



SOCIETY of OUR LADY  
of the Most Holy Trinity

# gray robes

SPRING 2024







# GRAY ROBES FORMATION PROGRAM

## SACRED HEART MAJOR SEMINARY IN DETROIT, MI

### Theology IV

Br. Joseph Spears (KY)

### Theology I

Br. Gregory Rice (PA)

### Pre-Theology II

Br. Andrew Collart (GA)

### Pre-Theology I

Br. Nicholas Judge (MD)

## PERMANENT CONSECRATED BROTHERHOOD IN MISSION

### Year IV

Br. Andrew Rowedder (MD) - Colón, Mexico

## NOVITIATE IN CORPUS CHRISTI, TX

Rocky Garcia (TX)

## ASPIRANCY IN BELIZE

Cole Hamilton (FL)

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*"I am the alpha and the omega."*  
Rev. 22:13



Dear Friends and Benefactors of SOLT,

We have journeyed through yet another Lenten season and reach the Easter celebrations. It is always deeply moving for me to ponder anew the Lord's full identifying with the human state, with the ravages of sin, the horror and finality of death. He personally lives through severe dysfunction, betrayal, mockery, abuse, jealousy, and irrational condemnation – elements of life which mar so many lives in some manner or other. The extent of his love to reach us is fully revealed in his passion: a fearlessness in taking that which is horrid and terrifying into his own person, into the Godhead. No longer are sin and its devastating effects foreign to God. He has made them part of his own life, his story.

And because it is his story – a divine story – it has a power beyond the human, beyond the bounds of time and space. He rises. He lives. Our sins become the glue which bind us to him, which he chooses as the meeting spot, wounds in his own flesh where we can find our wounds and failures, our life hidden in his. His rising, therefore, is our victory and becomes a prophetic foreshadowing of the final chapter of our story, a definitive ending: he gives life; he establishes an everlasting reign.

This Easter season corresponds with the final weeks of the semester of studies for our SOLT brothers. It is a happy and grounding reminder that the years of formation for the brothers are about a continual bathing in the passion and resurrection of Jesus. He is the foundation and the catalyst of all their growth. He forms hearts through gentle and truthful assurances and through his constant presence.

I hope you enjoy the dip into the lives of our brothers in this edition of the Gray Robes. We are continually grateful and indebted to your support and friendship.

Alleluia!



# God's Subtle Providence

DCN. JOSEPH SPEARS, SOLT

Most of the time I can tend to look for the big “aha!” or “thunderbolt moments” in my life and ministry. At times, these “moments” can feel like they are few and far between. However, every so often it becomes apparent that God has subtly and providentially placed me in a particular spot, at a particular moment, for the benefit of another.

Several weeks ago I was helping out with a conference with several of the other brothers in formation. I had been feeling frustrated due to some back pain, which inhibited me from helping in various ways throughout the conference. During one of the nights, there was Eucharistic Adoration. I sat there for a while and tried to pray but, due to the discomfort, I decided to leave early and wait outside for the evening to finish. When I had stepped away, I was feeling annoyed that I wasn't where I was supposed to be—that my back discomfort forced me outside of what was scheduled.

Yet, while I was waiting outside, a young man approached me looking a little teary-eyed. He was trying to find someone to pray with him. As we spoke and prayed I learned that the man was going through a rough transition in his life, the details of which I will leave aside. He had recently come to the sacraments, and felt overjoyed with it, but other challenges still hemmed him in. I didn't say anything super profound or read his soul, but honestly, that wasn't what was needed. He simply needed someone to be there, to listen, and to pray with him. So I listened; and we prayed together knowing that the Lord would hear us.

I don't know what has or will become of that man. But I believe that God chose to place me there for him at that moment. God's providence is always at work, even when we feel we are in the wrong place and ill-equipped. We need only be open to the subtle ways in which He is asking us to be present to those He puts around us.

***"I believe that God chose to place me there for him at that moment. God's providence is always at work, even when we feel we are in the wrong place and ill-equipped."***

*Above: Dcn. Joseph Spears overlooks Montreal while making a pilgrimage to St. Joseph's Oratory over spring break.*





# Standing In Place

BR. ANDREW COLLART, SOLT

*Br. Andrew Collart coaches his basketball players during a timeout.*

Somewhere in inner-city Detroit, within a crowded gymnasium, the “Starting Five” are called out as both teams take to the court, facing-off for the jump-ball. The bleachers are crowded with fans; but perhaps the most enthusiastic supporters of the Holy Redeemer Lions are a family of seven children, seated with their father and mother, cheering their two brothers on as the whistle blows. The Lions spring into action! Meanwhile, two consecrated brothers, monkish figures in gray robes, stand on the sidelines. Their names are Brother Andrew and Brother Andrew.

That scene occurred at the beginning of the basketball season. At the time, I had just been assisting Br. Andrew Rowedder—he having, for several years, served as a soccer and basketball coach at our parish school. (Although we have a talented Varsity coach named Joey Jeiger, Br. Rowedder and I were responsible for the JV team.) But Br. Rowedder was sent to our SOLT mission in Colón, Mexico in early January; so I have stood in his place for the rest of the basketball season. I miss his presence here in Detroit, but am glad I could carry on his role even to bearing the same name!

Coaching has been a rich experience for me and has taught me a lot about fatherhood: the responsibilities of “showing up”, of doing work and preparation behind-the-scenes, of forming young men’s manhood (affirming

what is good, training that which is sloppy, always encouraging), and of personal time-management. While our summer assignments are good experiences of active ministry, they don’t as-much involve ongoing long-term relationships nor intentional discipline with a work-life balance. This has been both challenging yet fulfilling, a real experience of spiritual fatherhood.

While reflecting on this, I realized that just as I stood in the place of Br. Andrew Rowedder when he was called away—even carrying on his name. Just so, whenever any man takes on fatherhood, spiritual or natural, he stands in the place of God the Father—and can thus bear His name too! “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.” (Eph 3:14-15)

Sure, our earthly fathers don’t always get everything right; but even on days where I was discouraged or felt that I was not perhaps the most qualified coach, I took comfort in the fact that I was standing in the gap for Br. Andrew. All that being said, I don’t like it when my basketball players just stand. I prefer that they... Oh wait! Hold on a moment...

“Guys, get on your toes! Be shifting to stretch out the defense! Move to find an open pass!”

...Excuse me, I’ve got to go!

***“...whenever any man takes on fatherhood, spiritual or natural, he stands in the place of God the Father—and can thus bear His name too!”***





# I've Thought of You Daily

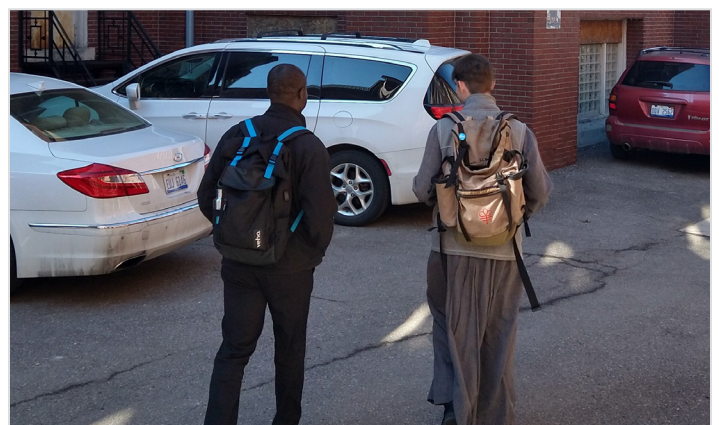
BR. GREGORY RICE, SOLT

The day was going swimmingly up to that point. All of my interactions felt smooth and the world seemed to be smiling as I went through my first day of ministry at the nursing home. I felt that I was carrying Christ in my chipper, eyes-up attitude and was proving quite well-suited to the task the seminary had assigned me. I checked my sheet for a name, and entered Room 132 with a small knock on the door which was sitting ajar. As I peered around the corner, I came into view of an older gentleman sitting in a wheelchair by a bed. As his gaze took me in, he seemed to look at my religious habit with an air of confusion and, perhaps, slight distaste. A social stiffness settled on me and I stumbled through an awkward introduction. Nothing seemed to start conversationally, so I proceeded quickly to the Communion Rite which I had come to administer, and moved on.

That experience stuck with me, nagging with a sense of inadequacy and counterfeiture, wiping the veneer from what had seemed like a shiny ministerial fit. The next week when I returned, the world had inverted its gaze: I felt awkward continuously and every interaction felt difficult. I took a deep breath when it came time to re-enter Room 132. As I peered around the door, I came into view of the same older gentleman, sitting as though he may not have moved since I last saw him. He looked up at me and, with the same bemusing expression, said: "Oh,

hello, brother.. I've thought of you daily." A tickle rose in my throat at that moment, and I said with genuine appreciation, "Thank you, George, that means a lot."

George is 102 years old and his wife used to speak on the phone occasionally with Blessed Solanus Casey. His uncle was a priest and may have lived in the same room I now occupy. I thought I was carrying Jesus in my chipper gaze, but I was carrying Him in the Eucharist and the symbol of my habit. George appreciated my visit where I had thought I failed. He gave me a greeting which genuinely rearranged my day and, gradually, came to rearrange my perception of ministry. For a long while after that, I thought of him daily.



*Above: Br. Gregory brings a cheerful presence in conversation.*

*Above: Br. Gregory and a friend from the seminary heading out to their chaplaincy internship.*

# The Image of the Father

BR. NICK JUDGE, SOLT

The world deeply desires to see the Father. This reality was impressed upon me in a life altering way when I was in Belize. It was impressed on me again this year during a catechism class that I teach, when I told the following story to the boys in the class:

While I was an aspirant in Belize, I came to have a fatherly sort of relationship with an 11 year old boy. It was a pivotal experience in my discernment. One day, when I was driving him back to his house after his First Communion class, he asked me if he could drive. While I wasn't totally willing to let him drive the parish truck, I knew what it was like to want to drive when you're eleven. So, I let him steer. He loved it. And I distinctly remember delighting in his joy at "driving" the truck. It was great.

I explained to the catechism class that this has become an image for me of the Father- that the two of us are sitting in that little green truck, and He's really happy that I am there with Him. He looks at me and finds me "very good" (Gen 1: 31).

I asked them if they had any questions. Often this isn't greeted by too much. But this time I fielded questions for about 25 minutes. They asked about the boy from Belize; they asked about life as a brother; they asked about me. On one hand, they weren't necessarily interested in God the Father. However, St. Paul says that we all groan within ourselves as we await adoption (Rom 8:22-23). We eagerly desire to be with God, even if we aren't aware of it.

Through sharing with them a portion of my heart, I gave them an opportunity to see the Fatherhood of God, because in that relationship, which I gave them a glimpse of, He gave me a share of His own role as father. And on encountering fatherhood, they were, in fact, interested!

Despite this subconscious desire, it can be very difficult to see that God is in fact a good and loving Father. Spiritual fatherhood seeks to cross this gulf, by pointing to The Father, but maybe more importantly by imaging The Father. Perhaps the most terrifying and humbling reality of my life is that some day as a priest and even now, in some ways, as a brother, I am responsible for people's image of the Father, because I am that image.



*Br. Nick Judge regularly invests time and enthusiasm mentoring the altar servers in the SOLT family of parishes.*

***"Through sharing with them a portion of my heart, I gave them an opportunity to see the Fatherhood of God, because in that relationship, which I gave them a glimpse of, He gave me a share of His own role as father."***



*A pickup truck at the Benque mission*



# WHY THE GRAY ROBE?

*When I put on my habit and wear it, it reminds me of my identity and that I'm 'on-duty' as a disciple and am representing Jesus.*

## Why Gray?

The story goes that our founder, Fr. Flanagan, was in a tweed factory in Ireland and asked why so much gray went into the loom but after weaving why the gray wasn't very visible. The worker replied that it's because gray draws out the other colors and fades to the background. That's when he decided gray should be our color.

In developing the community's spirituality, Fr. Flanagan drew especially from two key sources: the documents of Vatican II and *The Mystical City of God*. The latter were writings of Venerable Maria of Ágreda, a mystic. In her visions of the life of Mary, she describes Our Lady as always wearing the color gray. The two of these stories together influenced and inspired the SOLT habit.

## Reception of the Habit

The General Priest Servant addresses the new brother and says: "Receive this habit of the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity; cherish it as your mother's gift to you with much love and care. Wear it as a sign of your love and dedication to the Most Holy Trinity."

## SOLT's Habit Elements

- Gray material
- Profession crucifix
- Broad, black leather belt

*Wearing the habit opens up conversations and interactions for us brothers that we otherwise never would have! Real opportunities for grace!*

## Perfectae caritatis

Vatican II, 1965:

"The religious habit, an outward mark of communion with God, should be simple and modest, poor and at the same becoming. In addition it must meet the requirements of health and be suited to the circumstances of time and place and to the needs of the ministry involved..."



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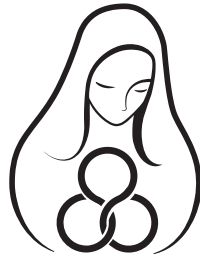


Follow Us





*Br. Nick harvesting maple syrup over Spring Break at Madonna House in Combermere, Ontario. He enjoys a cup of tea brewed with the sweet sap.*



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GRAY ROBES FORMATION PROGRAM  
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### WHY THE GRAY ROBE?



*The SOLT brothers in formation attend the Fellowship of Catholic University Students SEEK conference in January. (L to R: Fr. Dave Brokke, Br. Greg, Br. Andrew Rowedder, Br. Nick, Dcn. Joseph, Fr. Beau Schweitzer, Br. Andrew Collart). They represented SOLT as an ecclesial team along with SOLT sisters and lay missionary volunteers.*

*On the front cover:  
Br. Nick and Br. Greg on the steps of  
St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal.*



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**gray**  
**robes**

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