



CONNECTIONS

Celebrating Our Eucharistic Partnership in the Eymardian Family

AUGUST 31, 2020

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 7

Initial Formation via Zoom in San Antonio, Texas

Readers of this newsletter may recall a story from this past February edition of *Connections* about the leaders of the Associates of the Blessed Sacrament in San Antonio just completing an initial formation program for some 120 women and men who made their Promise Commitment last fall. These same leaders began a new IFP for a group of 55 women and men interested in becoming associates in November 2019.

When the state of Texas went into “sheltering-in-place,” the leaders decided to continue the IFP via Zoom starting in April. This past August 3, I had the privilege of being a guest presenter for Session X of the IFP for this group of prospective associates, “The Liturgy of the Hours.” Father Anthony Schueller, SSS, the Provincial and the pastor of Saint Joseph Church Downtown, was the main speaker on this ancient, revered liturgical prayer of the Church. I provided a brief teaching on the Psalms.

Our two teachings followed a powerful “Introduction” by Katherine Martinez, the Eymard and biblical text read by Christina Cruz, and a rich and moving sharing among the participants. Three people spoke of their long, painful bouts with Covid-19, and especially how much they felt the love and support of the community of associates in San Antonio during those difficult days. It was for me a very moving experience to listen to the stories shared. As called for in Session X, Dr. Billy Stewart led “Evening Prayer” to begin and end the session.

Thank you, Cesar Camacho, the leaders there, and Father Tony for continuing the initial formation program under these challenging circumstances.

Below is a picture I took of my computer screen of many of the participants who were on Zoom video at the moment of the shot.



“The program of preparation comprises prayer, deepening of the life of faith, appreciation of the specific vocation of lay persons in the Church, catechesis on the Eucharist, knowledge of the life and charism of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, study of the *Rule of Life for Associates*, and sharing in the life and activities of the Association.”

Rule of Life for Associates, 19

Center for
Eucharistic Evangelizing
Cleveland, Ohio

CONNECTIONS

Manna I via Zoom in Holiday, Florida

Readers of this newsletter may also recall a story out of Saint Vincent de Paul Church involving Laura Worhacz, an Associate of the Blessed Sacrament. For a number of years, she has been leading a group of some 120-plus women called the Mothers of the Blessed Sacrament. These are mothers who are dedicated to offering their daily duties through the heart of the Eucharist. Many are stay-at-home moms, yet some are working.

They are women of faith who feel called to mother the world into the presence of God through their love for the Eucharist. Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament is their patroness, Saint Peter Julian their patron saint.

This past June, they completed a year-and-a-half *Course of Study on Saint Peter Julian Eymard* program. Looking for something new to begin, Laura approached me about the *Manna I* program. (For those not familiar with this program, it is a three-part series of twelve-session Eucharist-centered modules over three years. The program was developed out of the Center for Eucharistic Evangelizing office in the 1990s.)

Laura approached me about doing the *Manna I* program remotely. She wanted to start with the August program entitled “In a Profound Atmosphere of Prayer: Eucharist and Solitude.” The author was none other than Father Bill Fickel, SSS, the pastor at SVDP, the Spiritual Advisor to the Mothers, and the Local Director of the associates at SVDP.

Laura kicked off the program on the evening of August 24. Father Bill was able to join the group via Zoom and present a teaching based on the article he wrote some two decades ago. Though many of the Mothers were not able to be present on the Zoom meeting, they each received an electronic copy of the August program. Laura and those who were able to participate were delighted on how well the program went, especially the shared conversation on the reflection questions.

One of the participants, who lives in New York, told Laura afterwards how much she loved Father Bill’s explanation of mysticism and how she got to witness his deep spirituality. (I want to note that Laura’s husband Ray, also an Associate of the Blessed Sacrament, sat in on the program, as well as a number of other associates and another half-dozen people who are in initial formation to become associates..)

Below is a picture Valerie Merimee, also an Associate of the Blessed Sacrament, took from her computer screen.

Thank you, Laura, for sharing this story with me.

Jim Brown



A Historical Note



The Story of the Aggregation (Continued)

The Peoples' Eucharistic League developed and grew into the mid-twentieth century. Thousands of lay women and men sought to be *associated* with the mission of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament as communities were established throughout the United States and in Ireland-Great Britain and the Philippines, which were part of the Province of Saint Ann. According to Father Leo Rousseau, SSS, the longtime Director of the PEL, its mission was "to provide loyal and true adorers of our Divine Lord solemnly and perpetually exposed on the altar." He went on to explain: "It also endeavors to foster in souls the spirit of love and practical faith in the real presence of Jesus in the Sacrament of Love – a faith that finds expression in frequent assistance at Holy Mass and reception of Holy Communion, and also in the assiduous practice of adoration and frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament."

By the Provincial Chapter of 1958, the directors of the various lay associations reported the enrollment of some 30,000-plus members among the groups of lay associates.

Of all the various components of the Peoples' Eucharistic League, The Eucharistic Fraternity involved its members in the most intense living out of the Eucharistic vocation. Father Rousseau defined their commitment in this way: "A society of the faithful associated with the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament who are desirous of attaining as far as possible in the world the ideal of Christian perfection by a special devotion to the Holy Eucharist. To this end, they profess to consecrate themselves unreservedly to the service of Christ's Divine Person in the Blessed Sacrament and to undertake, in union with and under the direction of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, to be true and frequent adorers as well as devoted and zealous apostles of the Holy Eucharist."

Those who committed to The Eucharistic Fraternity went through the following:

- A period of formation (a kind of mini-novitiate) under the direction of a Blessed Sacrament Father.
- A public "Act of Contrition" promising to make a daily hour of adoration, or, at the very least, an hour a week.
- They met once a month for ongoing formation and would undertake certain Eucharistic apostolates to spread devotion to the Eucharist.
- Their names were inscribed in the "Official Registry of the Eucharistic Fraternity."

Between 1922 and 1949, 862 women and men had made their "profession." The 1949 Registry showed that there remained 455 active members, of whom 389 were women. They reported having made 87,344 hours of adoration that year.

By the end of the 1950s and on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, a liturgical revival was in the air. The number of lay people involved in the various groups of lay associates was lessening as was the commitment to the devotion and practice of adoration.

In our next installment, we will talk about the Second Vatican Council and its impact on the Congregation, its mission, and its sense of identity, and eventually on what it meant to be an Associate of the Blessed Sacrament.

(Source material: An unpublished manuscript by Patrick J. Riley, D. Min.)