



SOCIETY of OUR LADY
of the Most Holy Trinity

gray robes

FALL 2020





*I glory in
my weaknesses.*

- St. Paul



GRAY ROBES FORMATION PROGRAM

SACRED HEART MAJOR SEMINARY IN DETROIT, MI

Theology II: Br. David Snow (MO)

Theology I: Br. Joseph Spears (KY)

Philosophy II: Br. Andrew Rowedder (MD)

Philosophy I: Br. Robert Blair Burton (CO)

PERMANENT BROTHERHOOD IN MISSION

Year IV

Br. Uriel López (Mexico) - Detroit, MI

Year I

Br. Adam Schmitzer (OH) - Detroit, MI

NOVIATE IN CORPUS CHRISTI

Noah Burdett (PA)

Gregory Rice (PA)

ASPIRANCY IN NORTH DAKOTA

Matthew Esserman (MO)

Andrew Collart (GA)

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Dear Friends and Benefactors of SOLT,

First and foremost, be assured of our constant prayers, particularly during these – to say the least – bizarre times. It goes without saying that each of us has experienced some degree of change in our lives through the effects of COVID-19, as well as those of social unrest and natural disasters. Such times leave us floundering, feeling a step behind, striving to do our best to adjust and stay the course.

When has anything ever before affected, almost simultaneously, not just the entire world but virtually every individual in it? The most acute effects are the negative ones: change, upheaval, uncertainty, suffering; feelings of nostalgia, fear, anxiety, and desperation. But the Lord never allows suffering without purpose. He does not take delight in it. It is not itself the end or the goal. Therefore, uncertain times are transformative times, as suffering is always the Lord's to transform.

On his cross Jesus refashioned suffering, retooled it, and rescripted it. It was left void of absolute power, and, in a shocking metamorphosis, became a testimony of his fidelity and constancy as well as an unyielding road to victory. All that is not final is passing, and all that is passing rests in God's creative hands. For the follower of Christ, when suffering is present, it means God is near and at work through his incomprehensible and immutable power made perfect in weakness.

The world has been brought into and through the experience of weakness, of powerlessness, of loss of control, of division and discord. Into this, Jesus speaks words of redemption and hope as he draws forth unexpected, perhaps unprecedented, fruits of his grace. Here at the SOLT House of Studies, in the grand work of witnessing Christ's formation of his future fellow priests and of his brother co-workers in the vineyard, we listen attentively for his sure voice: "Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5).

Please enjoy within these pages the newness and hopefulness of Jesus celebrated in our brothers, and in a most special way in the ordination of Fr. David Brokke this past July!

God's blessings to you,



Laborers in the Vineyard

Br. Uriel López, SOLT

Have you ever asked yourself when shopping at the supermarket, “Where did this vegetable come from?” or while driving in the countryside, “Who picks these crops?” This summer God blessed me in the Ohio fields by allowing me to serve in the migrant ministry for two weeks. Serving in this ministry made me grateful for the people who pick our produce. As you may know, the majority of these workers are from Mexico, but others come from Africa and Guatemala. In many cases, they have made the hard decision to leave their country and their families in order to provide for them.

One of the most wonderful experiences throughout those two weeks was striving to reach all of the 77 migrant camps in the Diocese of Toledo with Br. Ryan. There was no way we could reach them all, but our brotherhood in Christ made the job much easier. At each camp, we began small rosary groups and delivered a letter from the Bishop, explaining his gratitude and desire to accompany the workers in the sacraments. It was beautiful to see them as they read the rosary pamphlets and slowly learned the prayers.

Each camp varied in size and response. One camp had 100 workers while another had only 10. Sometimes we were not welcomed. At one camp, the workers told us not to come because they needed some sleep after working since 3:00 in the morning. But as we went through the camps, most were happy to have us. Many had not had a priest or religious visit them for a few years. Though they worked almost constantly, many still made time to speak with us, pray with us, and even to come to Mass. During one visit, Fr. Vincent celebrated Mass in a big room where the migrants package the produce. They were so thankful to have us, and they even gave us a box of peaches and apples. It made me appreciate their hard work, and whenever I eat an apple or a peach, I offer a prayer for them.

Whenever you buy produce in the store or if you see a migrant labor camp, please offer a little prayer for the workers or stop and visit them. They may be in the middle of nowhere, working far from home, feeling isolated and tired as if they do not have much freedom. Prayer and kindness done in Christ go a long way to making their load feel a little lighter.

There was no way we could reach them all, but our brotherhood in Christ made the job much easier. ”

Above: Migrant workers tending to the fields; Br. Uriel working in the migrant ministry.

Laying It All Down for Christ

Br. Joseph Spears, SOLT

This summer amidst the peculiarity and precariousness of COVID-19 I was in Corpus Christi, Texas, where the SOLT general headquarters are located. My time there was split between diverse work projects around the property and also various formation talks and classes. Two events that took on deep significance for me during this time—a good friend's solemn Profession of vows and my own acceptance into candidacy—were particularly edifying and served to strengthen my resolve to follow Christ.

Midway through the summer, through a short weekend of whirlwind travel, I was blessed to witness the Solemn Profession of vows for a close friend of mine, also named Br. Joseph. During the Rite of Profession, my friend laid down prostrate while I and everyone else knelt to sing the litany of the saints, praying for the saints' intercession for him. I remember thinking that through this simple but significant action of him lying prostrate, Br. Joseph was pledging himself to Christ while also giving witness to the future kingdom of God. As I knelt, prayed, and watched, I experienced a greater desire to follow Christ in my own commitments, to try to lay down my life daily just as Christ did for all of us.

A few weeks later, I was received into candidacy during a Mass and rite wherein the Church formally recognized and received me as a candidate for the priesthood. It is an official, formalized step for a man towards the altar of Christ. Although there was no moment in the Mass where I laid prostrate, I felt this formal recognition by the Church was itself a simple yet significant moment in my journey down the path of laying down my life for Christ.

Praying at my friend's Profession of vows and my Mass of candidacy were both moments of recognizing the gift and call to lay down my life and also to live for the future kingdom of God. This is what Christ has invited me and all of us to do in unique and varied ways. I hope and pray that you and I are able to follow that call in our particular vocations.



Br. Joseph was received into candidacy for the priesthood the same summer his friend professed vows.



Although there was no moment in the Mass where I laid prostrate, I felt this formal recognition by the Church was itself a simple yet significant moment in my journey down the path of laying down my life for Christ.

Diggin' a Ditch

Br. Adam Schmitzer, SOLT

Novitiate. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. Plenty of quiet prayer, reflective walks, and engaging study on the one hand, but zero wiggle room when it came time to dig a ditch on the other. Twenty feet. Forty feet. Sixty feet long. In my mind it stretches to infinity. And deep! At least 24 inches on the furthest side. Get the shovels, picks, and wheelbarrow. Here we go! Time for some blisters in honor of Our Lady.

Okay, so we weren't exactly digging the Grand Canyon, and to be honest this is the kind of work that I enjoy most and that makes me feel alive. Using the hands God gave me to tend and keep the little portion of creation He has provided for me always feels right, satisfying, and human. It's a part of our lot here on earth. More important, it's a part of our fallen lot due to sin. But as Christians, we can labor in union with Christ who transforms our work into a gift that sanctifies and redeems, making it into a stepping stone on the way to heaven.

Often, this kind of 'grunt' work isn't even visible in the end. We were digging a ditch for a sink drain, and once the pipe was laid, our work was literally covered back up with the dirt we had just taken out and, most likely, was never to be thought of again. But without each drop of sweat, each shovel toss of dirt, and much patient leveling, the pitch of the pipe wouldn't have been right, and the drain would have backed up. It was a hidden work that in the end was really most essential.

Digging that ditch was like humility in the spiritual life. Allowing Our Lady to dig away at pride, self reliance, and vanities can be painful and gritty, an interior, hidden work of mortification and truthful acknowledgment of weaknesses that we would rather gloss over in favor of



Br. Adam working on various projects in novitiate and in Detroit.

other more exterior and congratulatory works. But, as a priest friend always liked to tell me, "The deeper the foundation of humility, the taller the building of virtue God can build on top." It was a good project to work on that day, and I hope I can carry its lessons with me as I continue forward in my formation. Though I'm not exactly sure of all that lies ahead, keep on diggin', Mary, keep on diggin'!

**Get the shovels, picks, and wheelbarrow. Here we go!
Time for some blisters in honor of Our Lady.**



A Light in the Darkness

Fr. David Brokke, SOLT



Fr. David celebrates Mass at Butte St. Paul in North Dakota where he is currently serving as a parish priest.

When I first started the journey towards becoming a priest nine years ago, I never imagined in my wildest dreams that the day of my ordination would be enshrouded by the pervading darkness of a global pandemic. Just like planning for one's wedding, I had my own thoughts and hopeful expectations for that joyous day, including a long list of guests whom I had hoped would share in that momentous occasion. Yet as July drew closer, Texas began to draw nationwide attention as cases began to spike drastically. The week leading up to my ordination, phone calls and texts began to pour in as family members and life-long friends informed me of their inability to come. People who had assured me that they would be there were saying that they could not make it.

Each phone call and text hurt a little more than the next, but I understood and supported the decisions that people felt they had to make for themselves and their own families' safety. How could I not?

Anyone who knows me well, knows that bringing lots of people from different walks of life together in one place to meet each other and to celebrate together is one of the deepest joys of my life. "The more, the merrier" is a quote I live by, and I had hoped for so many years that my ordination would be the grand event of my life to truly live that out. Even Canon Law had my back, "Clerics and other members of the Christian faithful must be invited to the ordination so that as large an assembly as possible is present at the celebration" (CCL, 1011 §2). And yet, those plans were being dashed right before my eyes.

With so many people throughout the country and the world who had lost loved ones, how could I be upset with things not going as planned? After all, I was not even close to being the only one who was inconvenienced by this pandemic. I prayed and prayed for resignation to God's holy will, "Jesus, I

trust in you." And I did trust in him; I never lost my peace. Though I did wonder if the ordination would still go on, I never felt that God had abandoned me. I never felt that he was being unjust or unfair. In a moment of consolation, the Lord assured me that he was with me in my pain. That was enough for me.



When the day of my ordination arrived, I had nothing but peace, I had nothing but joy! Though there were many who could not be there, there were still so many loved ones who were, and, in a sense, their presence was felt more deeply because I knew what they had risked in coming. The Lord was so close. I felt his tenderness, his care, his love. And in a special way, his love was communicated to me through the words of Bishop Mulvey, "I think this is a special moment for you. In a sense, you are unique... to be ordained at this time. And I always like to think that God foresaw all of this... even before you were in your mother's womb, he knew all of this. And in that sense, you were almost doubly chosen, to be a light in the darkness that we are traveling through." Bishop Mulvey laid his hands on my head, prayed the prayer of consecration, and I belonged to Jesus Christ as his priest. My hands were anointed with chrism to celebrate the sacred mysteries. I was changed.

The Lord had always known that this is how it would be, and it amazes me that I was meant to be configured to Christ in his priesthood during this specific time in order to bring his healing, his love, and his light into the darkness of our world today. When I think of that day of my ordination, it shines in my memory with joy, with light, and with brilliance. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). I am so grateful for the gift to be his priest! It is my deepest joy!



Above (clockwise): Fr. David celebrating Mass on the Turtle Mountain Reservation; with fellow priest friends at his Mass of thanksgiving; celebrating Mass with Fr. Michael Slovak, SOLT; in a procession with volunteers and parishoners in North Dakota.

Melt It Down— Start Over.

Br. Robert Blair Burton, SOLT

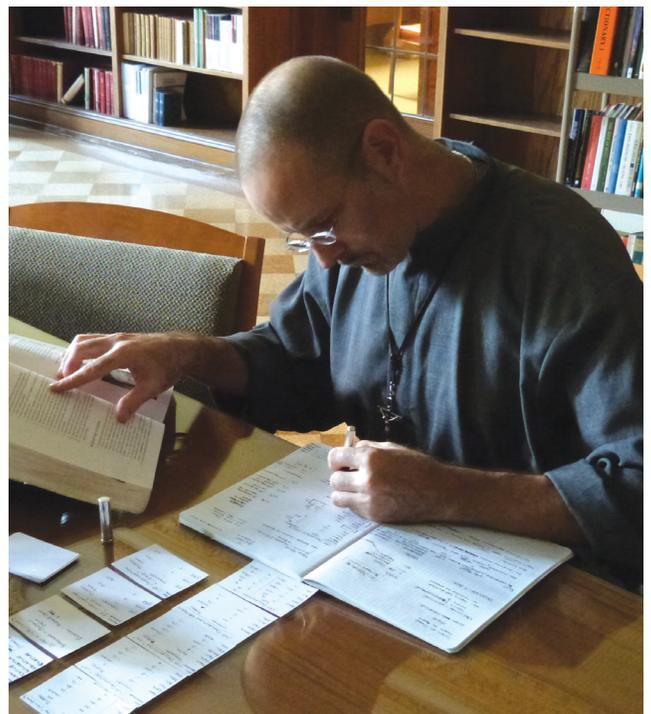
These words would strike fear into the hearts of the men who had come to the novitiate in the Society of Our Lady. For seven years in Capulin, Colorado, I worked with SOLT novices in my workshop, mentoring them in the art of fashioning the silver crucifixes that they would receive at their first promises when becoming SOLT brothers. When they brought their work to me for inspection, assistance, and advice, I sometimes saw that the fruit of their efforts had developed a flaw that was beyond practicable remedy, and it was necessary to tell them to begin again: “Melt it down—start over.”

Such words can be very difficult to hear, and even harder ones to obey. Hours, days, sometimes even weeks and months of their lives had been poured into the emerging form the men held in their hands. Had it all been for nothing? As the devouring flames of the torch reduced their work to a shimmering mass of molten silver, it could be tempting to believe so.

More often than I ever had to say those words to the men, have I had to follow them myself. In those moments, crushing discouragement seems so near, so menacing. However, I have seen that perseverance always bears its fruit, and invariably the final result manifested an excellence and beauty that far surpassed my original vision and effort. Without fail, every commissioned sacred vessel I have been privileged to make has emerged with a soundness of structure and harmony of form, combining in a beauty that I never imagined when I began my work.

Experiencing lessons such as these played no small role in my own discernment to pursue a vocation to the sacred priesthood in SOLT. After being away from formal studies for over twenty years, I perceived interior and exterior obstacles to turning my steps toward this seemingly insurmountable path. As I prayerfully sought greater clarity about the Lord’s will and plan for my life, I perceived his invitation to follow Him in this way, echoed in my memory of articulating that familiar direction, “Melt it down—start over.”

Informed by this consistent experience in my art, throughout aspirancy, novitiate, and now continuing into my first semester of seminary this year, I have been regularly reminded that obstacles posed by delay are often only apparent, and in fact, through them a great mystery unfolds.



*Above: A chalice and paten made by **Br. Robert** during his years as a silversmith; **Br. Robert** studying Latin as a new seminarian.*

SOLT

BROTHERS IN FORMATION



BR. DAVID SNOW, SOLT
Theology II
Missouri



BR. JOSEPH SPEARS, SOLT
Theology I
Kentucky



BR. ANDREW ROWEDDER, SOLT
Philosophy II
Maryland



BR. ROBERT BURTON, SOLT
Philosophy I
Colorado



BR. URIEL LÓPEZ, SOLT
Year IV Permanent Brotherhood
Mexico



BR. ADAM SCHMITZER, SOLT
Year I Permanent Brotherhood
Ohio



NOAH BURDETT
Novitiate
Pennsylvania



GREGORY RICE
Novitiate
Pennsylvania



MATTHEW ESSERMAN
Aspirancy
Missouri



ANDREW COLLART
Aspirancy
Georgia



SOLT Brothers in formation at Holy Redeemer Parish in Detroit, Michigan.

Let's Talk

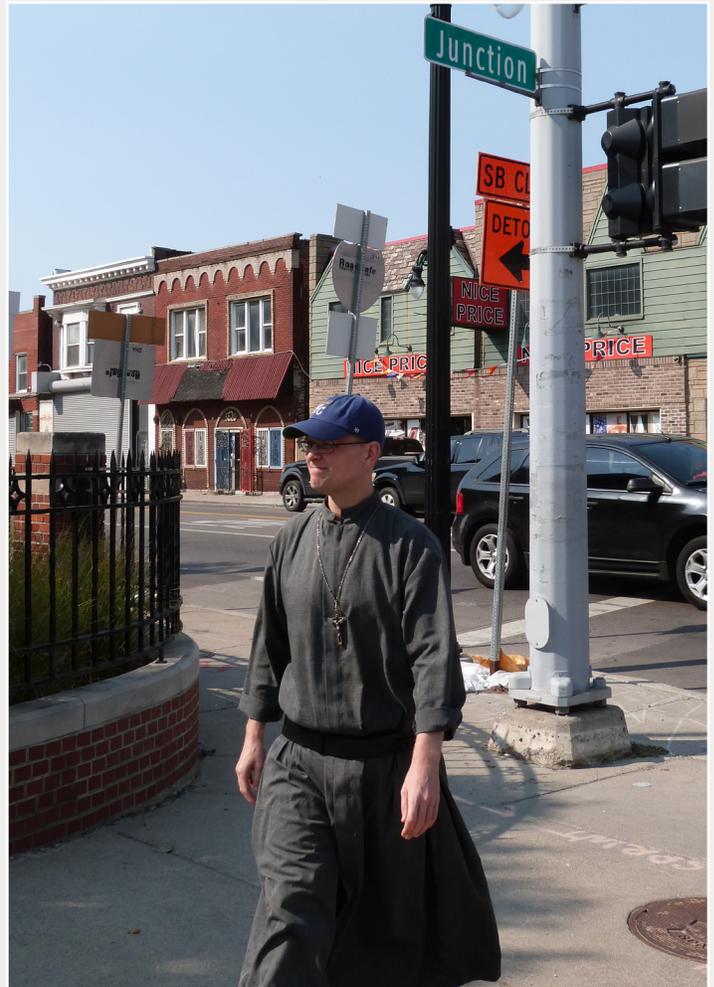
Br. David Snow, SOLT

The 2020 whirlwind has been fierce: COVID-19, quarantine, shut-down, civil unrest, natural disasters. When will they come up with a vaccine? What's happening to our cities? Why does God allow these horrible disasters? Whatever one's position on the state of affairs, all can agree there's a lot to talk about.

"So, where are you at with all this?" a former colleague of mine asked me this summer about some of the events of the year. It was the persistent question of my home visit before returning to Detroit for another semester of seminary—and understandably so. My response sounded like the canned answer every kid gives at some point in religion class: Jesus Christ. I spoke with several people during that time at home and was asked many questions. My answer, though, remained the same: Jesus Christ. It sounds corny and shallow to many, but let me explain what I mean as I did with my former colleague.

Wearing a religious habit every day means I don't exactly blend in with a crowd, so people often approach me with prayer requests or questions. I love it! I love chatting with folks on the street, in the store, in a restaurant about whatever is on their minds. They are looking for answers, fellowship, or prayers; some want to vent, others just need a listening ear. In my experience, deep down they are all longing for Jesus and they see me as an avenue to find Him. I do my best to help Him encounter them. When I pray with them, He can bring them peace. When I speak with them, He can give them strength to endure. When I listen to them, He can unburden them. When the 2020 whirlwind is blowing around them and they don't know what to do, He can calm the storm in their hearts, if only they turn to Him in faith and do what He asks. The storm of the world may still be fierce, but with Christ in their hearts they can weather it.

Where am I at with all this? I'm hopeful. Why? Because in these tumultuous times, we have Jesus as our hope,



Br. David wearing his habit on the streets on Detroit. He often finds that it draws attention and sparks conversation with people.

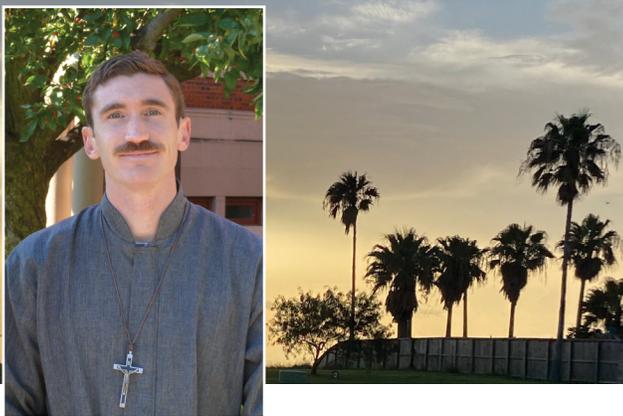
our strength, our confidence. He will see us through anything because he has conquered sin and death: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Lord, help me bring your saving message to everyone I meet.

I love chatting with folks on the street, in the store, in a restaurant about whatever is on their minds.



The Boys of Summer

Br. Andrew Rowedder, SOLT



Above: Sunrise in Corpus Christi, TX; the beach at Padre Island, Corpus Christi, TX
Cover photo: Br. Andrew (back center) with fellow SOLT brothers at the Corpus Christi shoreline.



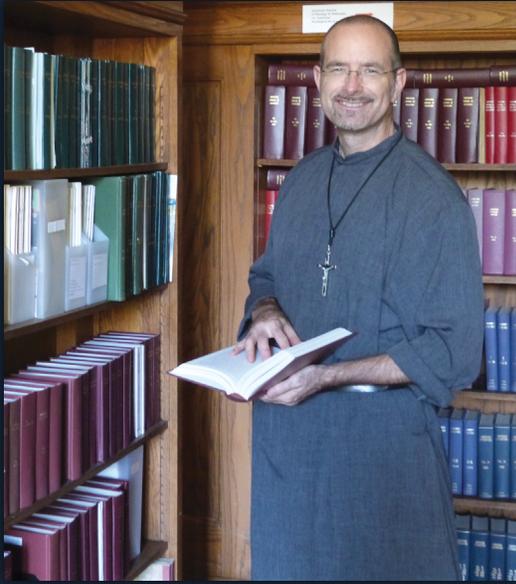
***As the waves rolled on,
an interior peace took root.
That moment woke me up and
reset me in a certain way that left
me more child-like and grateful
for the gift of life.***



After classes finished up this past May, Fr. Mark gave us the news that we would be headed to Corpus Christi, Texas, for the summer. Though the pandemic was affecting the nation, we believed that this was an opportunity to grow, particularly in holiness and brotherhood. Over two days, we drove twenty-five hours from Michigan to South Texas, finally arriving at SOLT headquarters, Our Lady of Corpus Christi Retreat Center. Upon arrival, we were warmly greeted by the novices and aspirants, our fellow brothers in formation. During those summer months, we truly grew in graced friendship as we prayed and worked together.

While we got into a good rhythm of work and prayer, the summer still held adventure. One Sunday, we made a visit to the beach to pray morning prayer at dawn. I had asked the brothers what they thought about the idea, and most really liked it. Somehow, the Lord pushed us out of bed and into the car to arrive just as sun was creeping over the horizon. There was just enough light to walk without streetlights. The normal driving entrance was blocked with debris and ankle-deep water, so we parked and walked down the road where we saw waves 5-8 feet tall crashing on the shore and causing the high tide. Somehow, we found a picnic table holding strong and sat down for morning prayer. That whole time on the beach, from praying, to strolling, to body surfing, I saw the great awesomeness and strength of God's creation. As the waves rolled on, an interior peace took root. That moment woke me up and reset me in a certain way that left me more child-like and grateful for the gift of life.

We not only enjoyed fraternity on the beach but also at the retreat center among the priests, brothers, sisters, and staff. We received formation classes from our superiors and formators, worked with the staff during the week, and regularly shared meals with the sisters and brothers. Our Lady of Corpus Christi has a special place in each of our hearts, and it was a great blessing to spend the summer there, growing in fraternity and charity with each other and with our larger SOLT family.



Br. Robert at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, Michigan.



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Fr. David celebrates his Mass of Thanksgiving after his Ordination to the priesthood on July 18th.

*On the front cover: SOLT brothers at the
Corpus Christi, Texas shoreline.*



SOCIETY of OUR LADY
of the Most Holy Trinity

gray
robes

FALL 2020