

Old Catholic Church of the Americas

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News Update

Bishop Bernard E. Sheffield, Presiding Bishop

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Since our initial meeting on March 20th, The SYNOD of Bishops has held meetings in April and May. We schedule our SYNOD meetings for the 4th Wednesday of every month. During this short period of time, we have seen more communication and transparency than all of the time prior. This is great and I hope to see continued enthusiasm in this area.

We agreed at that first meeting that we would not rush into things. Our goal is to work towards a unified denomination with all having equaled input in the direction that the Holy Spirit leads us. I was elected as President or Presiding Bishop for one year while we solidify our organization

and I wish to emphasize, as that I or any future Presiding Bishop, is just that, presiding. A person to be a focal point for initiation and discussion – not control or dictatorship.

We are still locating clergy from the NAOCC, to advise them of the reasons for our leaving and the formation of the new denomination OCCOA. I ask if anyone knows of clergy still not contacted that they let us know so contact can be made.

So much has happened, Geographical boundaries are established, committees have begun for Canons, Finance, Social Media and we are working on committees for Vocations and Ecumenical Relationships with other Old Catholic Denominations



well as all other religious groups. With Michael Seneco's presence no longer with us in Washington, Fr. David Lett has been appointed as Director of Development and Episcopal attaché to Washington D.C.

I believe the Holy Spirit is indeed directing us in our mission to serve the People of

From The Hermitage—Rev. Fr. John Kraft

Second, there are the anchorites or hermits, who have come through the test of living in a monastery for a long time, and have passed beyond the first fervor of monastic life.⁴ Thanks to the help and guidance of many, they are now trained to fight against the devil.⁵ They have built up their strength and go from the battle line in the ranks of their brothers to the single combat of the desert. Self-reliant now, without the support of another, they are ready with God's help to grapple single-handed with the vices of body and mind. (Rule of Benedict 1)

Election to live the life of a hermit (an anchorite) is a gift from God – “self-reliant... grappling single-handed with the vices of body and mind”. RB1.

The “vices of body and mind” mainly lie on living the ways of the world: You plan and execute. A hermit leaves everything to God – he/she lives with God and is in complete reliance to the will of God. In return, he/she enjoys the freedom God only can give.



Happenings in Florida - The Most Rev Bernard E. Sheffield, OSB, D.D.

Last month, our local newspaper printed a wonderful story on our parish as well as me as the Bishop of Florida. The article was well received and we actually had 15 new people come to us as a result of that article and more inquiries keep coming in.

Then the tides turned. I was called into the Episcopal Vicar's office at Holy Faith, where we conduct our ser-

vices. Apparently a parishioner of theirs contacted the local Bishop advising him of the article. The concern was that I am a gay, married man. Thinking the Episcopal Church had no problem with that, I was confused. But I was advised that there are three Dioceses in the country that do not accept gay, married clergy. So, even though I am not Episcopal, we use their worship space. I was then advised

that I could not consecrate on their altar or be in their sanctuary. So till the end of June, Father Paul and Father Thomas have been celebrating Mass while I stay in the pews.

The Holy Spirit always comes to the rescue. I received a call from the Pastor of Hope Lutheran inviting us to use their Sanctuary. This is really a turn around since

it was at Hope that I said my first Mass, was Blessed as an Abbot, Consecrated their altar when they dedicated their new church, filled in for their Pastor for two Sunday's when he had an emergency leave. I will be saying Mass on the Altar that I consecrated. What they say is indeed true – When God closes a door, He opens a window!

Happenings in Minnesota - Fr. Shannon Kearns, Minnesota

I've been involved in a number of really exciting projects: We had our second year of Camp Osiris; a retreat for gay and/or trans* identified young adults to talk about the intersections between their Christianity and their sexuality and/or gender identity. Our theme this year was "Beyond 101." We had youth and staff from all over the United States join us for a weekend in Minnesota, and it was a powerful, powerful time. You can read more about the camp (and read reflections from one of the participants) at www.camposiris.org/blog. While at camp I celebrated my first Mass which was an incredibly moving experience. Thank you to all of you who have prayed and supported Camp Osiris as we've gotten up and going. We're already thinking ahead to next year.

Along with my friend Brian Murphy, we celebrated the launch of www.gaytheology.com. Our main offering right now is a six week, multi-media course on gay theology. It's a new way of doing gay the-

ology; one that is more devotional than academic. We are helping people to reclaim the Scriptures as gay texts. The first, full course started about a week ago, and it's been so exciting to see it develop and to see people get passionate about it. We also have a bunch of resources for church leaders (www.gaytheology.com/leader) and a weekly lectionary podcast that teases out the gay subtexts.

And finally, many of you know that my dream for years has been to plant a church. After my ordination in January I started meeting with people who had expressed interest. That group has continued to get excited about the vision for this new community and we've got some big things coming up in the next couple of months: In two weeks we'll have a booth at the Minneapolis Pride festival! We'll be handing out invite postcards, silicone bracelets with the church email, and glow in the dark rosaries. It's very exciting to think about showing a different face of Catholicism to a city that has

been so wounded by many of the comments coming from the Roman Catholic Church.

We are also gearing up for our very first public worship service! On July 23rd (a Tuesday evening) we'll be having our first public Mass. This is one of three monthly services that we'll do before launching weekly worship in October. We have been given space to meet by a local ministry center that houses three churches and we are so excited! Please be in prayer for us as we gear up for this service. We want to be able to provide Minneapolis with a church that honors Catholic tradition and welcomes and celebrates all people. If you'd like to support that work, we are doing one more fundraising push: One of our main values as a community is making the Mass accessible to people. We want folks to be able to walk in the first time and be able to follow everything that is happening and participate fully. Part of making that happen is having a projector and screen. Someone has generously said they will

match any donations that we receive. As you might know this kind of equipment is pricy and so we're trying to raise some funds so that we can have it in place by the end of the summer at the absolute latest. You can donate online: <http://www.gofundme.com/39wy> as or send me an email and we can arrange another way.

Mostly, in all of this, I ask for your prayers for me as I continue to lead these endeavors. Many of you who have known me a long time know how long I have struggled to find my place in the church and in ministry. This past year it feels like I have finally found my sweet spot. I feel so blessed to be doing this work, and so humbled to be called to it. Thank you for your support over the years; for the ways that you have encouraged and held me up, for the ways that you have kept me moving forward. I have been surrounded by an amazing community and I carry you with me all the

Happenings in Rhode Island—Fr. Jakob Lazarus

Old Catholicism in Rhode Island

In 1917, the first Old Catholic parish was built by Bishop Franciszek Hodur of the Polish National Catholic Church which was a member of the Union of Utrecht until 2003. Parishes were also constructed in Woonsocket and in the neighboring, Fall River, Massachusetts. Joseph Vilatte, the first Old Catholic priest in America visited the communities in Rhode Island.

Holy Paraclete History

The Church of the Holy Paraclete was founded in 2009 by the Little Brothers of Jesus Caritas, an ecumenical community following the inspiration of Bl. Charles de Foucauld. The parish community began at the locally famous Brooklyn Coffee and Tea House and after two years purchased the Carcieri property in Providence. The building was first constructed in 1910 and was part of a larger estate, which was used as a front for illegal gambling and bootlegging. During the building's time of operation, pieces of

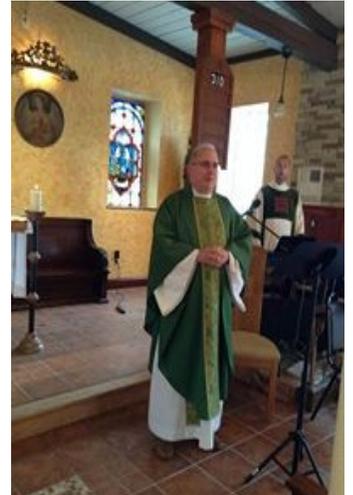
the Space Shuttle Enterprise were produced.

Holy Paraclete's Ministries

Although there were already four independent Catholic communities in Rhode Island in 2009, none of them accepted and welcomed all people. Holy Paraclete became the first house of refuge for all Catholics. This community was the first Catholic parish in Rhode Island to minister to Baptists, Mormons, people who were transgendered, and people who had same sex attractions. The parish also has a branch in the Berkshire Place Nursing Home where we celebrate Mass every other Sunday. Holy Paraclete is a member of the Rhode Island State Council of Churches and Fr. Jakob sits on the governing board. The parish has been without a bishop for three years after leaving the NAOCC in 2010 due to perversions of the apostolic faith. The community has grown strong as we have discerned relations with the Union of Utrecht.

The parish has two priests, one Brother and fifty members with an additional thirty members at the Berkshire Place. Frs. Jakob and John were both members of the Congregation of Holy Cross, a Roman Catholic religious order, which founded the University of Notre Dame. Fr. John has six college degrees including a MSW from Smith College and a PhD in theology from Fordham. Fr. Jakob has five college degrees including a JD from UMass Law, an MBA from Bryant University, and is beginning his sixth degree, a DMin at Nashotah House. The parish has no paid staff but many volunteers, which make the community work. Fr. John is a social worker and Fr. Jakob is a professor at Johnson and Wales University.

If anyone is traveling through Rhode Island, we welcome you to join us.



If you wish to have an article or news item included in OCCOA Newsletter, please contact Bishop Jim Morgan or Mr. Minott Gaillard. This is just an attempt to share with each other and give us a chance to "promote" each other when someone does something good that we'd like to copy—or tries something that doesn't work—and we won't try that—bottom line, we'd just like to open communication channels—share lessons learned—share our blessings. Minott is at wmg937@aol.com. Please submit articles no later than the 15th of the month.

"Why the Window" Part Four

Sister Ann Roe, OSB

I awake in the ER. A counselor is asking me questions I can't answer. I am weak and wobbly, need help getting to the restroom. My legs just collapse. I have had a breakdown. Over the next few days I begin to remember. Well, when we get home from the hospital, I see the evidence. Shattered glass, plates, photo albums torn apart. Apparently the stresses of Mom's death, the financial drain of making her house sell in the worst possible real estate market by remodeling one room after the other, a rapidly failing marriage, kids grown and gone, the defeated feeling of trying to take care of everything by myself had resulted in a meltdown. I am ordered to get

counseling, and I do, and the therapist I see mentions that she has group sessions in the evenings. So I attend. One night, after saying something about being raised a Catholic, but having dropped away, a group member approaches me and says, "Maybe you would like to go to the church I go to." I agree. Sunday morning comes. We pull up to the church. I have brought my hat. "Do I need to put this on?" I ask. He laughs.

We walk into the church. People are smiling and friendly. I see the altar, the candles, the statues of the Virgin Mary, the Stations of the Cross on the walls, and for the first time in many years I feel peace. I am

home. I am home!

I begin to look forward to going to Mass on Sundays. My Pastor hears my confession (what a long, long list!!) and we are in the sanctuary. It is late afternoon, early autumn, and the sun pours through the stained glass window. Colors glide across the floor, the pews, and I am overcome with joy. God has brought me here.

This is my story. God got me off to a good start, but I got off track. Then He set me straight



Standing Before. . . by Rev. Mother Rachael Christian



I have stood in the shade of many buildings both as a child and as an adult and never known such quiet. Such intimate peace, such an awareness of God's living Presence in a property; of course, maybe those times, I didn't think to look for it, or expect it, and only thought it was the fact no one was around that gave it peace.

Today I stood in the shade of an old brick building. Used for many denominations, built in 1927 and currently quiet and a little saddened by no one there to greet it and care for its body. Christ is there, present in every room and closet and space, but there are few to know this, for the congregation has gotten

small, aged, and tired; even this gives the place an intimate peace of Jesus being very near.

I close my eyes and see the sound of praise team music and the congregation joyfully praising God with loud songs of joy and laughter, even angels joining in to celebrate the unity of God's People in one place. I open my eyes in time to see wings of angels depart to the heavens and a light pour through the room I am in, just enough to embrace and then move on.

I close my eyes once more and hear the sound of many voices coming for coffee on a cold fall or spring or winter morning. A piece of toast or a bowl of cereal to keep their bodies warm as they walk the streets in hopes of work or a new place, not the shelter, to sleep that night. I open my eyes to hear the sound of marching feet, more like running masses of kids, excited to be near Jesus, racing to sit quietly to receive Him in Holy Communion.

An old building, worn by age and time, has been used for many different faiths and practices. I heard in a whisper that some of them may have been not so savory, my soul cried out to Jesus for the truth, and I heard in my heart, "Peace, I am here. What was is no more, what is, is now and I have called it good, there is nothing that can harm anyone here, for I have delivered the land around you from all evil." And my heart again knew peace.

Today I stood in the place where God has said is holy ground. Where children will be baptized; where holy unions and marriages performed; where First Communion and Confirmations made and Quinceanera's celebrated for young girls turning into women and Quinceanero's for young boys turning into young men. I closed my eyes and saw births and deaths, and life. And I opened them in the shade of a place where, when God speaks the children come running to feast on the Bread of Heaven and Drink from the cup of Sal-

vation. And we are all God's children.

Extending a hand of kindness; loving one another. Forgiving and not judging. Sharing joy and sorrow. Becoming the Body of Christ, using our hands to heal through Him, our feet to share His Word, our mouths to proclaim His Love and our eyes to see the wonders of His mercies everywhere. Poor and rich, young and old, sick and well, no one turned away, no one separated from God. All are welcome under the banner of unity and love. When I opened my eyes, I heard the Voice of the Lord say; "This is the place. Here you all will feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty and rest to the weary, for there is nothing impossible for God and no one will but those who choose not to come to Me; will miss Me, for I am here, because blessed are the eyes that have not seen and yet believe as you have believed in Me."

The Internet— What is the Value? - by Stephen Pustai

I was recently posed with the question, "What is the value of the internet?" I realized that there is no correct answer to that question because it varies person to person and business to business. The value of the internet comes from how you use it.

Today, we have instant access to an infinite amount of information as well as hundreds of ways to communicate thanks to smart phones, tablets and computers. What does that mean for the average person? It means that ignorance is no longer bliss. Living in a society where everything you could ever want to know is literally at your fingertips allows you the ability to make informed decisions on everything from where

to eat and what doctor to see to which church fits your needs.

When I am looking for a restaurant, I typically spend 15 to 20 minutes checking out a variety of places as well as their reviews. I have my mind made up about where I am going and what I am going to order before I ever step foot out of my door.

This brings me to the importance of having a website. When you have a website it should do three things. First, it should be welcoming and friendly. The website should greet people and say "Here we are, look at us!" without being flashy and in your face.

Secondly, the website should go into detail about who you are and what you do. If people do not get a good sense of who

you are when looking you up, you will likely never hear from them again. With unlimited choices online, it is easy to be eliminated based on what you don't say. Likewise, if you overload them with information you can be overlooked because you tell too much, so finding a good balance is crucial.

Lastly, you should always leave people wanting more. That is the truth in sales and many other professions. When they see a business online they should be thinking, this looks like a place I should go and check out. If that isn't the feeling your website is giving then it will have little impact.

As of May 2013, there are more than 2 Billion internet users and 4.85 billion web sites in

existence. It is clear that the internet is the information superhighway. So, having a website is like putting an advertisement on the Audubon. Will you make it count or let other people pass you by?



WHERE THERE IS NO VISION, THE PEOPLE PERISH Proverbs 29:18

Recently in “Our Daily Bread Devotional” the following appeared:

When airplane pilots are training, they spend many hours in flight simulators. These simulators give the students a chance to experience the challenges and dangers of flying an aircraft—but without the risk. The pilots don’t have to leave the ground, and if they crash in the simulation, they can calmly walk away.

Simulators are tremendous teaching tools—helpful in preparing the aspiring pilot to take command of an actual aircraft. The devices, however, have a shortcoming. They create an artificial experience in which the full-blown pressures of handling a real cockpit cannot be fully replicated.

Real life is like that, isn’t it? It cannot be simulated. There is no safe, risk-free environment in which we can experience life’s ups and downs unharmed. The risks and dangers of living in a broken world are inescapable. That’s why the words of Jesus are so reassuring. He said, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Although we can’t avoid the dangers of life in a fallen world, we can have peace through a relationship with Jesus. He has secured our ultimate victory.

Sometimes I think that I would really like life to be a simulation where the mistakes I make wouldn’t hurt anyone or me. That kind of life while believed to be harmless is harmful to the body of Christ. The above quote from Proverbs 28:18 “Where there is no vision the people perish” I have found to be TRUTH in my life and in the life of my parish. Recently we have been looking at another facility. Some of you may be asking what in the world are we thinking. The church and its property is debit free, it is a beautiful sanctuary, you have worked so hard on it, why not just relax and enjoy? It’s a good question. I have asked it of myself a hundred times. What I continue to hear is

“I did not call you to be safe to relax or retire. I called you to help my people, to be a work and witness of My miracles to the world. Yes God, but where is the money going to come from, the people power to do the work, but what if the city, people, other churches, burglars, angry people, gangs, tornadoes, storms, Satan, invading armies, an alien invasion oppose us, what if the terminator comes back from the future to kill Sarah Connors? Shouldn’t we stay safe, and make no waves where we are?

My brothers and sisters, Jesus the Christ of Nazareth, God the Father’s only son, our Lord and Savior was a

radical and a revolutionary in his time and he still is. He was no friend of the “Status Quo.” Jesus has not called us to be safe. He has called us to be, as St. Paul puts it: **“We are fools for the sake of Christ.”** 1 Cor. 4:10 When I think of this new opportunity my spirit soars with what might be. Limited, but by our own imaginations, we are. Yoda 3:1 Complacency kills our souls and makes us **‘unprofitable servants.’** Jesus said, in Matthew 5:13 that if we lose our flavor (**my interpretation**, vision) we lose everything. So armed with these Scriptures I say, “Yes Lord, send us”

Jesus said

“Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.” Matthew 21:22

Hebrews 11

The Meaning of Faith

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.....”

Read on about the obstacles, trials and challenges that our family of faith endured and triumphed over, in the Old and New Testament. We, I believe, continue to write the story of Jesus the Christ in our time. If you are con-founded, stymied, distracted, challenged or unclear about direction immerse yourself in the Word. Read the promises that are our legacy and then Pray, Pray, Pray.

What would you dare to do for Jesus if you knew you couldn’t fail?

A Bell Rings True . . . By Minott Gaillard

Did you ever meet someone that you knew would be a major part of your life for the rest of your life? Someone who just affected your inner being in such a way that you knew they would be a “forever” friend? Someone who allowed you to share your innermost thoughts—your joys, your pains, your life’s lessons? Someone who shared their own joys, pains, and life’s lessons? Someone you knew would be there, no matter what, even though they were 1,000s of miles away?

Well, I can say “yes” to all these questions. It’s a very long story, so I’ll give you the “Readers’ Digest” condensed version. On August 31, 1976, I was returning home from my year-long tour of duty at Osan AB, in the Republic of South Korea. Due to bad weather, I missed my connecting flight in Seattle—fog, no less!!! After a 13-hour trip, I was tired, sweaty, whatever you look like after 13 hours on a plane!!! I found a place to clean up and grabbed a seat at one of the airport’s restaurant bars. Sat for a while and ordered a drink and some food. My memory becomes rusty after that, but I began chatting with the guy a couple seats down from me. He was headed home to Alaska. I was flying through Ogden, UT, where I began my military career in November 1972, before heading home to South Carolina. (you’ll realize the irony of that as you go through this story!!!) We must have chatted for 4 or 5 hours before we had to leave. We exchanged cocktail napkins with each other’s phone numbers and addresses. (actually, I think he had a business card, but we can all identify with the cocktail napkin!!!) Usually, when you do that, you toss the treasured “card” in the nearest trash receptacle. But I kept this one. I didn’t realize at the time just how important that “napkin” would be for years to come.

After travelling to Utah and South Carolina, I headed off to RAF Woodbridge in Suffolk County, England, for my next assignment. It was there that I discovered world-wide direct dialing!!! And I did!!! I connected with my newly found friend in Alaska. We talked often—wrote—shared all sorts of life’s adventures. That was until I received my first phone bill—the equivalent of \$900 for 3 months!!! Ouch!!! I learned to write better letters!!!

Over the years, I was assigned to many different places—from England to Arizona, Alabama, Ohio, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Maryland, and back to Ohio. My friend was all over the map, too—particularly all over Alaska. But he and I kept in touch—never having the opportu-

nity to run into each other face-to-face. But our friendship grew. We shared our good times, our bad times—I even received canned, smoked Alaskan salmon from his mother at Christmas. She did it all herself. I actually chatted with her occasionally over the phone—a delightful lady. My friend and I each held our Mothers in such high esteem. And as Life has it, somewhere through our friendship, we each lost both of our parents. Somewhere, though, we still had each other’s friendship to help through the tough times.

After a while, though, we did lose touch—not sure if we lost touch or just lost the spark to continue to communicate. I think we both experienced downward spirals after our Mothers died, and we knew we really wouldn’t be good for each other. I had found, in the past, that when one of us was down, the other was able to maintain a decent sense of optimism to help make things better. Not at this point. I wasn’t really sure—not sure if he knew, either. Fact remains, we didn’t communicate for a few years.

So often I tried old numbers but never got any answer. At some point, I think I became angry—sometimes, anger is a great defense mechanism. It allows us to blame the other party for 100 percent of our pain.

But, this is when I thank whoever developed that amazing search engine, Google—I found my friend on Google. Not only did I find him, but he now lived just 3 or 4 blocks from a hotel I had stayed in a number of times on business trips—and I didn’t know he was there!!! God plays funny tricks on us, doesn’t He? So, we reconnected, by phone—a lot cheaper this time!!! We caught each other up with what had happened over the years that we weren’t in touch. So, I got this wild idea. I scheduled a “secret” trip to visit—asked innocently if he would be at his place of business because a friend of mine in that area needed some advice. He was going to be there. But then I couldn’t make the trip and had to reschedule. I had to reveal my ruse and let him know I was the “secret friend.”

This is when some of you will know the rest of the story. I was able to make a small contribution to help his organization purchase a very special item that would help them spread their message throughout their community. I was invited out to be part of the dedication. I flew out with a dear friend of mine. I stayed at the Marriott there in the city. Got in on a Thursday—actually walked past my friend’s house when I arrived, but I didn’t have the guts to

knock on the door. I hurried back down the hill to the hotel. I had a couple meetings in the area, but was supposed to meet my friend on Saturday at his place of business. Well, as my travel companion and I finished breakfast in the hotel restaurant on Saturday, I saw some very important looking gentlemen heading into the dining room. I poked my friend and said, “Marie, I think that’s him.” She said to say hello—I said “no!!!” We went up to our rooms—well, almost. She made me turn around and go back to the restaurant to say hello. So, we did. I walked up to this group—stood in front of the guy I thought was my friend and said, “If you’re not who I think you are, I’m going to be really embarrassed!!!” Well, sure enough, it was my friend, Jim Morgan, whom I hadn’t seen since that August in 1976—over 35 years since we had met. The irony of the situation was that we were both in Ogden, UT, where I had begun my career, away from South Carolina—and where Jim, having journeyed in a round-about way from Alaska, is realizing his full potential as a Bishop in the Old Catholic Church of the Americas.

After so many years of trials and tribulations—self doubts—wrong turns—and many years of “good” things from dear friends, family, mentors, spiritual leaders, and just plain ol’ prayer, we both seem to have reached a good point in our lives—a point where we can each look back and wonder how in the heck we made it this far. We have grown—and we both have those bumps and bruises that give us the opportunity to remember our Life lessons. We’re each at a place in our lives where it’s good that God has led us to reconnect.

All in good time!!!

The item Bishop Jim and his congregation were dedicating was a beautiful bell—a bell they would use to let the world know where they are—a bell that would signal that all are welcome into the family of God through Glory to God Old Catholic Church. But, to me, this bell would represent the renewal of a treasured friendship. A friendship which, as the bell, had tarnished over the years—has scars to show that it’s been rung pretty hard—but with a little polish and caring, still rings true.

