

YEAR FOR PRIESTS

12 TODAY'S CATHOLIC



JUNE 4, 2010

With Prayers of Thanksgiving to the Priests of the Archdiocese of San Antonio.

Catholic Daughters of the Americas
District #40
Court Prince of the
Apostles #1787
Junior CDA Court Prince
of the Apostles #1787



lin #1758

Incarnate Word
#2583

Belles of St. Mary's Campus Court #2615

The parish of Sts. Peter & Paul in New Braunfels congratulates



Father Tony Pesek

on his remarkable ministry
for 45 years
and prays for continued success
for many more years to come.

Ministry to Ministers Sabbatical

BY J. MICHAEL PARKER
FOR TODAY'S CATHOLIC

Catholic priests and religious spend the best years of their lives ministering to the spiritual and pastoral needs of others, often driving themselves to the point of burnout. But who ministers to them?

Many from all over the world have discovered that Oblate School of Theology's Ministry to Ministers Sabbatical Program offers experienced priests and religious a holistic program of renewal that treats the body, mind and spirit. Perhaps its best advertising comes from word of mouth, as graduates of the four-month program tell their peers about it. Since 1981, MTM has been offered twice a year, January through May and August through December, with breaks at Easter, Christmas and mid-semester.

"The church has always had great concern for the care of its ministers," said Father William J. Meyer, SM, director of Ministry to Ministers. "An opportunity for a religious, priest or lay minister to take a significant period of time away from active ministry for a sabbatical renewal is a singular time of grace."

It's a time of disengaging from ordinary activities, responsibilities and expectations which drive one to overextended life, and an opportunity to walk in the faith of the 'present moment,'" Father Meyer said.

MTM focuses on four behaviors that help each sabbaticant feel the rhythm of this holy time, identified by Marva J. Dawn in her book *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*. These behaviors are *ceasing, resting, embracing and feasting*.

"It's a rhythm that helps one to pay attention to a wholeness

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FATHER WILLIAM J. MEYER
Ministry to Ministers director

of life where the presence of God may be found bidding us to 'become' who we truly are, that beloved son or daughter created in God's image and likeness. It is an exercise of allowing oneself to 'become' rather than to 'prove' oneself, always doing and doing," Father Meyer said.

"When we are given time to experience personally who we are and to realize in whose image we are made, there is peace, there is healing, there is a new perspective on who God is for us and how we are to be present in the world."

Brother Peter Zawot, CSC, had spent 30 years as a teacher and principal in Catholic high schools. Sister Katherine Glosenger, RSM, worked 29 years in the finance office of her community in St. Louis. Father Gregory Lucey, SJ, came to MTM after 12 years as president of Spring Hill College in Mobile, Ala., and previous stints as president of the Jesuit Conference of the United States and vice president of Seattle University. Sister Patricia McDermott, RSM, has been a retreat director at Loyola Retreat Center in Falls Church, Va. Sister Mary Teresa McDermott, RSM (no relation), has taught in an inner-city San Bernardino elementary school for the past 17 years. All were at crossroads between ministries

when it made sense and was more feasible to take time for a sabbatical — a rarity during hectic ministerial lives.

At 76, Father Lucey said he needed time to reflect and prepare for a slower pace, without the heavy responsibilities he has been accustomed to all his adult life. "You're asking, 'What is God calling me to at this stage of my life?' I read sports and I'm happy when the Packers win, but I want God to be the center of my life in a way that's much more integral," he said.

The last thing he wanted was a tightly regimented program telling him what to do with his time. Perhaps the most welcome words he heard from the MTM program director, Father Meyer, were, "I'm not your superior. I'm here to encourage you to be present to the moment."

Monday through Friday, sabbaticants attend specially designed courses in theology and spirituality taught by OST faculty and other presenters focusing on renewal. Sabbaticants can choose two theology courses to audit at OST in the morning. Afternoons and evenings are free to fill in elective activities such as art, water aerobics, gym workouts and sitting in on a class at OST for the sheer enjoyment of it. A weekly faith sharing group experience and spiritual direction are available. A directed retreat at the end of the program utilizes the bonds sabbaticants have built with their weekly spirituality directors.

"I enjoyed the chance to study Scripture and learn about new developments in theology. I didn't have time for that as a college president," Father Lucey said.

Sister Mary Teresa enjoyed receiving continuing education without worrying about tests, papers and deadlines. "It's simply for my own enrichment, so I don't have to worry about things I forget," she said.

Sister Patricia was pleasantly surprised when OST professors frequently expressed gratitude to MTM sabbaticants attending their classes because "we brought our wealth of experience to share with the young students who are just starting out. That made us feel we were contributing something to the community, not just receiving."

She also found the multicultural ambience of the community beyond the school campus a huge draw, too. She used her free afternoons to take Spanish at the nearby Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. "I'm going back into spiritual direction, and now I'll have an advantage in being more available to work with Spanish-speaking retreatants. The cultural diversity of San Antonio has so much to offer. I met many wonderful



The Presentation Sisters offer

The Priests of the Archdiocese
Heartfelt prayers and thanks for
All their dedication,
Never-ending support,
Kindness, and
Service.

Congratulations!

Program at Oblate helps priests, religious to avoid burnout

people in the community beyond OST," she said.

Brother Peter had accumulated a mounting sleep deficit during his busy years of teaching and school administration. MTM gave him ample time to catch up. "I got nearly eight hours of sleep a night and still was able to take refreshing naps in the afternoons," he said.

He and the other sabbaticants found the Pat Guidon Center and the surrounding grounds of OST very peaceful and easily conducive to reflection and renewal. Weekly faith-sharing and spiritual direction played a huge part in enhancing their spiritual peace.

"Spiritual direction is the heart of our program," Father Meyer said. "It facilitates sabbaticants' ability to speak to God honestly and to listen to God revealing what he might want to say to them in a given situation. In many programs of this type, sabbaticants have to go out to the spiritual directors, but here, the spiritual directors come to them."

And that's not all. Food is plentiful, but sabbaticants are taught good eating habits to maintain good health long after they leave the program.

Father Lucey said he lost 19 pounds during the program by changing his eating habits. "I've eaten more food, but I've cut out desserts and stopped eating between meals. It doesn't happen just by doing this for two weeks; to change your lifestyle, you have to keep it up. I've been doing it for four months, and I hope to lose another 20 pounds by Easter."

Sister Katherine said her experience here gave her the time, opportunity and freedom to look at her faith in new ways, which in turn gave her more freedom to move deeper in exploring her faith. She also took a course about St. John of the Cross.

"Everything helped us to understand ourselves better. It gave me spiritual tools that I hadn't had before," she said. "This was an excellent time to allow God to work in everything we experienced."

Father Lucey said his experience will have a positive impact on his future ministry. "I see myself as a much greater asset in whatever ministry I'll go into because of the MTM program. I don't intend to minister less, but the quality of my presence will be much better because of this."



Photo provided by the Ministry to Ministers Program

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