



Priestly People

SERVANTS OF THE PARACLETE

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Remembering Fr. Ray Gunzel sP

March 12, 1929 – May 26, 2020

“One thing is clear. While I had thought that I was the author of this story, I know now that I have not been alone, but in a cooperative venture all along!”

A religious vocation can be observed on many levels, described by many metaphors. Ultimately however, a person's vocation is an inner process, mysterious, oftentimes circuitous and puzzling to the person and observers.

Perhaps the best description is that a vocation is the continuing story of a soul on a quest that ends only in the final surrender into the mystery of death.

A religious vocation is a continual stirring in the depths of the soul, a stirring that is persistent and unrelenting, never allowing one to rest, urging one on to sink deeper and deeper into the mystery of God and final union with the divine will. This has been my experience over the fifty (now seventy) plus years since I first entered religious life.

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My story can be divided into two distinct phases. I began my vocational quest in 1947 when I entered the Juniorate of the Brothers of the Holy Cross in Watertown Wisconsin. From there I went to Rolling Prairie Indiana where I received the habit and spent the following year learning the way of life of a religious teaching Brother. Silence, prayer, study, and manual work made up our days. I found the regime to my liking and there awoke in me a love of silence and study which has grown deeper during the ensuing years.

After completion of my undergraduate studies I was assigned to our mission school in Santarem in the state of Para in Brazil. A five-day trip on a flat bottomed, paddle wheeled river boat was my introduction to life on the mighty Amazon River. I found myself



Fr. Ray took his heart to Africa and we can now say “Well done good and faithful servant”. You gave it your all!

amazed, astonished and at times intimidated and dismayed as the boat made its way slowly up the great river. As the jungle slipped slowly past, I began to realize the enormity of the adventure on which I was embarking. Even before landing at the dock in Santarem at four in the morning I was aware of the intensity with which my American culture had gripped my soul, my sense of who I was, my perceptions of what was important in my life.

I was beginning a journey not only to another place on the map of the world, but a journey to another place in my soul. I was about to enter a journey of the soul that would lead me to encounter another self, a self-stripped of my American cultural value system, a self that stood beneath my carefully forged cultural self.

Today, forty-two years after that memorable trip up the Amazon, my seven and half years of teaching in Brazil continues in my mind as the most important rite of passage that I have experienced. It is a passage that opened me and prepared me for the challenges of every subsequent passage I have experienced since then. It forms the template for all subsequent rites of passage, and I believe that this experience is the one that burnished my soul, tempered my spirit and prepared me for my subsequent spiritual journey, a journey that continues as I write this reflection.

As I entered with enthusiasm and excitement into my career of teaching in an all-boys school five hundred miles upriver from the mouth of the Amazon, I had no expectations whatsoever that there was a vocation to the priesthood quietly nested somewhere in my unfolding story. After seven and one half years, and just before my second home visit to the states, I had become comfortable in the Portuguese language, at home in my adopted Brazilian culture and had every expectation that I would spend the remainder of my career teaching history and English as a second language to young men from up and down the Amazon and its tributaries.

The unfolding of the inner coils of my story is of one surprise after another. Slowly there began to grow in me a desire for priesthood, for a ministry that would more directly touch people's personal quest for God. Along with this, there was an increasing desire for a more contemplative life, a life lived quietly in the heart of the church.

Some years before this, Father Gerald Fitzgerald had established a new community of men dedicated to ministry to priests who had left their ministry and were now seeking a way back into their priestly life. Father Gerald's vision was of a company of men, Servants of the Paraclete, who would dedicate their life to humble, fraternal service to priests seeking to be reconciled to the Church and to their priestly life. It appeared to have all the elements I was seeking, a life of prayer, hidden from the public, while at the same time being a life of fraternal ministry.

I applied and was granted permission from authorities in Rome to proceed with a transfer to the Servants of the Paraclete. I soon found myself winging my way back to the United States to enter a new phase of my spiritual quest in St. Louis MO, where the Servants of the Paraclete had established a novitiate and a house of studies.

I enjoyed my time in St. Louis, found the life of a student suited me well; theology stimulated me. I completed my studies with an MA in Moral and Pastoral Theology with a concentration in Spiritual Theology. I was ordained as a Servant of the Paraclete in St. Louis in 1969. I went immediately to Berkeley California to study Drug and Alcohol addictions at the Berkeley Center for Alcohol and Drug addiction. I then spent the next several years working with our newly established Alcohol treatment center for priests in St. Louis. Subsequently, my ministry took me to New Mexico where my ministry focused on spiritual direction and teaching classes in our treatment center with the priests of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

While in New Mexico, I filled a niche in the continuing education of clergy in which we provided a short-term program that combined theology with some therapeutic components. An aspect of this effort was a Wilderness Experience for priests and religious brothers. They had the opportunity to deepen their prayer life by a more intense period of prayer, silence, and solitude.

The unfolding of my vocation seems to be drawing the circle to a close. The many circuitous paths, the seemingly disconnected lines are coming together to form a recognizable picture.

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I know now that I have not been alone, but in a cooperative venture all along!

Father Ray's story of his vocation was printed in *Priestly People* in October 2000.

Father Ray would become a missionary again in the early 2000's, traveling to the Philippines to begin the ministry of the Servants of the Paraclete and once again, to Africa, which stole his heart. He returned to the USA on several occasions but was restless and wanted to be "on mission". He loved being with the young men who were in formation. He served as Novice Master on more than one occasion in the Philippines and in Ghana West Africa.

Fr. Ray died on May 26, 2020 in Ghana, West Africa – where he had taken his heart to promote the mission and vision of Fr. Gerald.

Rest in Peace, Father Ray Gunzel sP

Remembering Fr. Ray sP

My personal reflections upon hearing of Father Ray Gunzel's passing on May 26th, 2020.

Marian Wolaver: Servants of the Paraclete Staff

Father Ray represented to me a Renaissance man. He was comfortable with the very young and the very old.

Never wanting to admit to aging, he was energized by the younger members of the congregation.

It was that twinkle in his eye that showed you he was totally in his element when surrounded by youth and the future.

Fr. Ray was a pioneer for the Congregation he had come to serve – the Servants of the Paraclete.

He willingly went to the Philippines. His heart became completely committed to developing vocations in Africa.

When the congregation set out in 2016 to open a house in Cape Coast Ghana, West Africa, - he was onboard. Some health issues got in his way early on in the journey to settle in Ghana, but he got his wish and he died doing what he loved to do – being a servant of God as a Catholic Priest, teaching and mentoring those he would leave behind to continue the work of the founder.

May God grant eternal rest to you, Father Ray, and may His perpetual light shine on your forever.



Surrounded by young members – he loved being with the young men!



March 2015 – celebrating his birthday in Tagaytay City, PI.



He wanted me to remember my nearly two months stay in the Philippines with the congregation and he chose a going away gift! He had just as much fun giving it as I did receiving it.



Signing vow papers along with his dear brother priest, Fr. Phil Taylor sP



This has always been one of my favorite shots of Fr. Ray. Fr. Technology! He had a "point and shot" camera and he asked me to get the photos developed. He was forever getting new tech items and continuously asking "how did you say this thing worked, again!"



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