

De Sales Says...

*“Great designs
are accomplished
only by
patience and
the passage of
time”*

Fall – 2004
Volume 17, Issue 3

Meet and Oblate

In the Spotlight

Tom Helfrich, O.S.F.S. entered the Oblates in July of 1967 upon graduating from St. Francis de Sales High School in Toledo, Ohio. Tom received his BA from Western Michigan University and his M. Div. from St. Michael's College in Toronto, Ontario. Ordained in 1978, Tom's early years in ordained ministry were spent in secondary education at various Catholic High Schools in Toledo, OH, Rochester, NY and Jackson, MI. He also served on the Toledo-Detroit Formation Team for four years. He has been the pastor of St. Mary in Adrian, MI since 1997.

Q: Tom, how to do like pastoral ministry as opposed to secondary education?

A: I appreciate the variety of this ministry. Not only am I involved with people of all ages, but the way I'm involved with people is very diverse. Literally, I'm involved with people's lives from baptism to death and all aspects in between. I'm also involved with people, in some

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Bondings

*A Newsletter of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales
Toledo-Detroit Province*

Salesian Spirituality

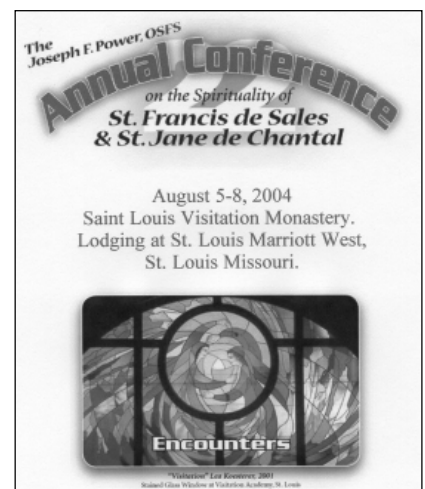
A Conference - An Encounter

By Sr. Suzanne Homeyer, VHM

My favorite refrigerator magnet declares “we don't remember days...we remember moments.” I will remember ENCOUNTERS: The 22nd Annual Conference on Salesian Spirituality as Bernard Bangle reading from his personal journal with a gleam in his eyes, a lilt in his voice and a definitive tone in his voice, “I will see God in everything.” My heart was spoken to with those words and I not only remember, but feel, the truth that was shared that afternoon.

I remember thinking as I experienced this keynote address: he really ‘gets it.’ This Presbyterian minister not only ‘gets’ Salesian Spirituality he can share it in a way that I understand, in the style of Francis, and in words and images of our time. Bernard has graciously allowed his journal entry to be printed here: Sunspots. Fifty yards away, someone opens a bank door. The glass catches the sun and reflects it to me in a blinding flash. My reflexes protect my eyes as quickly as possible, but in that searing fraction of a second my retina is branded. Wherever I look, I see the sun. A white sun on my feet, a red one in a tree, green sun, blue sun, fading sun. The experience is familiar enough. The longer the exposure, the more permanent the imprint. If I look toward God, I will see God everywhere else I look. I will see God in you. I will see God in my enemy. I will see God in a tree. I will see God in everything.

The five conferences at Encounters are each a part of Bangle's concluding statement of Sunspots; yet each is a springboard to ‘the more.’ Jim Cryan's “Biblical Encounters” moved the listeners with kairos agility from Cain and Abel, through Francis's crisis of faith and into the Mystery of the Visitation. The defining characteristic of any encounter is that it is an unexpected, unplanned event commanding a response. From a stuttering Moses on Mt. Sinai to Jesus on Mt. Calvary the biblical response is often; “Here I am.” In the face of the inexplicable and unimaginable any other response is not likely. Encounters are often seen as confrontational, engaging the ego and forcing an ethical or moral choice for self or other. Self-concern, self-image and self-interest can become

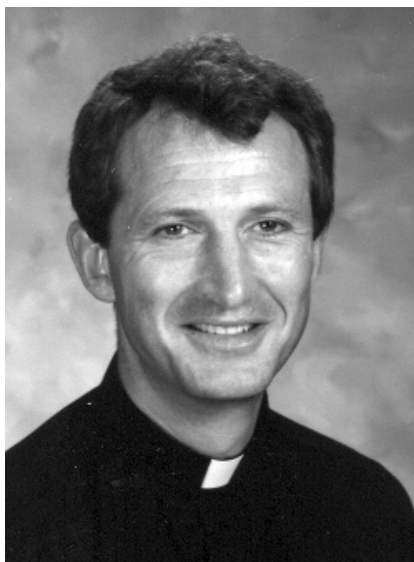


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Spotlight on Tom Helfrich...

Continued from page 1.

ways, that is more poignant than much of what I did in high school ministry. You know, family crises; major decisions and other life changing events.



Tom Helfrich, O.S.F.S.

Q: What kind of parish is St. Mary's?

A: It is a large parish, about 1200 families, which though originally an ethnic Irish parish, is now about one third Hispanic origin. I would consider it a pretty active, progressive community and one that has been that way since Vatican II.

Q: Are there any aspects of this parish that you find particularly interesting or engaging?

A: Yes, there are several things. One of the areas that we've focused on is coordinating our efforts with St. Joseph Parish, the other Catholic parish in the city. In fact, I think this is one of the distinctive dimensions of both parishes that may stand as a good model for other Catholic communities.

Q: What do you do with St. Joseph's?

A: We actually have a joint meeting with both staff's each month. During the meeting we try to coordinate schedules, calendars and wherever possible, come together in presenting programs. Our most successful effort has been in sponsoring our annual Vacation Bible School jointly.

Recently, we've been making efforts in combining our young adult programs in several ways. We began a program, *Theology on Tap*, that exists in various places around the country. This is an evening at a local bar or restaurant, where young Catholics get together with a speaker and discuss various theological issues and concerns over a beer or two. We've had great success with that and the energy among the young adults it's generated is impressive.

We also have an annual pulpit exchange between the two parishes. That has been lots of fun and again reminds us that we are one church. We just have two addresses in Adrian.

All of this assists in breaking down unnecessary parochialism and

enables our efforts to be more successful due to the combination of talent and resources from both parishes. As I talk about this, I am realizing that this effort reflects other aspects of my life as well.

Q: What do you mean?

A: It occurs to me that first, we not only have been successful in coordinating programs with the neighboring parish, but as a matter of course, regularly cooperate with the local Catholic college, Siena Heights University and Catholic Charities of Lenawee County.

I am also involved in the Adrian Ecumenical Forum, which has similar goals of cooperation and joint efforts.

In a similar vein, I meet with five other Oblates every Wednesday. We get together at 4:00 PM and after the opening prayer each one of us reviews the past week, sharing the grace and the struggle we may have experienced. Then we take turns providing an article for reflection and discussion, finally we have drinks and dinner. The reason we meet is to provide fraternal support, intellectual and spiritual challenge and fun.

I see a similarity in all these things based on the Church value of community among the believers. It is as community that we live and experience the best of Church and proclaim Jesus as Lord to others. I guess it is true, "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst." §

A Conference - An Encounter

From....Pg. 1

concern and compassion for the other, the alien, the culturally different. Such encounters transcend or obliterate previous relationship boundaries and in the present moment something completely new exists. This change is truly what can be called a graced encounter; we and the other have been made more — more like the children of God we all are.

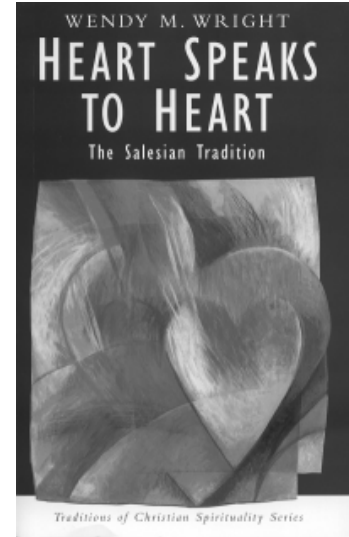
“Encounters of the Salesian Kind” as Wendy Wright presented are those based on the Salesian Tradition of a vision of the world of hearts. Central to this vision is the union of hearts — the union of human hearts with each other and the human heart with the divine and human hearts with each other in the heart of God. Wendy outlined friendship as the type of relationship that is needed to achieve a wholeness that will bring us all to God as Kingdom. Francis and Jane, Wendy suggests, had such a relationship — they could feel the heart of God beating in the heart of the other. This type of friendship is mutual and equal and the friend is seen as another self. Such a friendship is particular; encounters make it possible to meet real people and this is necessary for establishing real friendships in which the friends are transparent. It is in such relationships that real union and communion take place. “Encounters of a Salesian Kind” transform us and

hearts transformed by love can be broken — broken to love more. In summary, a heart broken in love, expands us in communion with each other and the breathing in and breathing out of God.

Joe Boenzi, the Salesian family story-teller, in his recollections of events in Francis’s life wove together what could well be a road map for “The Forever Unfinished Treatise”, the one Francis hoped to write on the love of neighbor. Joe challenged us all at the beginning of his talk to remember that God gave us two arms — one to embrace God and one to embrace the neighbor. Once we have as our starting point the “love of God” it is possible to move on to “the next one.” For Francis de Sales that meant the poor as well as the wealthy, the enemy as well as friends or relatives, those in the Church and the Calvinists. His awareness of God in all enabled him to encounter others where they were and to always see them as loved by God. Such moments of graced encounter are indeed open to any of us who are loved and know we are loved.

Jeanne Hunt drew from each talk a colorful thread and “Weaving a Post-Modern Fabric” helped us clothe ourselves in the multi-colored garment of Salesian Spirituality. We do not remember days; we remember moments. To extend Jeanne’s metaphor, we will not remember colors; we will remember the rainbow that was Encounters.§

Book Review



Wright, Wendy M., Heart Speaks to Heart, The Salesian Tradition. Marynoll New York: Orbis Books, 2004.

As a child I remember a large black photo album which would be brought out from time to time from its special home tabernacle and set before my brother and me. My Dad or Mom or sometimes both would carefully turn the pages and show my brother and me the photographs inside. “That’s your great grandmother. That is Uncle Frank”. With each picture there also came a brief story.

While my parents did not say so in so many words, they instinctively understood that to know who you are you must know from whence you came. The photographs, the stories, the souvenirs all helped to assure that my brother and I would

have as solid an identity as my parents could provide.

Wendy Wright's latest book, Heart Speaks to Heart, The Salesian Tradition, though it is most certainly an example of superb scholarship at every level, is to a certain extent the Salesian family album. To all the members of the Salesian family



from the oldest of the Visitandines to the most recently consecrated member of the Association of St. Francis de Sales, Wendy Wright tells our story, points out in word our ancestral heritage. In so doing she helps us all understand better from whence we came and pray God where we are going.

This book, which Wendy dedicates to the late Fr. Joe Power, O.S.F.S., is part of the Traditions of Spirituality Series published by Orbis Press. The General Editor of the series, Philip Sheldrake of Sarum College Salisbury lays out the goal of the series in these words. "The books seek to provide accu-

rate and balanced historical and thematic treatments of their subjects." This is exactly what Wendy has done.

Using the image of the heart as a literary needle, she tells the Salesian story, a spirituality of Hearts, beginning at the time of Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal themselves and their choice of the heart as part of the coat of arms of the Visitation Order, through the great disciple and promoter of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and through all the various heartfelt expressions of Salesian spirituality up to and including the present day.

The reader must remember that this work is both an "Introduction" and an introduction to "a Tradition." That means that Wendy presumes very little indeed from her readers. Those who have some familiarity with St. Francis de Sales may be tempted to move too quickly through what seems like simply a replay of familiar information about the life of St. Francis and St. Jane. That would be a mistake. Wendy is not just giving a series of disembodied facts in these first chapters. She is already using the literary needle of the "heart" to tell the story.

Although she must pass quickly over the matter, she rightly situates Francis in the movement called "devout humanism." This is a whole school of thought: philosophical, theological, and, I think we could say today, psycho-

logical. This "devout humanism" is built on the belief in the goodness and beauty of humanity expressed in the arts and symbolized by the heart. Francis thus set into motion a strong positive engaging spirituality, which while it did not negate sin, preferred to see the beauty as it were, rather than the beast.

This book is also an introduction to the whole Salesian Tradition, which is much bigger than any single part. In the second half of the book, when Wendy begins to identify some of the branches of the Salesian Family tree and how each has developed she demonstrates so well how broad and comprehensive the Salesian Tradition truly is.

At the risk of over-generalization, I must say that I believe Wendy's latest book, the introduction to the Salesian Tradition ought to be required reading for everyone whether the individual is a "novice" in the Salesian School or a "tenured professor." It is rare, if ever, that I read a text a second time, but I am now in my second reading of this book. Now that this "review" is written I feel I have the opportunity to re-read the book with the leisure of *lectio divina*, which this text certainly is.

David M. Whalen, OSFS

Available at DeSales Resources and Ministries, 216 pp, \$16.

Go to: HYPERLINK "<http://www.desalesresource.org>," www.desalesresource.org, or call 1-800-782-2270.§.

Oblate Ministry

The Deaf of Trinidad and Venezuela

by Mike Depcik, O.S.F.S.

Mike Depcik, O.S.F.S. works in Deaf Ministry for the Diocese of Lansing and for the National Catholic Office of the Deaf (NCOD). Deaf since birth and from a deaf family, he is the first Deaf Oblate. Part of his ministry is to provide catechesis and spiritual renewal for Deaf Catholics around the world. Following is his reflection on a recent trip to Trinidad, where he provided several retreat experiences, and Venezuela.

I left Detroit on May 31 for Caracas, Venezuela. I did not realize that Caracas was located in a valley between impressive tall green mountains. The airport was situated along the coast because the area was flat enough for planes to land and take off. It was about a forty-five minute drive to Caracas from the airport and the highway circled the

tall mountains. The weather in Caracas was much cooler than the sea level. On the side of the mountains were barrios - make shift homes built by poor squatters from Columbia and other countries.

In Caracas, I stayed with the Alvarez Family. Their house was a cozy middle class home by American standards. It was in the same neighborhood where President of Venezuela lives. However because of the political instability, President Hugo Chavez chooses to live at an army base, which has better security and protection for him and his family.

Many Venezuelans suffer from the political and economical instability of their country. The middle class and rich are worried about sliding helplessly into poverty and many blame President Hugo for causing such problems.

Deaf Venezuelans in general were friendly. They warmly welcomed me and I had the opportunity to celebrate three Masses and hear confessions in spite of my very limited knowledge of Spanish and Venezuelan Sign Language. I also visited a deaf Catholic school. Unfortunately, in spite of good intention of nuns ministering at the school, many, if not all of the children were very uninformed about the basics of the Catholic Faith.

After staying in Venezuela for

three days, I flew to Trinidad - an island country seven miles off the northeastern coastline of Venezuela. Though it was only seven miles away, Trinidad was truly a Caribbean island. The climate, geography, and people were definitely Caribbean and you could tell the difference between two countries immediately.

I gave a retreat to 24 deaf people and once again I was deeply moved by their beautiful but simple faith. In America, we often ask this question, "Where are the young people?" In Trinidad, on other hand, I asked the question "Where are the old people?" Believe it or not, most participants were in their 20's. There were a few who were in their 50's and they were considered the old.

Most deaf Trinidadians have no more than a 2nd grade level of reading. They were warm and friendly. Despite their lack of education, most had a deep appreciation of the Catholic Faith and an obvious love of Jesus.

It is hard to decide which country - Venezuela or Trinidad is poorer. After discussing with Venezuelans who then came to Trinidad for a convention, we agreed that Trinidad was poorer than Venezuela. However Trinidad is more stable both economically and politically.

On Wednesday, June 9, the Deaf of Trinidad hosted the second Pan American Deaf Catholic Encounter Convention. About 45 people, four from the U.S. Columbia, Puerto Rico, The Dominican Republic, San Lucia, Venezuela, Trinidad, Guyana, and United King-



Retreatants in Trinidad

dom attended the convention, which was held at a local retreat center.

The nature of the convention was to discuss how to bring more unity among Deaf Catholics in Pan America. We elected officers who will work hard to make this dream a reality. A third convention is scheduled in

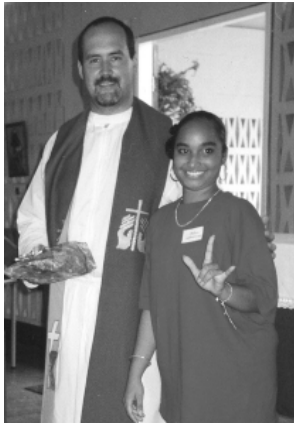
2006 in Columbia.

The best part of the convention was the opportunity to pray together. I truly sensed the beauty and the universality of the Catholic Church. No

matter what language we used or what cultures we came from, we felt right at home during the Mass and rosary prayer time. During that time, I felt proud to be a Catholic and grew in my appreciation and respect of our Church.

Once again, I was moved deeply by the beautiful faith of the Caribbean people. They sang beautifully (you know me I am not particularly crazy about singing in the church) and I even joined them and enjoyed myself!!! They were attentive at Mass and you could see that they were truly worshipping the Lord.

I truly wish that we Americans shared the same enthusiasm they have for God. I felt humbled and privileged to be with them and hope to visit there again\$.



Mike and a new friend.

Oblate Life

Novitiate Boasts Largest Class Since 1989

By Novice Shaun Lowery

On a sunny Friday morning on the campus of the De Sales Center in Brooklyn, Michigan, six postulants from the Toledo-Detroit and Wilmington-Philadelphia Provinces of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales were received as Novices. The Rite of Reception, which took place in the Catholic Chapel of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, began a yearlong period of prayer and study required of all religious in formation and will culminate with the first profession of the vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience.

The Rite of Reception into the Novitiate, set in the context of Morning Prayer, symbolically called for the candidates to present themselves to the Oblate community and ask for a place to dwell and pray among the professed members of the community. Each candidate for the novitiate entered wearing the simple attire of an Oblate and joined in praying Morning Prayer. During the rite the novices were given copies of the Constitutions

and the Spiritual Directory of St. Francis de Sales. They were then blessed by the community and commissioned to study and pray in preparation for public profession of vows.

The Church requires a one-year Novitiate program for all people wishing to enter a religious community. During this year, the Novice begins to study and appreciate Salesian roots and grows in his awareness of Oblate life and Salesian spirituality. This year of reflection is the preparation for taking the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience which will make a novice a professed Oblate of St. Francis de Sales. Following the Novitiate year, vows are taken annually for at least four years before taking perpetual vows. The Toledo-Detroit Province and the Wilmington-Delaware Province sponsor a joint novitiate.

These days the novitiate experience is somewhat different from those of the past. "We never got to do *that* during *our* novitiate!" This seems to be the resounding cry of many Oblates when they hear the schedule lined up for this year's novitiate class. With everything



Oblates raise hands in blessing at the reception of novices.



Novices (L to R) Mark Winterbottom, Michael Castrilli, Dominic Ciriaco, Shaun Lowery, Michael Newman and Ronnie Czyn

from a Salesian Conference in St. Louis, a monastic retreat in Colorado to a pilgrimage in Annecy, the novices will be kept busy.

This year the novitiate is under the direction of Ken McKenna, O.S.F.S. who has been the novice director since 1993. Ken is assisted by Mike Connolly, O.S.F.S, who is in his first year of this ministry. These two Oblates reflect the joint effort of the two provinces: Ken is from the Toledo-Detroit Province and Mike is from the Wilmington-Philadelphia Province.

While there are many things to keep novices busy from daily classes and tasks around the facility, there is always time to be creative. One of the novices, Shaun Lowery originally from Detroit, Michigan, has used his time to develop a website for the Toledo-Detroit Province. He has done a great job. Please check it out at: www.oblates.us.

Please keep these men in your prayers as they continue to use this year to discern their future as Oblates and ministers in the Church.

Also, if you know anyone who may be interested in joining the Oblates, do not hesitate to talk to them about it

and refer them to the Vocation Director for the Province. The Director is Martin Lukas, O.S.F.S. and he can be reached at the address and phone number below. §

Bondings is published four times a year for the members and friends of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, Western Province (U.S.A.). Its purpose is to enhance and develop the bond we have through our common faith and spirituality.

We have no bond but the bond of love.
—St. Francis de Sales

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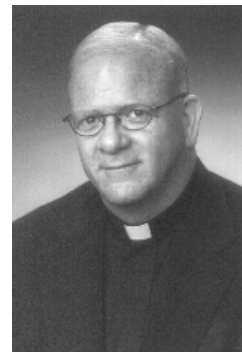
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From the Editor...

Dear friend,

I live in rural, southeastern Michigan, an area known for its fertile farmland. All around me are signs of harvest and plenty. Throughout the day trucks loaded with corn, pumpkins, soybeans and more rumble down the street outside my office. The rhythm of the earth and the seasons at this time of year remind me how blessed I am.



Having just celebrated another birthday I am mindful that crops are not the only thing that face a harvest. Thankfully, our faith not only allows us to see God's grace in harvest, but also in the promise of glory in our own passing. I guess I must be thinking a lot about getting older. Anyway, I have lots of people around my parish who try hard to keep me young.

Keeping the bountiful harvest in mind and aware of the upcoming holiday, have a blessed Thanksgiving. Let us pray for peace in our hearts and our world.

In Christ,

Jack Loughran, O.S.F.S.

Jack Loughran, O.S.F.S.

Whatever happened to the Provincial Offices?

This may sound like a strange question, but in fact the offices of the Province have just moved. So, before I go into the details, here's the new address and phone number: 2043 Parkside Blvd., Toledo, Ohio 43607-1597. Phone: 419-536-7493; Fax 419-536-7514.

The previous offices were located in what is called locally, "The Old West End." This is an historic area of very large and beautiful homes built around the late 1800's and early 1900's. The Oblate Provincialate was a large, three story Tudor home with a detached carriage house complete with it's own two-bedroom apartment. The house served as the home for the Provincial and several other Oblates as well as the offices for the Province since December of 1985.

While the home was spacious and very nice, it was always acknowledged that it was not the most conducive facility for business purposes and a bit larger than we needed.

The impetus for the move was the request by Bishop Blair of the Diocese of Toledo to take on the responsibility of Gesu parish in Toledo. Gesu parish, founded in by the Jesuits is a large parish with a large grade school. This past year the Jesuits informed the diocese that they would no longer be able to handle this commitment and that the bishop would have to assume responsibility for the parish.

Ironically, Gesu parish sits right off the corner where St. Francis de Sales High School is located on Bancroft Ave. and next to the Visitation Monastery of Toledo. The obvious choice of who should take over the parish to everyone involved was the Oblates. We Oblates took over the parish on July 1 of this year and have the permis-

sion of the bishop to use the former convent as the offices for the Province. After minor renovations and a certain amount of cleaning, the offices were moved the second week of October. The facility provides a much friendlier office space and to the delight of everyone, the offices are not in the basement as in the former facility - we have come into the light! The Provincial will live in the rectory attached to Gesu parish along with the Oblate pastor and several other Oblates. Now the corner of Bancroft and Parkside in Toledo is the Salesian center of the city. §



The new Provincial Offices.

Oblates of St. Francis de Sales

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