Bringing Christ to Others

Volunteers visit, take Communion to those unable to attend Mass

WRITTEN BY MERLE FRIEDENBERG

The practice of visiting those in need, often bringing them the Eucharist, is founded in the Church’s long history of pastoral care. Jesus said, “I was sick and you visited me,” (Matt 25:36). In the 2nd Century, St. Justin Martyr wrote, “The deacons carry away the consecrated bread and wine … for those unable to attend,” (Apology 1:65).

We at St. Dominic’s carry on that rich tradition. Under the auspices of Sr. Colleen McDermott, O.P. trained volunteers serve as Eucharistic Ministers (EMs) taking Holy Communion to the homebound and those in hospitals and convalescent centers.

When ministers visit the aged or ailing, they say “hello,” have a conversation, or just lend an ear. Deacon Dan Rosen says the goal is to make a connection with people. This is done by asking questions, being respectful and offering prayers, maybe a church bulletin. He calls it a “ministry of presence.” Encounters range from those getting no response, to those which are intimate and inspiring. When volunteer Philip Ryan gave a patient a small manger scene at Christmas, it was “his treasure, the best thing he ever got.” Springer Teich tells of Karl, born in the same year and same place (Salzburg, Austria) as her mother, with whom she speaks German. “There is a natural DNA bond that Karl and I feel,” she says.

Tim Isley, Parishioner, called receiving Holy Communion during his hospital stay “a lifeline.”

EMs bring Holy Communion to those requesting it. They receive the same training as those at our Masses—how to properly handle the sacred elements of communion, and how to administer them in a prayerful way. Additional training is given by the hospital we serve, California Pacific Medical Center. Our late Fr. Felix brought Communion there daily for about 20 years. Currently, ministers do this usually about five days a week.

Jim O’Dea, coordinator of our CPMC volunteers, says that these EMs perform two corporal works of mercy at once—visiting the sick, and feeding the hungry. He says, “It’s bringing the Body of Christ, bringing part of the Mass, to them.”

Some ministers go to nursing homes. Many are small, but recently at Victorian Manor, Rosa Willis greeted a group of 27 residents with candles, crosses, and rosaries. Br. Columban
Two new wonderful priests arrived at St. Dominic’s earlier this summer. Fr. Augustine Hilander, O.P. will serve as the Parochial Vicar, and Fr. Justin Charles Gable, O.P. will serve as Prior.

"A Parochial Vicar is someone who assists the Pastor in working with the parish," explains Fr. Augustine.

Alongside Fr. Michael, our Pastor, Fr. Augustine will be working with the Spirituality Commission and with the new evangelization group, Emmaus. Fr. Augustine will also be providing talks to the Young Adults Group, working with the 3040s Group, supporting the hospital ministry, and helping the Dominican novices learn about the Dominican Order. That’s on top of his ongoing sacramental work, making for a very busy schedule.

According to Fr. Augustine, “St Dominic’s is special because it is a house of formation and is well known for its diversity in both its clergy and parishioners.” He is impressed with the wonderful people and “the thoughtfulness of our parishioners, especially during confession.” To him that sacrament encompasses Christ’s life of healing, and includes “striving to be the best” from both sides – parishioner and priest.

Raised in southern California, Fr. Augustine graduated from Carden Academy in Huntington Beach and Mater Dei High School in Santa Ana. He came to his Catholic faith while attending college at Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, CA. He was received into the Catholic Church on Easter Sunday, 1997 and calls it “the most important day of my life.”

Fr. Augustine and Fr. Michael went to college together at Thomas Aquinas College and graduated together in the same class. “We came on the same vocation visit to the Dominicans,” Fr. Augustine remembers.

Since his ordination in 2008, Fr. Augustine has ministered in Eugene, OR as Chaplain at the University of Oregon, then at Holy Family Cathedral in Anchorage, AK, and most recently at St. Raymond’s Church in Menlo Park. St. Dominic’s is his fourth assignment as a priest.

Fr. Augustine enjoys giving talks and loves meeting people. When asked what the parish community can do to support his work, Fr. Augustine smiled and replied, “Bring someone with you!”

Fun Fact: Fr. Augustine is 6’ 6” (no, he does not play basketball).

The role of Prior is a formal one in the larger Dominican Community, and it is an elected role. As Prior, Fr. Justin works with our Pastor, Fr. Michael, in supporting the Dominican Clergy and Brothers in residence. This means we may not see him as much as we do the three priests who are assigned to the parish.

Fr. Justin’s role is centered on supporting the Brothers in their ministry, and being the general administrator for our Dominican Community. He is charged with the day-to-day running of the Community. While we will see him at Masses and Confessions from time to time, much of his work will be out of the sight of parishioners.

In addition to his duties as Prior, Fr. Justin also has the job of Professor at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley. Fr. Justin has a passion for teaching and philosophy, and graduated with both an MA and a PhD degree in Philosophy from Fordham University in New York.

Ordained a priest in 2014, Fr. Justin’s first assignment was in predominantly at St. Mary Magdalene Parish in Berkeley. Next he moved to St. Albert’s Priory in Oakland as
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read the Gospel, and after receiving Communion, all sang Amazing Grace. Once a month, a priest from St. Dominic’s celebrates Mass.

Another aspect of this ministry involves visiting homebound parishioners, of which there are currently six.

What motivates people to do this? James Nitz volunteers because the people he visits “need the hope of the Risen Lord and the promise of salvation.” Steve Reading does it because of his sympathy with “fellow Christians who have very few choices left.” Willis says, “The Holy Spirit hit me in the back telling me that’s what I was meant to do.” Coordinator of volunteers for convalescent homes, Gloria Charry, recalls St. Francis’ words, “It is in giving that we receive... That’s the whole meaning of this ministry. It allows us to really live our religion.”

For those being visited, the impact can be immense. Most are deeply grateful and find that the compassion enriches their lives, bringing them a sense of peace. After brain surgery, when a St. Dominic’s EM brought Kathleen Hynes the Eucharist, she said she “talked to God a lot that day.” Before his gall bladder operation, Communion was brought to Tim Isley. He says, “Because I was completely helpless, I couldn’t get to Jesus, but that minister brought Jesus all the way to me. It was like a lifeline being cast out to me. It was pretty powerful.”

Likewise, those who do the visiting are greatly rewarded. “It’s a blessing to share the love, peace and uplift of Christ in the Eucharist,” Reading says. Sheila Harris is moved by the fact that God allows her “to care for His people physically, mentally and emotionally.” O’Dea notes, “I get so much out of it that it really makes my day.” Regarding her charges, Charry says, “It’s not what I do for them; it’s what they do for me. I love it. It’s a gift.”

Deacon Chuck McNeill points out that while this philanthropy is a primary duty of deacons, the laity is crucial and more lay ministers are needed to bring Communion to our 80 infirm and vulnerable parishioners.

If you feel called to this ministry or would like to learn more, contact the Community Outreach office at 415-674-0432.

To schedule an EM to come to you or a loved one, call the parish office at 415-567-7824.

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Unholy Water

BY MARJORIE CAMPBELL

Not all water at St. Dominic’s is holy. Some water is patently annoying. Such was the conclusion of former pastor Father Xavier Lavagetto, O.P. when imposing water stains began spreading outward from the east wall of the south transept on Bush Street. This transept hosts the stunning Twelve Apostles as Dominicans stained glass as well as the Church’s surviving Pieta. It’s no place for unsightly water stains.

“I can’t believe it,” Father Xavier commented after he first noticed the disturbing discoloration. “It’s water. Can you believe it? We are leaking.”

That was two years ago. In October 2015, exploratory work began to find the source of leakage leaching through the Church’s stone walls. This work took building professionals to the Church’s roof.

“They water tested on the roof,” Michael Rossi, St. Dominic’s Parish Administrator, explains. “You basically create a heavy rain like we get in the winter and see where the water goes.”

The outside surface of the Church looks like stone, but it is not. It is actually terra cotta, glazed to a stone appearance. Between the terra cotta and the interior concrete there are gaps, the sort of gaps escaped water loves to fill.

“We found that the roof pan and flange which should have drained the water directly were not well connected,” Mr. Rossi says. “The water would build up and then seep down through the gaps, then saturating the cast stone walls on the interior of the church building. This resulted in the extensive stains we could see inside in the corner.”

It was those unsightly stains that set Father Xavier’s determination. While the water leakage might cause structural concern over time, the stains tarnished the beauty of the south transept. Under Father Michael Hurley, O.P.’s new leadership, the transept was scaffolded. Workers opened the wall to visually identify the leakage as it drained from above.

“We had to stick our heads into the wall,” Mr. Rossi laments. “There was no other way to identify the flow of the water.”

Repair then began in earnest. Father Michael wanted the job done – and the scaffold down – by Easter. Roofing, masonry and plumbing professionals coordinated the fix that cost over $90,000.

Fortunately for the congregation, remaining funds from the Saving God’s House campaign covered the expense. The work came in on time and the Church celebrated Easter with holy water and no construction. The lingering question remains. Is the leak fixed?

“I believe so,” Mr. Rossi chuckled, “but the real test will come with the next rain storm.”

Water stains ran virtually the entire length of the south transept’s corner.

To fund projects like the south transept roof repair, the parish relies on the financial support of parishioners to our Saving God’s House campaign.

To make a gift or to learn more about including St. Dominic’s in your will or living trust, contact Michael Rossi at 415-674-0435 or michael@stdominics.org.