

Come and See A Letter from Camarillo

Above all, always see Jesus in every person, and consequently treat each one not only as an equal and as a brother or sister, but also with great humility, respect and selfless generosity.

— Blessed Charles de Foucauld

Dear Brothers,

We are 18 priests and a Bishop who gathered at St. John Seminary in Camarillo, CA from July 17th to the 21st for the triannual Assembly of the Jesus Caritas Fraternity of Priests USA. We came from all areas of our country and were delighted to welcome Fr. Fernando Tapia, from Santiago, Chile, who serves as our Pan American Responsible.* We were also blessed to have the wisdom of six former National Responsibles at this assembly including Bishop Don Hanchon who now serves as our liaison to the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops.

This Assembly marked our fiftieth anniversary as an independent Region of the Jesus Caritas International Fraternity of Priests. Fr. Dan Danielson was elected the first National Responsible of Jesus Caritas USA in 1967. It was his efforts that lead to the creation of hundreds of fraternities throughout the United States. He has dedicated his life to the service of his brother priests.

Dan was a member of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry and helped write the Bishops' document, "The Spiritual Renewal of the American Priesthood." He also co-founded the National Organization for Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy. His own local fraternity has been meeting for over 50 years. Dan's passion for encouraging fraternity among priests also inspired him to lead 100 priests' retreats over his lifetime.

For all these reasons it was a joy for us at the Assembly to celebrate Fr. Dan Danielson as the inaugural recipient of the Universal Brother Award. This Award is presented by the Jesus Caritas Fraternity USA at its annual gathering to a Diocesan priest who exemplifies the spirituality of Blessed Charles de Foucauld and has discovered through his message a way of living the Gospel more fully to the ends of the earth, in fraternal sharing with his brother priests, in caring for the least among us, and in silent adoration of our Eucharistic Lord.



We came to the Assembly still feeling the void left by the recent deaths of two of our former National Responsibles, Fr. Mike Smith and Msgr. Howie Calkins. Both men were humble and holy priests who through their gentle humor taught us all to live with joy. So, we prayed in thanksgiving for all our brothers in fraternity who have gone on to Glory. How good it was to be in fraternity with them!

And praying for an ever increasing number of deceased brothers underscored for us that by far, the most striking trend facing our fraternities is that we are aging and dying off. This of course is reflective of a general trend in the American priesthood. In 1990, there were a little over 34,000 diocesan priests in the U.S.; in 2014 the number had dwindled down to 16,462 active diocesan priests. In 2014, 3,448 out of our 17,337 parishes were without a resident priest. This can all be somewhat discouraging. It is a trend that is bringing ever increasing stress and isolation to the Diocesan priesthood.

In preparing our answers to the Questionnaire for the International Assembly in Bangalore, India, we also reflected upon the challenges that we face with the complex political and economic realities of our day. Both in our civil and faith communities we are a divided people. The Church remains the largest provider of services and outreach to the poor and yet we talk less and less prophetically about social justice issues. We experience great polarity not only in our politics but also in our faith communities. There is growing economic disparity. The poor fear they will be left without health care and the “stranger” in our midst fears at any moment he will be deported. There is an ever increasing secularization of our culture that affects our ministry every day. And yet, as priests, we seldom talk about these challenges; much less bring them to our prayer.

How do we respond to all of this? Do we “circle the wagons” and simply concern ourselves with “walking each other home” until the last priest in our dwindling fraternities “turns out the lights.” Our do we realize that we still have “a little blood left in our veins” and continue to reach out to our brother priests, especially our younger brothers who face such tremendous challenges, to share with them the fraternal spirituality that has enriched our lives and ministry? We have a gift to share and moving forward from this assembly we realize that we need to tell our story and invite our brother priests to come and see.



Our spirituality finds its roots in the life of Blessed Charles de Foucauld who many judge to have lived a very odd life as a missionary diocesan priest in the Sahara Desert where he was eventually shot to death on December 1, 1916. While his life may seem “distant” to the experience of most Diocesan priests today, the priests of the fraternities have found that the elements of his spiritual life (a life rooted in the gospel, Eucharistic adoration

and contemplative prayer, simplicity of life and love for the poor, an openness to all and fraternity with our brother priests) offer a wonderful foundation for our priesthood. We commit ourselves to a life rich in prayer as we search for the face of God in life and the people we meet every day.

As Fernando Tapia reminded us in his meditations during the Assembly ours is an Incarnation Spirituality. “God did not simply wave his magic wand over our humanity and retreat to heaven.” ** Jesus immersed himself in our humanity. In the spirit of Blessed Charles our Fraternity tries to follow Jesus, the Nazorean. It was in his daily life at Nazareth that Jesus was schooled in the ways of the Kingdom. Thus in the *Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis reminds us that “an evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in the people. Evangelizers thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice.” (EG 24).

We in the Jesus Caritas Fraternity USA are not ready to “turn out the lights”. As with most movements in the Church, there may come the day when our time as past. But we still have a gift to share. By acclamation we reconfirmed Fr. Jerry “Hap” Ragan as our National Responsible. We recommit ourselves to sharing the gift of Fraternity with our Bishops and with our seminarians. We recommit ourselves to helping our brothers who are already in Fraternity to come to a deeper understanding of our spirituality and we invite our brother priests and bishops who are searching for a great spiritual support system to “Come and See” the priestly fraternity that has so enriched our lives.

Fraternally in Christ,

+ Don Hanchon	Fernando Tapia	Mark Mertes
Jerry “Hap” Ragan	Dan Danielson	Tom McCormick
Don Dunn	Greg Pawloski	Bob Amundsen
Ron Belisle	Joe Greeley	John Jacquel
Dick Rossman	Chuck Roland	Sammy Taylor
Will Connor	Alejandro Trejo Estrada	John Murray
Norman Supancheck		

*The first three Jesus Caritas Fraternities were organized in France in 1952. They adopted the French concept of leadership and so used the term Responsible to designate the leader.

** J. Metz in *Poverty of Spirit*