

For more information
about AMM, visit
www.AMM.org.

A Light in Hard Times

Don Fulford Looks Back on 10 Years at AMM

If you have traveled south from St. Louis on Interstate 55, you have seen the billboard for the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. If you have been to the Shrine and grounds in Perryville, MO, you have seen the beautiful church, the grotto, and the Rosary Walk.

You have likely not seen the inside of the Association of the Miraculous Medal (AMM) offices in Perryville, where a staff of dedicated individuals offers kindness, encouragement, prayers, and more for hundreds of thousands of AMM members around the world: writing letters and emails, taking phone calls, offering an ear to those who are in pain, praying with them, sending out millions of Miraculous Medals, and much more.

AMM, an apostolate of the Congregation of the Mission Western Province, was founded 105 years ago this May by the Vincentians at St. Mary’s of the Barrens. Its mission is to “promote devotion to the Miraculous Medal and to support the Vincentians and their work and mission.” The medal itself dates back to when the Blessed Mother appeared to St. Catherine Laboure, a quiet and unassuming Daughter of Charity in 19th century France, and directed her to create and distribute the medals as a sign of hope, a light in hard times.

Don Fulford, President and CEO of AMM, has been in his role for 10 years, before which he led Feeding America. He said with his career of working for organizations that serve the poor, the job at AMM was a natural fit for him. He admits that when he arrived AMM was in need of reorganization.

“I noticed that the relationship with the Vincentian priests and brothers needed to be strengthened,” he said, “and I saw as an organization, we were struggling with who we were.”

At that time, AMM had 42 employees, and today, that number is more than 70 and AMM stands as one of the largest religious organizations in the country, serving more people than ever before. The phone team takes more than 50,000 calls a year, an equal number visit the grounds,

(continued, p. 2)



Dear Friends,

The summer season is finally upon us. It is a great time of the year for enjoying time with family and friends. Hopefully, the summer will provide you with some space for reflection and prayer. For many of us, the rest of the year is busy and demanding with so many activities. We need time to slow down for prayer and to be redeemed in the spirit.

I am happy to present to you this new edition of *The Vincentian*. This issue will introduce you to some of our creative and innovative missions, programs, and people.

The heart of the Vincentian Spirit is one of imagination and seeing the many possibilities for serving the poor and bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth. Besides the gift of imagination, the Vincentian charism demands a courageous heart to do “what must be done” for the people of God.

I hope you are inspired by these beautiful stories. As a Vincentian, I am so very proud to be sharing them with you.

Peace and joy to you and your families.

Sincerely in St. Vincent de Paul,

Fr. Patrick McDevitt, C.M.

Provincial Superior

(continued from cover)

and AMM distributes more than 3 million medals annually, along with cards, rosaries, and other religious items, an amazing amount considering the small number that St. Catherine started with.

“The power of what Mary did with St. Catherine Laboure as part of the Vincentian charism was to provide this reminder of people’s faith even in the darkest of times,” Don said. “To be a small part of that legacy inspires everybody in this office.”

The AMM has been a blessing. It has always been there when needed. I have been a wearer of the Miraculous Medal for many years. I feel very blessed to be a member of the AMM.”

Duane Ziolkowski, Milford, MI



Found in Translation

Joel Sanchez brings AMM to Hispanic members

“In my culture there is a particular devotion to Our Lady,” said Joel Sanchez, Hispanic Program Manager for the Association of the Miraculous Medal (AMM). “I enjoy spreading the devotion, and I know that our members are particularly amenable to the devotion to Mary.”

He started at AMM in January 2013, prior to which he worked for the National Shrine of St. Jude, where he managed the Spanish programs.

Joel, who works for the Perryville-based organization from his home in Chicago, serves AMM’s 40,000 active Spanish-speaking members. In addition to dedicated phone staff who take calls in Spanish, his team creates other Spanish-language content, from emails to mailers.

Joel’s job is to ensure that what Hispanic members receive is clean and straightforward and culturally in line with the mission of the organization. Much of it is Spanish translations of the English materials, along with some content produced specifically for the Hispanic population with the support of Fr. Prudencio Rodriguez, C.M., AMM’s Spanish-Membership Spiritual Director.

“One of the things that I have enjoyed is talking to actual members and learning about the struggles they are going through and being the face of the organization,” Joel said. “I tell my team, everything we do, though it seems simple, can have a big impact for people. It is a vocation of working with the people and offering a ministry of presence.”



The Greatest Thing

Renee Brueckner has lived the AMM Mission for nearly four decades

Renee Brueckner, Director of Operations at the Association of the Miraculous Medal in Perryville, MO, has worked for the organization for 37 years. While that may seem astounding, especially in this era of high mobility among the workforce, it is less uncommon at AMM.

“The average employee has been here for 20 years,” Renee said. “Twenty-five people have been here 25 years or more, and 25 have been here five years or less.”

Renee said the newer and more seasoned employees share a love and commitment to AMM, an apostolate of the Congregation of the Mission Western Province devoted to promoting the adoration of Mary throughout the world.

“It is very meaningful, being part of the mission of the Catholic Church and knowing that we touch people in a very personal way and act as the face of Mary to many people, because she is ever compassionate and loving and always there,” Renee said. “The testimonials that come back from our members are beautiful and help us all to grow in faith.”

Renee, who was hired initially to work on computers, said AMM manages the majority of its printing in-house, and whether staff members are running a press or working directly with one of AMM’s 305,000 members, they are animated and motivated by the mission.

“The greatest thing is to see the talents that people have here and how they are being used by the Lord to help the Church,” Renee said.



Carla Parker is part of the AMM Spanish-language phone staff



There's No Place I'd Rather Be

Fr. Milton Ryan, C.M., Serves as Pastor Where His Journey Began

Fr. Milton Ryan, C.M., has served as Pastor at Holy Trinity Parish in Dallas since 2018 and notes with almost a sense of wonder that his faith journey and his path to the priesthood started in that very place more than 40 years ago.

He recounts how he was in his 20s, attending graduate school, and feeling some doubts about the direction he was headed in life. Though he was not Catholic at the time, he wandered into Holy Trinity and attended a weekday Mass.

"I wasn't Catholic, and I wasn't interested in becoming Catholic," he said. "I was in a discernment process. 'Do I really want to commit my life as a pianist and a teacher.' I felt like surely there's more."

He asked God to help him decide what to do with the rest of his life. The answer was slow in coming, but he kept coming back to Mass and said the thing he struggled with the most was the concept of the Eucharist.

"Then, one day at Mass something happened and I recognized Christ in the Eucharist," he said. "I started thinking that God is calling me to be a priest, because...if Jesus Christ is really physically present in the Eucharist, then there is no place on the Earth I'd rather be or nothing I'd rather do than get as close to that experience as possible."

A year after converting to Catholicism, he entered the seminary and began working toward becoming a Vincentian priest. Early on, he said his conviction was tested with a seminary trip to a poor community in Juarez, Mexico, across the border from San Antonio. The work was harrowing and dirty, digging latrines and anything else that was needed to serve the poor there.

"I thought, 'This is not my thing; no way could I be a Vincentian,'" he said. "I was resigned to that for the rest of the trip."

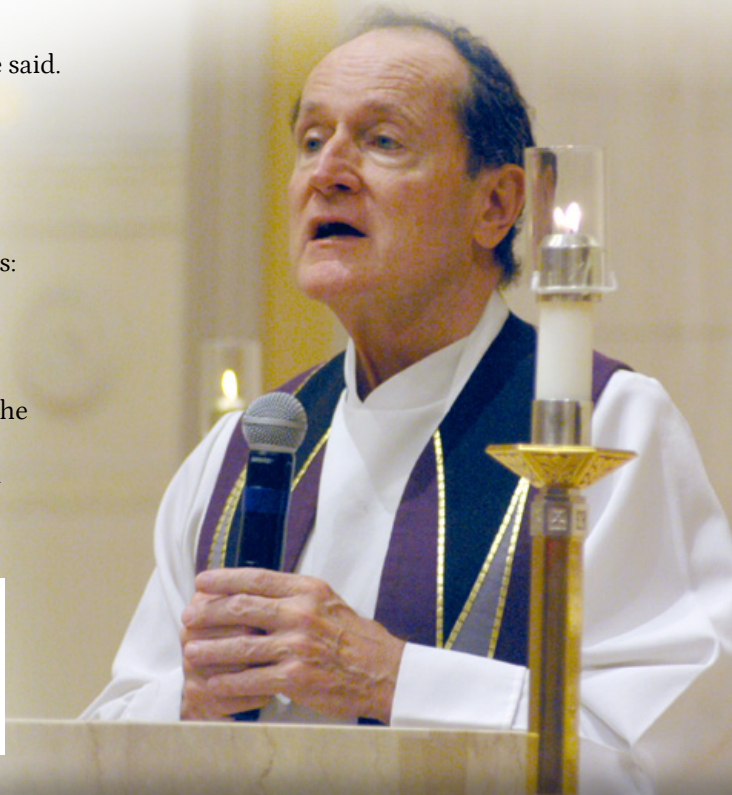
Then, on the way out of the settlement, he looked over and glimpsed a little girl standing on a trash heap, waving at him.

"I almost made it out of the dump," he said with a pause and a deep breath, "but that little girl is still waving at me, and to me, she is Jesus: 'Help me. Don't leave me. Is there something you can do?'"

Fr. Milton was ordained in Perryville, MO, in 1991 and served at parishes in Missouri, Illinois, and Colorado before landing at Holy Trinity, where it began for him. He still plays the piano, and he and the people of the parish look after a homeless woman named Jackie who suffers from schizophrenia and has taken up residence in the parish parking lot, a shadow, perhaps, of that little girl in Juarez years ago.

"She's our Jesus," he says with a smile.

Scan the code to watch Fr. Milton's video.



A Structure in Everything

Benny Ruiz blends finance, liturgy, and music

An architect by training, Benny Ruiz sees structure in everything. He first worked at Holy Trinity Parish in Dallas in seventh grade answering phones. Now, at 61, Benny serves as liturgist for the parish, as well as regional treasurer for the Congregation of the Mission Western Province. Holy Trinity also affords him an outlet for his other love, music, as he sings in the choir and as a cantor.

Benny studied architecture at the University of Texas Arlington and pursued a career in structural engineering. In 1990, when he was between jobs, Fr. George Weber, C.M., Provincial Superior of the Southern Province at the time, offered Benny a position as his office administrator, which he gladly accepted.

Benny later became treasurer for the Texas House of the Vincentians, which includes the priests and brothers in Texas and New Orleans. Benny is also employed by the parish as liturgist, for which he oversees liturgical ministers, assigns clergy assignments for Masses, and teaches classes for RCIA.

“Architecture got me thinking in terms of structure and time-management,” Benny said. “Building design has a rhythm and a flow, like music does, with quiet spaces where the melodies come together. The liturgical year has a structure as well; we never come back to the same point but are constantly moving upward in a spiral and progressing.”

(continued, back cover)



One-Man Band

Fr. Minh Pham, C.M., Ministers to Vietnamese Flock at St. Peter

Except for some volunteer help for cleaning, assembling the bulletin, and the announcements, Fr. Minh Pham, C.M., runs St. Peter Vietnamese Church on Garland Road in Dallas on his own, including maintenance.

“I am a one-man band,” he says with a smile.

He has served as pastor there for 12 years. A native of Vietnam, Fr. Minh was ordained in 1991 and previously served in pastoral assignments in California and Arizona before Fr. Perry Henry, C.M., Provincial Superior at the time, approached him about the opportunity at St. Peter.

“Fr. Perry was friends with the bishop in Dallas,” Fr. Minh explained. “When the previous priest left, he asked Fr. Perry if he had a bilingual priest he could loan to the diocese.”

In the Vincentian tradition of asking, “What must be done,” Fr. Minh saw a community in need and chose the assignment at St. Peter.

(continued, back cover)



“Lead With Love”

Vincentian Spirit Inspires Couple’s Faith Journey

John Palter had been a lifelong Catholic when he met Kathy — a Methodist since birth. Working together in the same Dallas law firm, the two young attorneys began dating and fell in love.

“John introduced me to the Catholic faith,” Kathy says. “He brought me to Holy Trinity, a Vincentian parish that’s been around since 1905 near Downtown Dallas. It has a vibrant, multicultural, diverse community. Their motto is, ‘All Are Welcome.’ It is very Vincentian.”

As the couple looked ahead to marriage, Kathy went through RCIA to enter the Catholic Church. “I was confirmed at the Easter Vigil in 1990. John and I were married in 1992 by Father Dan Borlik (C.M.), who remains a close friend to this day.”

The couple never left Holy Trinity. Their two children attended the parish faith formation program and received all their sacraments. John and Kathy served in numerous ministries, deepening their ties with the Church and the Congregation of the Mission.

“Every Vincentian priest I’ve ever met has inspired me in some way,” Kathy says. “Their approach that I’ve witnessed again and again is to **lead with love.**”

Among examples Kathy cites — a phone call from Father Dan not long after the couple was married. “He said, ‘I’d like to come over and cook dinner for you two.’ It struck me as a lovely, magical thing, for a pastor to do!”

Another example came during a homily of Father Milton Ryan (C.M.). “He spoke about not shying away from difficult situations and people, but rather to lean into them with great love and respect. That’s what I feel the Vincentians do so well.”

“He spoke about not shying away from difficult situations and people, but rather to lean into them with great love and respect. That’s what I feel the Vincentians do so well.”

In April of 2022, Kathy was called to Presbyterian Hospital, where she learned devastating news of her husband’s sudden passing. “I texted both Father Milton and Father Mike (Walsh, C.M.), who came immediately,” Kathy recalls. “Father Milton began making calls and arrangements for meals for our family. Their kindness was an amazing, beautiful tribute to John. We had committed our heart and soul to the Holy Trinity community, and the whole parish reached right back to wrap their arms around us.”

Over the years, the Palters’ Christian values and their love for the Vincentian fathers overflowed in financial generosity to the Congregation.

“If you can’t help someone personally, or only have a modest amount to contribute, you can throw up your hands or turn away. Or you can give to those who know how to multiply the effect of whatever you are willing to offer. John and I saw the immense reach of the Vincentians locally and around the world. We knew our gifts wouldn’t be spent on wasteful things.”

Since John’s passing, Kathy and her children continue to feel the love of the Vincentians. “A loved one’s death changes your entire life, so to have a home at Holy Trinity means so much. We are the luckiest parish in Dallas to have the Vincentians with us.”

In 2008, John and Kathy Palter were made affiliates with the Vincentians for their exemplary, longstanding service and generosity to the Western Province of the Congregation of the Mission. Affiliates are recognized for their close partnership with the spirit and ministry of the community’s clerical members.



Jubilarians 2023

40 years of priesthood



FR. PERRY HENRY, C.M., is from Beaumont, TX, where he attended St. Vincent's High School Seminary. Born in 1955, he entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1974 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1983. Fr. Perry served 13 years as pastor of St. Joseph Church in New Orleans. In 2010, he was appointed the first Provincial of the newly configured Western Province and then became the director of the DePaul Evangelization Center in Montebello, CA. He is now the superior of the Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles community and collaborates on the affordable housing project in Montebello with Mercy Housing. Besides his seminary degrees he has a Doctor of Ministry degree from Catholic Theological Union.



FR. LAWRENCE (LARRY) ASMA, C.M., was born in Waukegan, IL, in 1947, holds a BA and MA in English, and served in the US Navy during the Vietnam War. He entered the Congregation in 1977 and was ordained a priest in Chicago in 1983. In the seminary, he earned an MA in Sacred Scripture and served as a chaplain to psychiatric patients, first at DePaul Hospital and then St. Anthony Medical Center, both in St. Louis. After a brief missionary stint in Trinidad-Tobago, Fr. Larry served the senior Daughters of Charity as chaplain at St. Louise House in Albany, New York. He resides at St. Mary's of the Barrens and is an Apostle of Prayer. Fr. Larry is also famous for his artistic talents and teaches watercolor lessons.

40 years of vows



BRO. MARK ELDER, C.M., hails from Ste. Genevieve, MO, but as the son of a U.S. Marine aviator, he lived in many places. He entered the novitiate in 1972 and took permanent vows as a brother in the Congregation of the Mission in 1983. He earned a BA and MA in Education and a BA and MFA from Denver University. After teaching in seminary high schools, he changed his focus to art and ended up at DePaul University, where he still teaches, specializing in murals. His work can be seen in many places around Chicago as well as the Vincentian curia in Rome. He recently completed a major project, "The Story of the 'Little School under the El,'" for which he and his students wrapped 25 pillars under the Fullerton Ave. El with murals portraying noteworthy people and events in DePaul's 125-year history.

60 years of priesthood



FR. THOMAS HINNI, C.M., was born in 1936 and is a graduate of St. Vincent's High School in Perryville, MO. He entered the community in 1954 and was ordained in 1963. He served 10 years in Chicago at DePaul Academy and then at DePaul University, where he earned a master's degree in counseling. He shifted to parish ministry in his hometown of Perryville and then in St. Louis and a number of parishes in the Diocese of Pueblo, CO. He served as superior of the Lazarist Residence from 2005 to 2011 and resides at St. Mary's of the Barrens, where he coordinates the Apostles of Prayer program. He has a reputation as a dedicated and caring pastor, and his positive spirit and dedication to prayer are an inspiration to many.



FR. JOHN (JACK) SHINE, C.M., was born in 1936 in Kansas City, MO, and spent one year at Rockhurst College before joining the Congregation in 1954. Ordained in 1963, his first assignment was as Vocation Director of the Western Province, followed by a few years of seminary work at Regina Cleri Seminary in Tucson, AZ. He spent 24 years in parish ministry at Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal in Montebello, CA, and St. Vincent's in Phoenix. Fr. Jack earned master's degrees in history and religious education and served at two evangelization centers in Montebello and Santa Barbara. He is well-regarded for his zealous approach to ministry and for his outgoing, hospitable nature. He currently resides at St. Mary's of the Barrens, where he is an Apostle of Prayer.

60 years of vows



BRO. DAVID GOODMAN, C.M., was born in 1938 in McCallsburg, IA, and attended elementary and secondary school there. In 1958 he entered the Congregation of the Mission as a brother candidate, taking permanent vows in 1963. A large part of Bro. Dave's life in the community was devoted to building maintenance. To this end, he became a licensed building engineer through Malcom X College in Chicago. He served in Lemont, St. Louis, East St. Louis, and Denver in this capacity. Later, he also became certified in Clinical Pastoral Education and currently resides at St. Mary's of the Barrens, where he is an Apostle of Prayer. Over the years, he has pursued many interests, from fixing up old Studebakers to ballroom dancing to Tai Chi.



CONGREGATION
of the **MISSION**

THE VINCENTIANS
WESTERN PROVINCE

3701 Forest Park Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63108



ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

2023 SUMMER NEWSLETTER

Learn more about the Congregation of the Mission Western Province, join us in prayer, and offer your support. Visit us online at vincentian.org and like us on Facebook at facebook.com/CMWesternProvince.

A Structure in Everything

(continued from p. 5)

Last year, Benny was recognized as an affiliate of the Congregation of the Mission for his contributions and dedication, and he accepted the honor with gratitude. At the heart of everything he does is the Vincentian charism of serving the poor.

“Not just the monetary poor but the poor in spirit,” he said. “Everyone is in a different state, some happy and some looking for something more, who need a boost. We minister to everyone here. That is what Holy Trinity is all about.”

One-Man Band

(continued from p. 5)

The complex, which consists of the church, offices, and classrooms, which are used today for PSR and Vietnamese language classes, was originally a Baptist church. The Vietnamese community bought it 25 years ago for \$700,000 and started the parish. Today, the parish is debt-free.

At 375 families, St. Peter’s is the smallest of four Vietnamese parishes in the Dallas area, but Fr. Minh says it is an active community. The parish holds regular dinners as fundraisers, as well as a couple festivals per year. Though separated culturally and by thousands of miles, the parishioners also step up annually with generous support for the Vincentians’ work for the poor in Kenya.

“I’m happy here,” he said. “The people are friendly, and they love me. It’s a vibrant faith community. People love to go to Mass and attend services. They are faithful and come to Mass no matter what.”