



mission

magazine

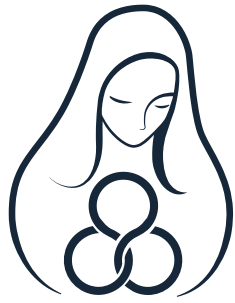
SUMMER 2023



WITH HASTE:
Br. Adam Schmitzer

PLANTING SEEDS OF FAITH:
Sr. Mary Claire Strasser

RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL:
Dcn. Ken Dawson



SOCIETY *of* OUR LADY

of the Most Holy Trinity

A message from the **GENERAL PRIEST SERVANT**



SOLT General Chapter

This coming July, the three branches of SOLT - clerical, sisters, and lay, will hold our once every five-year General Chapter. The General Chapter is a convocation of elected and ex officio SOLT delegates from around the world. It is the most important event in the life of our community designed to promote and preserve our charism and patrimony. It is also a special time to discern the will of the Holy Spirit regarding the direction our community should take in these present times. Indeed, given the challenges of our times, we certainly need the direction, wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit to

move forward, boldly and courageously, yet prudently and wisely.

The General Chapter is also the time for our general elections where our servant leaders and general councils will be determined. For me and my general council, Fr. Tony Blount, Fr. Fausto Malanyaon, Fr. Brady Williams, and Fr. John Gaffney, the Chapter will mark the end of our second term in office. Serving in a leadership position in the Church presents some unique challenges and opportunities. Indeed, during our tenure, there have been some easy and clear decisions; there have been some difficult, yet clear decisions; and, most challenging of all, there have been some



*The SOLT team
and missionary
volunteers pose for a
group picture on
Easter.*



Disciples of Jesus through Mary living in Marian-Trinitarian communion, serving on Ecclesial Family Teams in areas of deepest apostolic need

difficult decisions which were not so clear, and only in hindsight did we learn whether or not we made the right decision. Admittedly, despite the prayer and consultation, there have been a few in this latter category where we would have appreciated the benefit of hindsight. Through it all, the common theme has been to trust in God's Providence to continue to bless and direct us, despite our own limitations and imperfections.

More than anything, serving in leadership has inspired a great sense of gratitude. Gratitude to God for the grace to serve; to Our Blessed Mother for her intercession; to Bishop Mulvey, Fr. Phillip Brown, and the various bishops around the world for their support and willingness to collaborate with SOLT; to all of our benefactors and friends of SOLT for their assistance in helping sustain our missions

through their prayers and generosity; and, to our SOLT members for their dedication, cooperation, and tremendous work in ministering to the people of God entrusted to us.

To all of our faithful readers of the Mission Magazine, please pray for us in a special way for the success of our General Chapter - that it would truly be a great event of the Holy Spirit for our community. Thank you for all of your prayers and support through the years. God bless you!

FR. PETER MARSALEK, SOLT is originally from Burlington, Ontario. He currently serves as the General Priest Servant and resides in Corpus Christi, Texas.

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With Haste

Archbishop Allen Vigneron stretched out his hands over me and Deacon Joseph Spears as we knelt down at the end of the Mass. We had just made our perpetual promises as members of the Society and he was giving us a final blessing as we were about to go forth. Here is a part of the prayer of the Church that he offered for us:

“May God grant you to hasten in the joy of Christ along the narrow way you have chosen, rejoicing to bear the burdens of your brothers and sisters.”

It struck me as a reference to Our Lady’s visit to St. Elizabeth. After she had just received the gift of the Savior at the Annunciation she “arose and

went with haste” to share that gift with her cousin and attend to her needs (Lk 1:39). Perhaps she went with haste because, more than anyone else, she had experienced in her life how sweet it is for a soul to possess God, and how life-giving it is to share Him with others. It would have been painful for her then to have spent even a moment’s hesitation in not springing forward in her love of God and neighbor, in not progressing along that narrow way of perfection and charity.

As Christians we are all called to walk along this same path of perfection to some degree and it is now my calling in a particular way as a professed permanent brother. The promises of





Previous page: Fr. Peter Marsalek, General Priest Servant, receives the perpetual promises of Br. Joseph and Br. Adam; fellow brothers congratulate them afterwards

Above: Br. Adam professing his perpetual promises; the SOLT community in Detroit celebrates this joyful occasion; Br. Joseph and Br. Adam during Mass

poverty, chastity, and obedience that I had just made can now be a tremendous gift towards this end, efficacious as they are to help speed a religious along his journey by uniting him to the Lord in a more intimate and unhindered way, capable of leaving him only anxious about the things of the Lord and how to please him (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32).

Yet the road to Judah for Mary was difficult and rough, traveling under a hot sun and along dusty roads. Should we then expect anything less for ourselves? Times of dryness, testing, and weariness most certainly will be a part of the journey because there is no growth without these, and there are no more authentic signs of love that we can offer. But even with the difficulties, it is impossible for me to imagine Our Lady without a smile on her face as she made her way along, seemingly oblivious to all except the treasure of salvation she possessed inside of her and which she so ardently wished to share with her cousin.

I suppose then that I am writing these thoughts more as a prayer than anything else, hanging my heart on the blessing offered by the Archbishop and the kindness of Our Lady who has gone before me on her own journey. They both will be a source of confidence for me as I move forward from my time of formation, trusting that everything will be provided for me, to be able to run with haste like Mary all the days of my life, to persevere along the narrow way that I have chosen, and to rejoice as she did in bearing the burdens of my brothers and sisters. Every journey has a first step. Now let's get busy with the second.



BR. ADAM SCHMITZER is originally from Athens, Ohio. He has been serving at Most Holy Redeemer Parish in Detroit for the past three years and professed his perpetual promises on April 14, 2023.



Planting Seeds of Faith

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth." 1 Corinthians 3:18

From the very beginning of the Church, missionaries have been sent to plant seeds of faith throughout the world. We plant many, many seeds over the years, praying and hoping they will take firm root and come to full fruition in Christ. We know that, like St. Paul, we plant, but others water those seeds, and God causes the growth. Many times we don't see the watering, the growth, or the fruit, and just trust that those seeds are bearing fruit towards eternal life.

We understand this deeply as missionaries in SOLT. Oftentimes we water the seeds one of our brothers or sisters have planted, and we rely on them to do the same for us serving in our ecclesial family teams. Yet, every now and then, God lets us see the fruit of our seed's planting and watering.

Recently, I visited Most Holy Trinity parish and school in Phoenix, where I had the privilege of serving for nine years teaching middle school. I watered the seeds others had planted, and





Above: Sr. Mary Claire with her 7th grade class in 2017

others watered the ones that I planted in the lives of my students. Seeds were planted every day, but sometimes got lost in the fields of grading, paperwork, middle school drama, and day to day life. Being back there I was able to see many of those 12-year-olds, who are now as young adults.

First there was David. In 6th grade, he was Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen in our yearly "Saint Museum." He wrote the precepts of the Church as a rap for an assignment, and in 8th grade was the star of the Advent Program, singing the entire Posadas program as St. Joseph. He joyfully shared with me he had just submitted his application for seminary for the Diocese of Phoenix. His sister, Jackie, who I also taught, recently married another core leader in the youth group, serves as a catechist, and works at Most Holy Trinity School.

Next was Angel. In 7th grade, he answered every question on his spelling test with "Jesus" instead of the correct word, hoping for a higher grade, because "Well, Sister, you always say Jesus is the

answer to everything!" Over breakfast he shared his excitement at his recent acceptance into the Marines. We prayed together, discussed how he'd stay close to the Lord, and both shed tears in thanksgiving as he pursues his long time dream.

Then there was Karina. In middle school, she asked deep, tough questions about the faith. She strove to do the right thing, even when it meant facing pushback from her friends. She recently graduated high school and received a full scholarship to University of Mary in Bismarck, ND, and is very active in her parish and faith life.

Seeing the growth God has brought in these three, and many other of the young adults I was able to visit, I came to a deeper understanding of Pope Francis' words in Fratelli Tutti:

"It is truly noble to place our hope in the hidden power of the seeds of goodness we sow, and thus to initiate processes whose fruits will be reaped by others."



Previous Page: Sr. Mary Claire reconnects with her 8th grade class in 2023 as they prepare for their high school graduation; celebrating Karina's 8th grade graduation in 2019

SR. MARY CLAIRE OF THE HOLY FAMILY STRASSER is originally from Nashville, Tennessee. She first professed her vows in 2007 and currently serves as Director of Consecrated Life and Women's Vocations for the Diocese of Corpus Christi and in the SOLT Mission Advancement Office.



Responding to God's Call to Serve as Family



Ginny and Deacon Cal Cathers were introduced to SOLT in 1964 by a friend who knew about a new Catholic missionary community that recently moved to Kansas City, Missouri. What was unique about this missionary community and attractive to them was that it included lay families, along with the priests and sisters. This drew them in and after hearing our founder, Fr. James Flanagan, teach the faith, they knew that SOLT was their home. For the next few years, they were in a period of formation and discernment, culminating in 1968 when they became official definitive members of the SOLT lay association.

While they were both filled with missionary zeal and desired to serve as a family in foreign countries, Cal also felt the call to the permanent diaconate. Answering this call would delay the start to their service in mission, but both Ginny

and Cal felt that it was part of how God was calling their family to follow Him. In 1976, after Cal's formation and ordination as a permanent married deacon, the Cathers responded to Fr. John McHugh's invitation to join him in a new SOLT mission in Belize. It was here that Ginny and Deacon Cal found their missionary vocation, living and serving in Benque Viejo del Carmen, Belize, ever since.

They have experienced all of the joys and sorrows of family life, including births, deaths, and the everyday challenges of raising children (most of their six children grew up in the mission) in Benque. Ginny and Deacon Cal have been blessed to serve on teams with priests, brothers, sisters, and other lay members who have become a part of their family.

In the midst of their service in mission, it became

Above: SOLT Benque Viejo team celebrating Easter; Deacon Cal and Ginny outside their home



Inside BRC, founded by Dcn Cal and Ginny

clear to them that they would need to financially support their family and not count on the mission for this need. At the same time, they saw the challenges in the area with regard to the education of children. At that time in Belize, very few children were graduating from elementary school (only 40%) and high school (only 10%). The Cathers saw this as an opportunity – an opportunity that they helped fill by creating, publishing, and distributing high quality textbooks to the schools in Belize. By 1995, their company, BRC Printing, was the largest non-government employer in Benque Viejo, distributing books for free to more than 40% of children living in poverty.

While BRC Printing was largely driven by Deacon



The Cathers family with SOLT Co-founder, Fr. John McHugh

Cal, Ginny found her calling in the mission ministering to women and children in poverty or difficult situations. Ginny's passion for helping single mothers and children has led her into pro-life ministry and helping women prepare for and find jobs to support their families, all of which gives the children a better chance at completing their education.

Ginny and Deacon Cal Cathers are living a life of service, forty-three years and counting, focused on and providing an affordable, quality, Catholic education for the young people of Benque Viejo del Carmen, Belize. Their life of discipleship, blessed by the many graced friendships they have formed as members of the ecclesial family team in Benque Viejo while serving those children and families in deepest need has been a great example and inspiration regarding the Church's call to the laity to missionary service: "the command of the Lord 'Go into the whole world' is continuing to find a generous response from laypersons who are ready to leave familiar surroundings, their work, their region or country, at least for a determined time, to go into mission territory." (Christifideles Laici, #35)



DEACON KEN DAWSON is from Alpharetta, Georgia. He and his wife Christine raised their eight children in the SOLT community near Covington. They have been SOLT lay members since 2008 and he was ordained a deacon February 5, 2022.



SOLT Mission Trip in Belize

From May 26-June 7, 2023, fifteen young missionaries from across the US set out on an adventure of a lifetime! Led by Fr. Mark Wendling, Sr. Mary Elizabeth Albers, Sr. Stella Maris Abbott, Dcn. Joseph Spears, and Br. Greg Rice, the group joined the local SOLT team of priests, brothers, sisters, and laity to serve in areas of deepest apostolic need in Belize. Please pray for all of our SOLT missionary volunteers serving summer programs and those preparing for their year of service starting in August.



Above: Youth Night held at the John Paul II Junior College in Benque Viejo, Belize; teaching the youth in the village of Arenal; gathering for skits and a dance; missionaries working on a house improvement project

A Word of Thanks



It is with great gratitude and a heart full of thanksgiving that I conclude ten years of service as the General Sister Servant. God has led our community along the narrow path, providentially providing for all our needs. He blessed us with the leadership of Most Reverend Michael Mulvey, protector Bishop of the greater SOLT family and Fr. Phillip Brown, P.S.S., our Religious Assistant. I am grateful for the tremendous support they both have provided. Our finance council and development advisory board have all generously shared their expertise and time over and over again. Our friends and benefactors are the best in the world! Thanks for helping make the dream of a Motherhouse come true. What a privilege it has been to serve alongside Fr. Peter Marsalek, General Priest Servant, as well as with both Fr. Dan Estes and Rosalie Buerger, General Lay Servants. It has been a singular honor to serve the Sisters. Their beautiful witness as consecrated spouses of Christ and evangelical zeal have been an inspiration and consolation. Many, many thanks to all of you who have made it an incredible journey. May God reward you!

- Sr. Megan Mary Thibodeau



According to the SOLT Sisters Constitution, the General Sister Servant has a two-term limit on her position. As such, this coming July 27 will mark the end of the ten-year tenure of Sr. Megan Mary Thibodeau serving as the General Sister Servant. Having worked closely with Sr. Megan over the past ten years, I can attest personally to the graceful, wise, dedicated, patient, and charitable manner in which she has diligently carried out her office. Following her term of office, Sr. Megan will begin a five-year assignment working in the Vatican Secretary of State in Rome as a translator and correspondent of the Vatican on behalf of the Holy Father, Pope Francis. On behalf of all of the SOLT community - priests, brothers, sisters and lay, we thank Sr. Megan for her dedicated service to SOLT and are very grateful and proud for her next appointment! Please pray for Sr. Megan as she embarks on this new assignment.

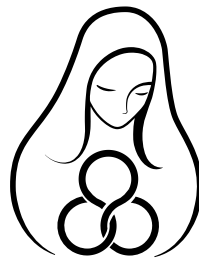
- Fr. Peter Marsalek



Above: Sr. Megan Mary at the groundbreaking for the new Motherhouse, Visiting the Casa de Ninas in Mexico, Sr. Megan Mary with Sr. Mary Emmanuel after the perpetual vows of Sr. Mary Rachel Craig



Above: Sr. Mary Claire and Sr. Mary Mediatrix visit with Karina in Phoenix



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On the front cover: The day after his ordination, Deacon Joseph baptized John Mateo Francis.

Right: Deacon Joseph Spears distributes communion during his ordination Mass.



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