



SOCIETY of OUR LADY  
of the Most Holy Trinity

# gray robes

SPRING 2018





# Forming the Whole Person

*A Preparation For Mission*

## GRAY ROBES FORMATION PROGRAM

### PASTORAL YEAR IN COLÓN, MEXICO

Br. Tim Burnham (Canada)

### SACRED HEART MAJOR SEMINARY IN DETROIT, MI

Theology III: Br. Dave Brokke (MD)

Philosophy II: Br. Javier Ebertowski (TX)

Philosophy I: Br. David Snow (MO)

### PERMANENT BROTHERHOOD IN MISSION

#### *Perpetuals*

Br. Ryan Avery (TX) – Detroit, MI

#### *Year V*

Br. Danny Tozzi, (MS) - Detroit, MI

Br. Nick Coombs (MO) – Robstown, TX

#### *Year I*

Br. Uriel Lopez (Mexico) – Detroit, MI

### NOVIATE IN CORPUS CHRISTI

Joe Spears (KY)

### ASPIRANCY IN BELIZE

Steve Bernal (TX), Ruben Peralez (TX)

Adam Schmitzer (OH), Andrew

Rowedder (MD)



Dear Friends and Benefactors of SOLT,

Upon review of the contents of this issue of “The Gray Robes” I was struck by the breadth of topics covered, the broad spectrum of what fills the life of the brothers in formation: practicum training for priestly ministry, skiing and skating in northern Michigan, a pastoral year in Mexico, intellectual stimulation and the journey through studies, and the beatification of Blessed Solanus Casey here in Detroit. The varied and diverse horizons of life manifest the fullness of formation that shape these men towards future ministry in the church.

Since the vocation these men have chosen includes the entirety of their lives, formation, by necessity, must address the whole person. Indeed, the Church identifies four “pillars” upon which formation stands: the spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, and human. Growth and development in each pillar complements the others, equips a man with self-mastery, and readies him to encounter and embrace the lives of God’s faithful. In a SOLT specific way, the formation process must include a consciousness of preparing men to face the types of ministerial scenarios that we as a community enter into, areas of “deepest apostolic need.”

Fr. Mike Schmitz, priest of the diocese of Duluth, Minn., a well-known Catholic speaker and friend of SOLT (Fr. Mike volunteered at Mount Carmel High School in our Belize Mission as a layman from 1997-98), refers to SOLT as “the Special Forces of the Church.” What he sees in SOLT is a community ready and willing to go and serve where others may not be able to reach. The peripheries and margins, to which Pope Francis calls the Church of today, are what make up the very sectors of society that SOLT is called to serve. Our missions, wherever they may be, are where we find God’s treasures: perhaps not flashy in the estimation of the modern world, but the hidden places and folks upon whom we find the Lord’s eyes rest. It is the well-rounded, well formed men of SOLT who must be able to love God’s people on all fronts, to be in the world but not of the world: solid enough to stand fast, scrappy enough to roll with what comes, to be dedicated and strong in their faith, accessible, reachable, and a place where all can find comfort.

In Christ,

Fr. Mark Wendling, SOLT

*Above Photo: (left to right) Br. David, Br. Uriel, Br. Javier, Fr. Mark, Br. Ryan, Br. Dave*

## Contact

### SOLT HOUSE OF FORMATION

1721 Junction St., Detroit, MI 48209

313.842.3450

### RECTOR/VOCATIONS DIRECTOR

Fr. Mark Wendling, SOLT

361.767.9567. vocations@gmail.com

### SOLT DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Sr. Mary Mediatrix of All Grace, SOLT

PO Box 4116, Corpus Christi, TX 78469

361.654.0054 Ext. 312

smarymediatrix@solt.net



# Reversing Roles

*Br. David Brokke, SOLT*

On October 6th, 2017 I was installed as an acolyte at the hands of the auxiliary bishop of Detroit, Bishop Robert Fisher. He placed a ciborium filled with unconsecrated hosts in my hands as he said, "Take this vessel with bread for the celebration of the Eucharist. Make your life worthy of your service at the table of the Lord and of His Church." To which I responded, "Amen," feeling completely unworthy and yet feeling humbly thankful for the responsibility handed on to me.

An acolyte is an assistant to the priest and the deacon at the altar. It is one of the preparatory ministries entrusted to seminarians on their way to the priesthood. As an acolyte I have assumed the role of the "designated" extraordinary minister of Holy Communion after the deacon and I am able to prepare the altar at Mass, purify the vessels after Communion, and expose the Blessed Sacrament for Eucharistic Adoration.

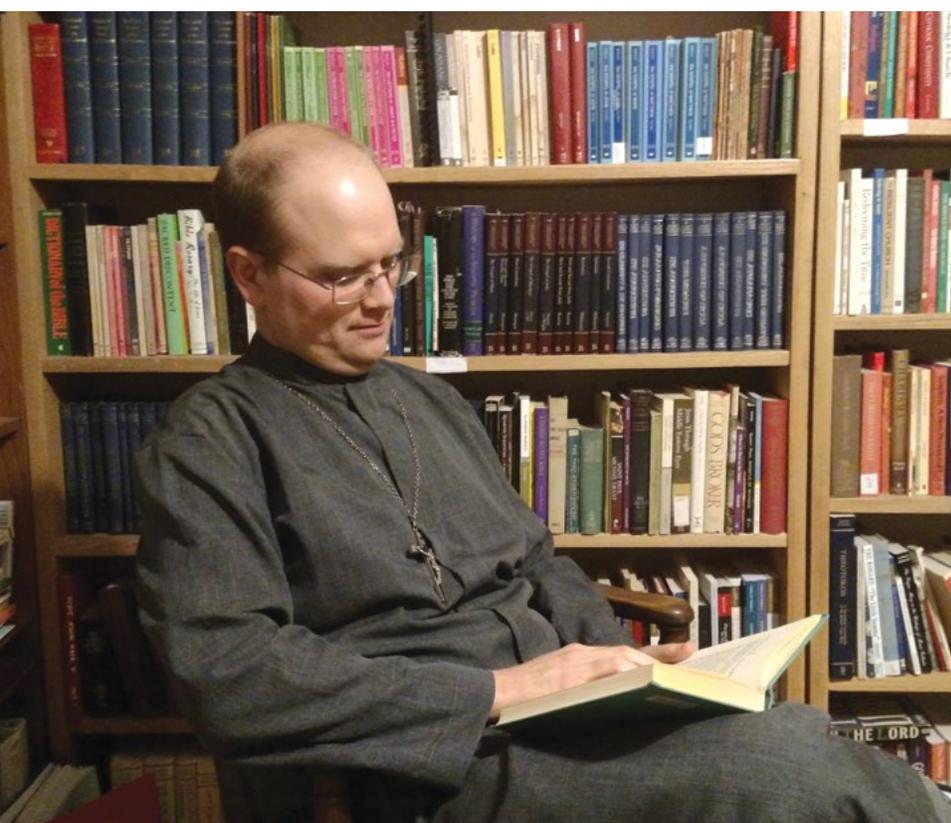
Stepping into these liturgical leadership roles has been a humbling, beautiful, and reassuring blessing for my vocation. At times, however, they feel familiarly foreign: instead of the receiving end, I am now on the giving end. In both my homiletics and liturgical practicum courses this year, I was assigned to practice the rites of baptisms, weddings, funerals,

and to preach a homily for each. For baptism, I had to practice baptizing a baby doll, for the wedding I practiced guiding Janet and Bernardo, an engaged

*Giving a practice "blessing" felt strange and yet natural.*

couple from our parish, Most Holy Redeemer, in the sharing of their vows, and for the funeral I had to practice incensing a real casket (thank God it was empty!). Practicing things I have only seen priests do is both humbling and intimidating. Giving a practice "blessing" felt strange and yet natural. Was I moving my hand in the right direction? Was my hand in the right formation? Did I speak loud enough? Did I forget something? All these things that I have taken for granted, I now have to relearn them in reverse roles.

In April of this year, my classmates will lay down their lives in a particular way as they lay prostrate on the floor for their ordination to the diaconate. They will have the hands of their bishop laid upon them and they will rise as deacons. Admiration and joy fills my heart as I think of them as they take this great step. Hope, excitement, and trepidation fill my heart as I look forward to 2019 as I move closer and closer to the day when I too, with the help of God, will lay down my life for the Church.



# The Grace of Studies

*Br. David Snow, SOLT*

“Music is the voice of God,” my father said to me when I was very young. This statement has remained with me and has become an axiom for me. Since that time, I began to look for God in music. Over the years I experienced his presence in profound ways, especially through studying the violin. I came to know that God had bestowed on me the blessings of talent, drive, and passion for the craft, and I eventually obtained my master’s degree in music. As a student and a professional, I performed and studied some of the greatest masterpieces known to man, and I glimpsed some of the divine mysteries in the process. The grace of knowing God through study came about because I believed my father, and my father had faith in God.

My time in music school was wonderful; I received a fantastic, practical education. However, in my mind and heart there was always something missing. I could glimpse the divine mysteries hidden beneath the

surface of my studies, but because I attended public universities we could not plumb the depths to uncover their full splendor.

After graduation, I did everything I could to dive into the truths I desired more fully to comprehend. I read the scriptures deeply, silently praying with them, and studied the teachings of the Church. My knowledge of God grew, and as a result so did my love for him. My love for God increased so much that I began to hear his voice in my heart. He called me to Our Lady’s Society while I was practicing the violin.

As a brother in the seminary, God continues to bless me through my studies. Now I am able to soar to the heights of his majesty and plumb the depths of his profundity. His truths are always new, inexhaustible. Through my studies I have come to know that God loves me so much that he allows himself to be known by me through music, philosophy, theology, the sacraments, my brothers and fellow seminarians, teachers, superiors, family, and friends...and countless other ways. This knowledge comes through faith. For me, it came through the faith of my parents in statements like the one from my father. Faith is a grace that God gives to all who are open to it. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7).



# Growing in Priestly Paternity

*Br. Timothy Burnham, SOLT*

This year as part of my formation for the priesthood I am serving at the SOLT mission in Colón, Mexico. In Colón we care for over two hundred children who live and attend school in our houses. Most of the children under our care come from very low-income homes and many from single-mothers who are unable to take care of them year-round. A few have been taken from their families and entrusted to us because of abusive or neglectful situations in their homes.

Every day the kids, ranging from ages six to eighteen, attend school, do chores, play, and pray under the care of our workers and volunteers. They learn to live a disciplined life, getting up early to pray before preparing for school, and working for a couple hours each afternoon. We have cows and sheep which the kids learn to care for and fields where the kids learn to work with different crops.

The children at Santa María come from such diverse backgrounds and situations that it can be difficult to know how to best care for each one. Every child we care for comes from a unique situation and each one is dealing with their own unique struggles. Like all young people they have good days and bad days, and we try to accompany and guide them through their ups and downs.

Serving the children of Santa María has been great preparation for the priesthood. Priests often care for parishes with a wide range of people, all with different needs and different backgrounds. It's difficult to meet the needs of every person we care for. But here at our homes for children, as well as in the priesthood, we try to give those in our care the one thing that every person needs: the love of Christ. Whatever background they come from or whatever hurts they may carry with them, the kids we serve all desire to experience the unconditional love that can only come from knowing their Savior. The most important part of our work is bringing kids to know about Jesus and his love for them.

Through daily prayer times, Mass, the reading of Scriptures, and classes on the faith, we try to bring each child at Santa María to Jesus personally. Above all we try to be Christ to them. We want to radiate the love of Christ to our children so that they come to know and believe in God's love for them.

# Blessed Be God in All of His Designs

*Br. Javier Ebertowski, SOLT*

I had first heard about Fr. Solanus Casey two years ago when I was in novitiate and we were learning about the founding members of our community. Fr. Solanus Casey was a very humble Capuchin Franciscan who after seminary was designated the doorkeeper. Due to his difficulty in learning German and Latin, he struggled in his priestly studies and was therefore after ordination not given faculties to preach or to hear confessions. He was what was known as a “simplex-priest.” He humbly accepted this decision of his superiors as the will of God and graciously greeted visitors to the monastery. He would pray with pilgrims and one-by-one miracles began to occur through his prayers. He became known throughout the Detroit area as a miracle worker. He kept a journal, under the direction of his superiors, of over 6,000 recorded entries of answered prayers through his intercession. Today there are still family members and people throughout metro Detroit who either were healed or know someone who was healed by Fr. Solanus’ intercession.



Because of his notoriety for holiness, in May 1957, Fr. Jim Flanagan personally met with Fr. Solanus Casey in order to converse with him about the work that he believed Our Lady was doing in the foundation of SOLT. As the story goes, Fr. Solanus responded in the words of St. Simeon in the Gospel of Luke, “Lord, you can dismiss me now, Your servant, according to your word, for my own eyes have seen the fulfillment of what you promised me.” And just as St. Simeon passed into eternal life shortly after seeing Israel’s Messiah, so too did Fr. Solanus pass into eternal life on July 31st, 1957.

Fast forward 60 years and on the anniversary of Fr. Solanus’ death, Fr. John McHugh, our co-founder, also passed into eternal life on July 31st, 2017. The SOLT brothers have often visited the Solanus Casey Center to go to confession and to pray at his tomb, seeing him as a special patron for Our Lady’s Society. And here we are, the next generation of SOLT men and women celebrating the beatification of the man who had a personal hand in confirming the unique work that Our Lady began with Fr. Flanagan. For those who have never been to a beatification or canonization Mass, words are hard to find to describe what it is like. Being in Ford Field, the NFL stadium where the Detroit Lions play, with over 60,000 fellow Catholics and 500 concelebrating priests, is not something that happens every day. People from all over the world came to celebrate this man who had in one way or another touched their lives. The crowd erupted with jubilant praise as Fr. Solanus Casey



was declared “Blessed” and a relic of his body was processed into the sanctuary, carried by the woman healed in the miracle which led to his beatification. Perhaps one of my favorite blessings from his beatification was the mini-SOLT family reunion of priests, sisters, brothers, laity, and even novices that made the journey here to Detroit from all over the country in order to celebrate an extremely holy man who was so foundational in our beginnings. Blessed Solanus Casey, Pray for us!



# Changing Seasons

*Br. Uriel G. López, SOLT*



Two things I never imagined in my life were living in the north and going back to school. When I was told that I was going to have to go study at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, I thought, “My worst nightmares are coming true.” Born in Mexico and coming to the USA at age 8, I have lived in Phoenix, Ariz. for the past 28 years of my life and I got used to the 120 degree summers and the 50 degree winters (which were really cold for me!). Now I am living in Detroit, Mich. where I am continuing my formation for the permanent brotherhood.

When I first got here it was August, and we had really nice weather as I nervously began my first classes. But it started getting really cold around the month of November and there was a lot of snow already. During our winter break we went further north to Petoskey, Mich., and I had a great time because for the first time in my life I was able to ski and ice-skate. I really enjoyed ice-skating and actually was a quick learner. We continued to have a really white winter for much of the winter months.

I have also been anxious about my studies (not just the cold weather!) because I haven’t been to school in a very long time and taking classes at a seminary was a new and daunting experience for me. But now I am getting the hang of it. I am beginning to see how our classes will help us to work with the people whom we serve in our community and be able to teach them about the faith. By the grace of God, I passed my first semester. Like the cold weather that I was not really looking forward to because I had never really experienced it before, I see how God provides for us no matter the seasons of our lives.



*Novice **Joe Spears** with a statue of Blessed Solanus Casey during his visit in Detroit*



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*On the front cover: **Br. Uriel** has learned to love the winter weather*

*Right: **Fr. Mike Schmitz** visits the SOLT priests and brothers in Detroit*



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