directors General Mario Laroche, Yvon Carpentier, and presently François Hamel, and the members of the Central Council.

Prior to becoming a Region separate meetings were held in Michigan and New Jersey and then were later organized into semi-annual meetings between both groups and these meetings took place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania because of its central location between New Jersey and Michigan. Because of the duress and expense of traveling to Canada for the Summer Congress every year, the United States group petitioned the Director of the Canadian District and the Central Council to consider the possibility of forming a United States Region. In February of 1996 we were given a mandate to conduct a feasibility study by Fr. Yvon Carpentier, and the Central Council to determine if we were prepared to become a Region. Based on the very positive results of the mandate and with the support and encouragement of the Canadian District Director and the Director General, plans were made for the United States to become a Region.

Letter of Approval

In a letter dated June 18, 1998, the Reverend Yvon Carpentier, Director General of Voluntas Dei Institute announced the Canonical Erection of the United States Region which was to take effect August 15, 1998.

The Director General appointed Reverend George Hazler as the Region Director and Reverends Michael Craig and John O'Neill as Region Councillors. The first couple to be assigned to the Region Council was Mr. & Mrs. William McClellan. They were succeeded by Mr. & Mrs. John Buckman who are presently serving as members of the Region Council.

Canonical Erection of Region

On Saturday, August 15, 1998, the Solemn Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary at St. Mary's Abbey Retreat Center, Morristown, New Jersey the Voluntas Dei Institute was proclaimed a Region. The Mass was celebrated by The Most Reverend Nicholas A. DiMarzio, Auxiliary Bishop of Newark, New Jersey and present Bishop of the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York. During the Mass the Director and Councillors were officially installed. The ceremony was witnessed by members of the Central Council and members of the Canadian District.

Formation of Teams in the United States

From these humble beginnings and with the support of the leadership in this Region we have been able to move forward with the establishment of 6 teams: Chesapeake Bay Team, Delaware Bay Team, Jamaica Bay Team, Jersey Lakes Team, Jersey Shore Team and Morgan Run Team. We are in the process of considering an "internet" team for all those scattered throughout the United States who find themselves in temporary situations without a team. This is presently under consideration with the Region Council

Membership Statistics

Our membership includes 12 in Aspirancy; 5 in Probation; 3 in Vows; 14 in Commitments; 17 in Stability and 24 observers. All of us gather three times each year for our national meetings. The spring and fall meetings are held at the Newark Airport Marriott Hotel in Newark, New Jersey

because it is convenient for those traveling by plane and also those living on the East Coast of the United States. The Summer Congress for the United States has been held at Sacred Heart Retreat Center in Newton, New Jersey.

Situation of the United States

The social, political and economic situation in the United States is quite tenuous these days as the whole world is impacted with the fear of possible terror attacks. This certainly has a major influence on all strata of our society. Then again it varies across the United States. There are areas that presently claim an upturn in our economic status pertaining to jobs but this also fluctuates. Being a presidential election year for the United States, anything is possible. But there is always hope!

Relations with the Bishops

Based on the times and circumstances at which we need to interface with the hierarchy in our country it has always been a very positive and blessed experience. To be straightforward we have no problems with any of our bishops. In all circumstances they have been most gracious and also very cooperative. *(Personal note: Having been elected as the President of the United States Conference of Secular Institutes, I will have the privilege of attending the national bishops meetings. This will be an asset for Voluntas Dei giving me an opportunity to interface directly with the bishops.)*

Promotion of Vocations

Because of the size of the Region and the very involved ministries of our members, we cannot afford to have anyone in a full time position and so Fr. Andrew Sioleti of New York has graciously volunteered to serve as the Mission/Vocation person for our Region. We find that we are attracting all new members through personal contacts. I have not met anyone who came to Voluntas Dei because of a brochure. We have received contacts from our web site – this is the vocation literature of the present and future. At our national meeting in March of 2006, a young man who is a university professor came to our meeting because of reading about us on the web. This is where the young people are today. The web site with an attached email address is also a great reference for all those inquiring. We are also directly linked with the web site for the United States Conference of Secular Institutes.

Initial and Ongoing Formation

In November of 2003, we reorganized our approach to formation and also restructured our national meetings to reflect this reorganization. We now gather five hours prior to the official opening of the three national meetings to address the needs of formation. Facilitators have been appointed to address the Aspirants, those in probation, vows and commitments and all members pertaining to their particular level of formation in the Institute. We have adapted the guidelines provided to us by the Central Council. Reflection leaflets are continuously being prepared and distributed to the members to serve as topics and reflections for the team meetings and for personal meditation. **United States Region Statutes** were approved by the Central Council August 25, 2002.

New Committee Structure for Region

As we continue to grow it has become increasingly difficult for the Region Director to handle and coordinate all facets of life and responsibilities for the Region and so at the November, 2003 meeting we proposed a restructuring and it was accepted by all. This new committee structure will call all members to active involvement and responsibility for the projects and direction of the Institute. This will be a further step in enabling the Region to grow and to incorporate new members in a solid way.

The **Liturgy Committee** will have full responsibility to coordinate and prepare all liturgies and prayer services for the national gatherings of the Region. The **Mission/Vocation Committee** will assist the Mission/Vocation Director in all his duties and responsibilities.

The **Communications Committee** will now be responsible for the publication of TOGETHERNESS USA three times each year. They will also be responsible for establishing communication networks for the dissemination of important information.

The **Leaflet/Literature Committee** will create monthly leaflets for team meetings and also supply teams with other literature and suggestions for keeping the team meetings vibrant and meaningful. The committees will meet for one hour on the Saturday afternoon of our national gatherings. At the April meeting of the Central Council, the United States region was approved to become a District-in-Formation. ⚙

JURIDIC STATUS

Reverend Father François Hamel, Director General of the Secular Institute
Voluntas Dei,

Considering the evolution, in the course of the last years, of the process directed toward finding a new juridic status for the Region of United States of America (USA) that is more suitable to the present reality;

Considering the growing number of members in USA related to a good promotion of vocations;

Considering the vitality of the sectors and teams in USA;

Considering the hope of development and in a particular way taking into account the responsibility taken by Region of USA for a founding in Trinidad and Tobago;

Considering the capacity for self financing;

Considering also the capacity for self management of the present Council and the moral guarantees for the future;

After having consulted the members of the Central Council of the Secular Institute Voluntas Dei at the meeting of April 28-30, 2006, concerning the request of the Council of the Region of United States of America to acquire a new juridic status,

Decrees

THE CANONICAL ERECTION
Commencing August 5, 2006 of
THE DISTRICT IN FORMATION
OF UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (USA)

With all rights and privileges provided by the *Constitutions* (articles 201-204) of the Secular Institute Voluntas Dei.

Given at Philadelphia
August 5, 2006

François Hamel, I.V. Dei
Director general

Voluntas Formation in the U.S.A.

by John O'Neill



Four years ago, with the nomination of the present leadership for the U.S.A. Fr. George Hazler, District Director appointed me to be in charge of formation. It was a position I held previously and unofficially even prior to that. However, significant changes and improvements were also put in (even prior to my appointment). These included a wider network of formation leadership

- Aspirancy - Deacon Joel and Carol Livingston,
- Probation - Fr. Anthony Ciorra,
- Profession prior to stability - Fr. John Campoli,
- pre-aspirants - inquirers, Fr. Andrew Sioletti, and now our "St. Isidore Team" - Greg Kremer.

The wider spectrum of formation leadership ensures that there is greater input and shared wisdom while allowing for more personalized formation. At our three annual meetings for the entire U.S.A., all who are in formation come six hours earlier to meet with respective formation leaders. Topics are assigned prior to the meetings from the official formation literature of the Institute. The formation leaders do their best to see that candidates within the various stages understand not only intellectually, but even more, spiritually and personally, the material assigned for that stage of formation. Efforts are made to contact the persons assigned to the formation directors to facilitate individual formation.

At, the three annual meetings, all who are responsible for formation, meet to share concerns, questions, hopes, dreams, etc. Candidates are evaluated to help find positive means to support them, especially if there is some degree of difficulty. We continually explore better ways of facilitating formation. We report our findings to the District Council (thanks to the efforts of Carol Livingston)

The Formation Team is also responsible for planning the three annual meetings. Since these meetings are part of formation, we plan the topics and then select speakers. Fr. Ciorra has a wealth of information on speakers and we rely a great deal on his assistance and expertise. We continually strive to reflect on an aspect of our lives as members of a Secular Institute and then select speakers who can assist us in living out our consecrated secularity.

To provide for those who live distant from other members (Japan, mid-West, etc.) we have formed a "virtual" community (St. Isidore Team - St. Isidore is the patron of computers). While the goal is for each member to have a "real" community, we assign those who are not currently in a local team into the St. Isidore team. This team meets regularly on line to discuss the formation topics. (Greg Kremer, the team facilitator is a college professor who is an expert on computers along with Fr. Julian Gonzalez) They have been quite successful with this program in reaching out to those who are not geographically connected.

Mary Buckman of the Jersey Shore Team along with those who have assisted her have condensed a great deal of the material we received from Canada and put the topics into brief packets that can be discussed at local team meetings. This has made it possible for the whole of the U.S.A. to reflect on the same Voluntas material concurrently.

Fr. Art Candreva has a constant supply of the writings of Fr. Parent available and provides this material at our national meetings.

Our national meetings further receive the benefit of those who plan liturgies, provide for hospitality, greet people at airports, etc.

In addition we are working on ways to provide adequate formation for the affiliates who are members of our Voluntas family. MaryAnn Schoettly has provided great assistance in this regard. Affiliate Ruth Surak has been a long time member and as an archivist for our District has provided a wonderful history of our District through her collection of photographic albums which she displays at our national meetings.

Of course the work of Eileen and Marty Theys and Bob & Eleanor Surowiec are a constant blessing for keeping the lines of communication open to all members and observers. They work tirelessly behind the scenes and witness to the spirit of service while assisting in formation by the sharing of information. ✨

25 years of marriage

DE LA CRUZ GOMEZ, Diego/Emilia (Dominican Republic) ~ January 2, 1982
ANTONY EVERYSTUS, Everystus/Cicily (India) ~ March 20, 1982
ROMERO, Valentin/Ines (Dominican Republic) ~ March 25, 1982
LEONARD LAMBERT, Pathinathan/Sebastian (Sri Lanka) ~ May 22, 1982
THOMAS, Varghese/Aniet (India) ~ May 24, 1982

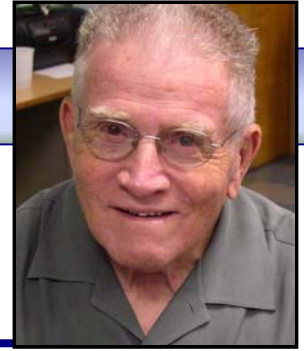
JOSEPH, Anithil/Vedamanickam (Sri Lanka) ~ May 29, 1982
ALBERT, Soosa Michael/Marie Anthonial (India) ~ June 10, 1982
JOSE, Emmanuel/Betsy (India) ~ June 10, 1982
SYLVAINCE, Joseph/Marie-Ossee (Haiti) ~ July 24, 1982
NAVARATNAM, Joseph/Anne (Sri Lanka) ~ August 23, 1982

WILSON O., Nadarajah/Daisy Jenova (Sri Lanka) ~ October 9, 1982
AMESTICA C., Pedro E./Rossanna de F. (Chile) ~ October 30, 1982
FRANCIS, Simon/Stella (India) ~ November 27, 1982
CORNELIO, Francisco/Victoriana (Dom. Rep.) ~ December 12, 1982

Congratulations!

His vocation: the Church and the Theatre

by *Father Malachy Higgiston*



Malachy lives in Cherry Hill, New Jersey and is part of the Delaware Bay Team. He has achieved Stability in the Voluntas Dei Institute. He has a B.A. from Catholic University and an M.A. from New York University. His ministry involves weekend Mass at St. Thomas More in Manalapan, New Jersey, spiritual direction in Cursillos in Trenton and Camden Dioceses, weekend retreats and days of recollection. He is also involved in a puppet ministry.

Asked about his vocation, he will tell you it has two avenues: the Church and the theatre. The call to the Church falls into three distinct events:

- 1) The morning after emergency appendectomy when he was 15 years old, a teacher told him “God spared you for something. It will be your business to find out what”. At that time, he became involved with the lay apostolate, the Young Christian Workers (YCW). The method was an important milestone: SEE—JUDGE—ACT. The Voluntas Dei method: I OBSERVE-- I EVALUATE--I COMMIT, echoed the same thing 50 years later and clinched his decision to apply for Aspirancy in the Institute.
- 2) The second vocation call was on the ship leaving Ireland for the U.S.A. A subliminal image crossed his mind as he watched the receding Irish coastline. The message was that he would be a priest when he returned to Ireland.
- 3) The third event happened a year later. Coming from Sunday Mass, he got a copy of the OSV. In the ad section, in bold-faced print, it said

“PRIESTS WANTED”. He answered that ad that afternoon. Since then he has considered himself a mail-order priest. He was ordained for the Salvatorian Fathers on December 8, 1956.

He taught English at Mother of the Savior Seminary, Blackwood, New Jersey for seven years. It was during this period that the theatre came to abundant flowering. He produced and directed *The Passion of the Savior* (11 performances annually). The students nicknamed him Cecil B. de Malachy.

Malachy opted to join the Army as a Chaplain and found himself in Vietnam in May 1967. Following this and a stint in Alaska, he was assigned to Germany. His ministry was the soldier and his family. The great thing about the Army Chaplaincy is that a priest can really specify his ministry. It was in Germany that he produced and directed a whole slew of musicals.

He describes himself as Philippians 4:4. The joy of the Gospel is a compelling strain in his spiritual journey. His imagination is an accompanying feature of this, since he always feels a need to tell a story, or dramatize scripture. In contrast, this is offset by the need to be alone and away from the crowd. He feels that there is a delight in being with our Lord for no reason, other than to enjoy the intimacy, to praise him and to hang around together.

His favorite saint is Ignatius of Loyola and to quote him: “He would view with everything in it being ordered to the greater glory of God. His spiritual diary lets you look inside his heart and in his most intimate dealing with God, his imagination—this guy is a challenge.

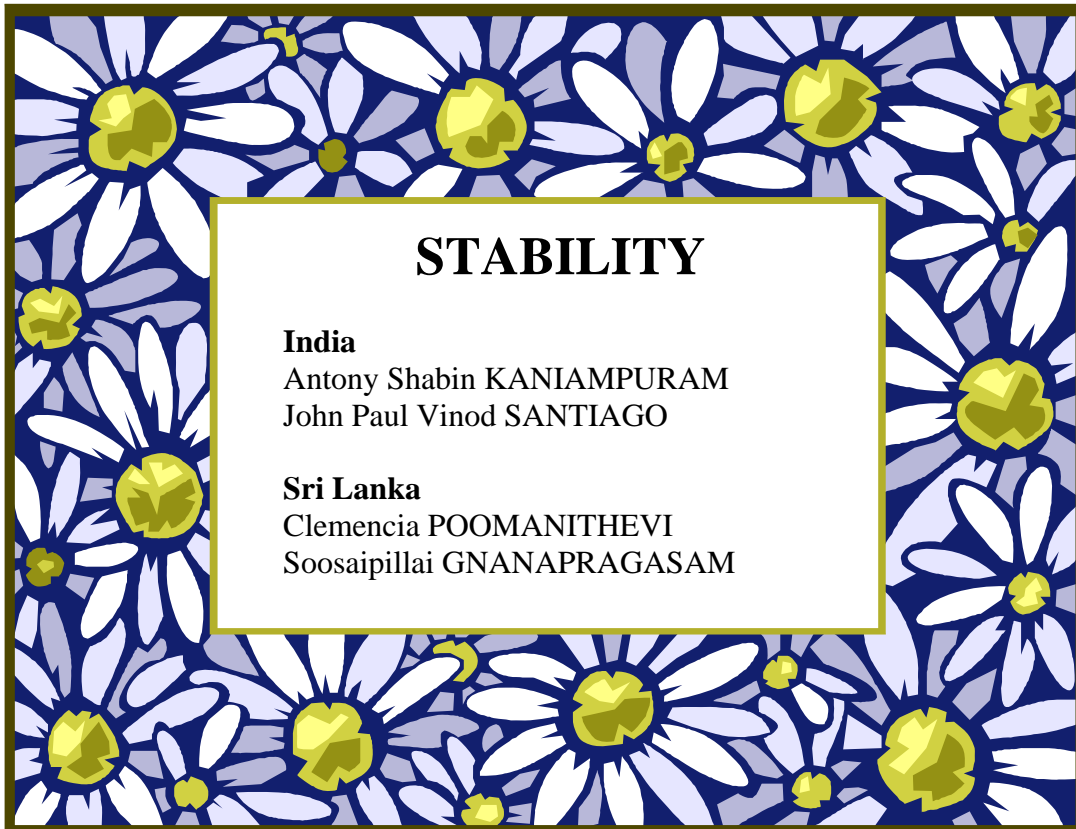
Some of his closest moments to God have been as a very young altar boy, member of the young Christian Workers and the Cursillo encounter with Jesus.

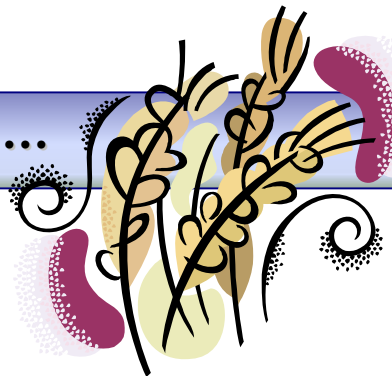
Malachi's favorite Biblical quotes are Philippians 4:4, Philippians 2 and Deuteronomy 30:11-14. Books that he would recommend are: *The Four Loves* by C. S. Lewis, *The Long Loneliness* by Dorothy Day, *The Year of the French* by Thomas Flanagan and *Any and All* by Thomas Merton.

Malachy first heard of Voluntas Dei when Gerard Steffener told him about a meeting in Baltimore, with a former Paulist, about secular institutes. Several Salvatorians were invited, and he asked to be invited too, in order to get information for John Campoli. During the meeting, he became very conscious of the Team and the method of sharing. Both of these took him back to his YCW days. He felt he had come full circle.

Voluntas Dei has brought together several disparate elements in his spiritual life. The YCW in his late teens and early twenties (which really propelled him into the priesthood); the Salvatorians and the Cursillo (a watershed in his spiritual journey)—all these came together for him in the charism and the three-fives of Voluntas Dei. The next step was to embrace it and begin living a consecrated life in the world.

The Voluntas Dei roots Malachy in God's presence. He expresses himself this way; "it calls us into being like the Virgin of the Annunciation. It makes us aware of our critical hang-ups. It turns us away from self towards others in an attitude of peace. It summons us to the Eucharist and to sharing intimacy with Christ in the tabernacle. It encourages our perusal of the Word and prayerful reflection. And, to make sure we are aware of our mother, it bestows on us her rosary. Now, what else do we need?" ✿





St. Isidore Team ~ by Greg Kremer



The St. Isidore team is needed for our geographically large and rapidly growing region, to keep isolated members connected and to immediately connect with new members. For illustration, let me describe a recent team meeting. About a week before the meeting, the organizer (Greg, from Athens Ohio) sends out the Lesson for the month via email, along with a reminder to log in to Yahoo Messenger at 8PM EST on the first Monday of the month. At the meeting time, the organizer initiates a voice conference (like a telephone conference call, but free) and invites all members to join the conference. Sitting at their computers, long-time members like Julian (from Miami Florida) and John (from Tokyo Japan) join in, though for John it is actually Tuesday morning due to the time shift. We listen to each other through our computer speakers and when we want to talk we click on the "talk" button in the Yahoo Messenger window and speak into our computer microphone. Tim (from Colorado Springs, Colorado) also joins in but is in the process of developing a new team. He prefers to listen and occasionally type in a well thought out response or comment in the text message box. Others joining in

The St. Isidore team is unique in many ways, but we believe it is an authentic and Spirit-led response to our times. Instead of team members living close together and meeting in person, the team members are far apart and meet via a voice conference on the Internet. Instead of a permanent team, the St. Isidore team is more like a halfway house, accepting and nurturing those without a "home team" until they can establish a local team. The three-times-a-year national *Voluntas Dei USA* meetings are especially important for the St. Isidore team, for building personal relationships and putting faces to the names and voices of any new members who will be joining us for our voice conference meetings.

include Gladys (an associate member who is temporarily living in Illinois) and several observers (Ben, an Indian priest currently stationed in Chicago Illinois, and Bill, pastor of a parish near Webster, Massachusetts.) After sharing greetings and stories of the spring weather in our various locations, we take turns reading passages from the lesson on "criticism and complaint", pausing to discuss and share stories and perspectives. After an hour or so of prayer and discussion, we sign off and return to our jobs, our ministries and our lives.

Although we are unconventional, the Spirit seems to be moving in our region and in our team, and the transitional nature of our team seems to be working. For example, Julian, the former organizer of the St. Isidore team, may eventually leave us since he is now the leader of a new team starting up in Florida. In a fraternal spirit, we plan to continue to use the best available technology to improve our ability to communicate over long distances and keep the isolated members of our growing region connected to team life. ✨

Biscayne Bay Team

In keeping with the tradition of the USA teams we are using the theme of a local body of water for a team name. Since we are very new as a team we have not finalized our name but it looks as if we might be the Biscayne Bay team. Two members came over from the St. Isidore team and three members are relatively new to the Institute. Currently the team consists of two clerics, one single layman and a married couple. We have had others express interest in the life of the Voluntas and we are always seeking new members.

All the members of the team are very involved in their parish communities and the two priests are also very involved in ministry. One priest, Julián González, teaches Spanish and Theology in a Marist High School. On weekends he helps out in two parishes and also helps out in local parishes with confessional ministry. The other cleric, Emilio Rosolen is very involved in the ministry of healing and counseling to those who are very ill. Fr. Emilio is also very involved in parish ministry on weekends. Both clerics are also involved in the care of their elderly parents.

The other three members of the team are young retired members who are still very active in their

parishes. Several are members of their parish counsels and do many and varied forms of ministry in their parishes. The married couple are Frank and Rose Litwin and the single member is a long time member of the Institute in the US- Robert Boris. The diverse backgrounds of the three lay members add some very rich dimensions to our discussions and fraternal life. One very distinctive mark of our team is that we enjoy each others company and when we meet it is as if we were just speaking to each other the day before.

We have been meeting once a month in the homes of the various members. Four members live a little closer to each other but one member comes from a little farther away. We are very fortunate in that we are fairly computer literate and find communicating across the distance easily bridged by phone and e-mail. One member is a co-founder of the St. Isidore team and finds the experience very enriching so he still attends the cyber meetings once a month. Because we are so far south and removed from the rest of the teams we find the annual meetings very gratifying and helpful for our continued formation at members of the Institute. ✨

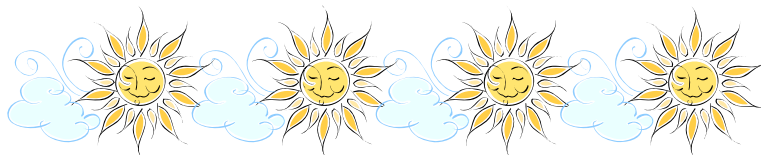


Saddle River (NJ) Team ~ by Eleanor and Bob Surowiec



The Saddle River Team was formed in January 2006. The members of the new team are Julie and Tom Devine, Mary Mosquera and Bob and Eleanor Surowiec, formerly of the Jersey Shore Team and Father Damian Colicchio from the Jersey Lakes Team. Father Damian was appointed Team Facilitator. The Team is off to a good start, meeting regularly and learning from each other. Fr. Damian is Campus Chaplain and director of Campus Ministry at Felician College and is also an adjunct teacher of Italian and the Franciscan courses. Tom Devine is a designer and educator with Public Service Electric and Gas Company. His wife Julie is a teacher at St. Mary' School in the Metuchen Diocese. Mary Mosquera is a retired entrepreneur and active in various ministries. Bob is a former engineer with AT&T and his

wife Eleanor is a former Secretary for the Glen Ridge Board of Education. Both are now retired. All members are very active in their respective parishes. The team meets in the home of Bob and Eleanor Surowiec. Already a few possible candidates have expressed an interest in coming to our meetings. ☼



Jersey Lakes Team ~ by Eileen & Marty Theys

Marty and I were born and raised in Jersey City, NJ, although when we met, in 1974, Marty was living in Great Meadows, NJ, which is in Warren County, and I was still in Jersey City.

We did get married on March 8, 1975, and settled in Warren County. Here I was—a “city girl” one day and the next day living out in the middle of nowhere with cows, chickens, deer, and God knows what else. It was quite an adjustment.

Marty worked as Director of Plant Operations at Welkind Hospital in Chester, NJ (now Kessler Institute). I began working for a law firm in Hackettstown. In October of 1978 we were blessed with the birth of our son, Marty, Jr., and in August of 1980 our daughter, Jessica.

In April of 1979 we bought a house in Stillwater Township in Sussex County, where we presently reside. After Marty left Welkind Hospital in 1986 he started his own well pump installation business. That same year I began working with the Child Study Team at Stillwater Elementary School. Marty sold his business a few years ago and now works for the sisters at Sacred Heart Center and also for Parkhurst Distributing Company. I'm still working at Stillwater School.

We are parishioners of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church in Swartwood. Marty converted to Catholicism at the Easter Vigil in 1989. At this parish, we became involved in the religious education program and the confirmation program for a few years. We were also a Pre-Cana sponsor couple for about 12 years. I think where our faith

and our sense of community really began to take hold was in the small group meetings that we had each week for many years at our home or at the home of other group members. There we read Scripture, prayed together and shared meals with one another.

Then in 1997 we were invited to a Parish Renewal Weekend Experience which was facilitated by Fr. Angelus. That was a true awakening for us and we became more excited about our faith and wanted to share that with others. Then a team was formed with Fr. Angelus, Mary Ann Schoettly, and us. Together, we held about eight Parish Renewal Weekends at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.

It was also around this time that Marty and I learned about the Secular Franciscans. We spent about four years with the San Damiano group that met in Newton, NJ, going through formation. I made a temporary profession for two years and then, after much prayer and reflection, decided not to continue.

In January of 2000 Fr. Angelus, Marty and I attended a seven-day Stephen Ministry Leader's Training Course in Florida. Stephen Ministry is a one-to-one Christian caring ministry where laypersons are equipped to provide care to persons in our parish and community who may be experiencing many different kinds of life needs and circumstances. A Stephen Minister meets with his or her care receiver on a weekly basis and also attends continuing education and peer supervision meetings twice a month. We brought this back to our parish and later that year three more people,

including Susan Ramberg and Mary Ann Schoettly, attended a Leader's Training Course. So far we have trained fifteen Stephen Ministers and we are working on arranging another class.

In May of this year I graduated from the ministry program of the College of St. Elizabeth with a Certificate in Pastoral Administration. Marty provided the patience and support!

One August Marty offered to do a favor for Fr. Angelus by going to Newark Airport to pick up three members of Voluntas Dei. I thought I would just go along to keep Marty company. Well, about eight hours later we finally arrived at Sacred Heart Center with Joe and Kay McGlynn and Augustine Kattady. (It's interesting to note that we made the airport run the following year also and, again, flights were delayed and we spent several hours waiting. We began to wonder if this was an initiation ritual!???) We then attended our first team meeting in September of 2000 at the College of St. Elizabeth in Morristown, NJ. There were only seven team members present besides us. We left excited, enthusiastic, and curious about Voluntas Dei. So we continued to attend the team and national meetings and have learned more and more. We have had the special privilege of meeting Fr. Parent during two trips to Canada with other team members. He is a very special man with great faith and peacefulness. He is an inspiration to us. Voluntas has become a very important part of our lives.

Eileen and Marty are now in Probation as members of Voluntas Dei Institute. ✪

***“If we could look at our neighbour with the eyes of God,
we would discover in him/her the marvels God has deposited there.”***

Father Louis-Marie Parent, o.m.i.

Trinidad Team

For the past ten years, Fr. John Campoli and Mary Buckman of the Jersey Shore Team have been leading a ministry of Healing and Renewal to the Islands of Trinidad and Tobago. Three years ago they decided to use the spirituality of the Three Fives as the basis of their teachings, mentioning after each session that this was based on the spirituality of the Voluntas Dei Institute. They suggested that if any one was interested in doing deeper into the Spirituality that they gather for a meeting. At that time thirty people expressed interest.

John and Mary met with Archbishop Gilbert of Port of Spain and received permission to explore the possibility of an ongoing presence of Voluntas Dei in his diocese. He gave his blessing and John and Mary left information on the Institute behind with

Selma and Neil Flood, who agreed to hold the first meeting in their home. The first year did not bode well as those expressing interest seemed to dwindle. However, the following year, three couples decided to continue their study and began to meet regularly. Last August, these six people attended the United States Summer Congress and returned home with a strengthened resolve to continue. Since then, some other people have expressed an interest and the attendance of the Trinidad Team is growing.

At this time, all three couples have applied and have been accepted for Aspirancy. They are Neil and Selma Flood, Michael and Kathleen Hutchinson and Donald and Moonyene Patience. We pray that the Spirit will continue to work in their lives and inspire more to come to their team. ✨



***“Life is a question of love : love that gives,
gives again, forgives, surrenders and hums its joy.”***

Louis-Marie Parent, o.m.i.

