

SOCIETY of OUR LADY
of the Most Holy Trinity

gray robes

FALL 2018





Ministry, Unity, and Resolve

GRAY ROBES FORMATION PROGRAM

PASTORAL YEAR IN CORPUS CHRISTI, TX

Br. Timothy Burnham (Canada)

SACRED HEART MAJOR SEMINARY IN DETROIT, MI

Theology IV: Br. Dave Brokke (MD)

Theology I: Br. Javier Ebertowski (TX)

Philosophy II: Br. David Snow (MO)

Philosophy I: Br. Joseph Spears (KY)

PERMANENT BROTHERHOOD IN MISSION

Br. Ryan Avery (TX) - Phoenix, AZ

Br. Nick Coombs (MO) - Robstown, TX

Year V

Br. Danny Tozzi (MS) - Detroit, MI

Year II

Br. Uriel López (Mexico) - Detroit MI

NOVITIATE IN CORPUS CHRISTI

Andrew Rowedder (MD), Steve Bernal (TX)

ASPIRANCY IN BELIZE

Adam Schmitzer (OH), Blair Burton (CO),

Paul Pesek (TX)



Dear Friends and Benefactors of SOLT,

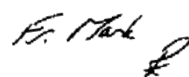
We begin another year of formation with the start of the 2018-19 academic year, after a full and busy summer for the SOLT community and brothers in formation.

Contained in this issue of Gray Robes are plenty of accounts of the varied ministries, activities and experiences of the brothers as they were scattered far and wide to SOLT missions for their summer apostolates. The summer, free from studies, provides a significant opportunity for unique growth in important areas: it gives the brother contact with the Body of Christ in new contexts, it provides ministerial experiences which become both educative and inspiring, it augments and intensifies commitment to vocation and what the future holds as consecrated men at the service of the Church. This round of summer experiences thankfully achieved these goals for the brothers, many of which are attested to in the contents of this issue.

For SOLT as a community, the two week General Assembly of the entire international community in Corpus Christi marked our summer individually and communally. There was the significant work to be done by each of the three branches of SOLT – clerical, sisters and laity – of revisal of existing constitutions. We sought to make them more representative of the lived way of life in SOLT while maintaining the spirit and vision of the founder. Chapter members and delegates of the three branches tackled this in meetings restricted to perpetually professed members. Although an intense and arduous two weeks, due to the amount and the importance of the work, an awareness of a deep unity and momentum in the community was evident to everyone attending. Something that had potential to be both exhausting and contentious, somewhat paradoxically left everyone renewed, bonded and encouraged with a new sense of mission and direction.

This momentum has spilled over, and proved necessary, as we began the new year of formation against the unexpected backdrop of shocking and unsettling news in the Church. Thankfully, and even surprisingly, the brothers in formation appear graced with a resolve, a proper “digging in of the heels” to be the prepared men for Christ that the Lord asks of them. It is an inspiring and encouraging phenomenon to witness. They are the generation of those who will be asked to live the renewal that, through purification in the Church, is already afoot.

Thank you for your continued friendship, prayers and support. We pray for you daily, and ask for your prayers to as we all seek strength to persevere in charity, faith and love.

In Christ, 

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From Death to Life

Br. David Brokke, SOLT

Speeding past two trucks meeting at a street corner in the middle of the night, Fr. Tristan said, "That's them." My heart raced as it became even clearer to me just how deep I was in the domain of one of Mexico's largest and most violent drug cartels.

This May and June, I was assigned to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico which borders Laredo, Texas separated only by the flowing Rio Grande. I was being sent there in order to practice my Spanish and serve Masses at either the parish or one of the five chapels attached to the parish. I was also asked to attend as many as I could of the 30+ pequeñas comunidades (or small groups for adult faith formation), assist at one of the nine youth groups, and do door-to-door evangelization. But one thing that I never imagined myself doing was meeting one-on-one with a former member of the cartel in order to prepare him for his first Confession and his First Holy Communion.

The first time that I met O., as I'll refer to him here, was when I entered his house to see a shirtless, stick-thin,

tall, 21 year old young man with various black tattoos on his gaunt almost skeletal body. O. was a member of the cartel for much of his young adulthood. He had been caught by the police, arrested, and incarcerated. While in prison he had a new tattoo etched onto his skin

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I had just seen something more powerful than seeing the dead rise!

by which he contracted AIDS. He seemed a bit indifferent to the idea of having classes, but his sickness had humbled him enough to acquiesce to the request of the pastor, Fr. Tony. As we started our first class I could tell he was not that excited. But by the middle of our class, he began to pepper me with questions. I saw a sense of awe and wonder awaken in him as his eyes sparkled with a new found hope. We began meeting almost three times a week having almost three hour classes each time. He was becoming excited and enthusiastic about the faith. But everything reached its climax when he had his first thirty-minute tearful confession. He looked free! The next night he received Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

What a gift it was for me to witness that, as Fr. Tony expressed, I had just seen something more powerful than seeing the dead rise!

Present Among the Poor

Br. Javier Ebertowski, SOLT



Upon returning to our Colón mission in Mexico, I realized just how true that cliché I have heard throughout my life really rang true for me, namely, “If you don’t use it, you lose it.” Just the prior summer I had spent 4 weeks in Spanish school in Antigua Guatemala, learning all the nuts and bolts of the Spanish language. Now, a year later, and those nuts and bolts had become quite rusty. I had spent the entire academic school year so immersed in the world of philosophy that I forgot how to communicate in Spanish!

That being said, I think it goes without saying that I had a very humble beginning upon my arrival back in Mexico, trying to build (and rebuild) relationships and mentor a rather large group of troubled Spanish speaking teenagers. My days often consisted of helping Doña Luz (the Cook) make tortas (sandwiches) and prep lunch in the mornings, doing manual labor with the boys in the afternoons, and then, praying and playing with the

boys in the evenings. Perhaps my more enjoyable experiences there in Colon, were the times when I was able to spend a little more time with the boys in smaller groups, usually playing foosball, Ping-Pong, or a game like Connect 4. It was during these moments of recreation that I was able to establish trust and build relationships with the boys.

Thinking back on this experience, I can’t recall actually doing anything profound or life changing for these kids. I just remembered being there, which, now that I think about it, is something we all want in this life, someone to show us they care for us, simply by their presence.

Having just finished my philosophical studies in seminary, which were quite vigorous, the adventures I had in Central America were very much a welcomed gift from God. As much as I enjoy learning about the Categorical Imperative or Existentialism in seminary, I would much rather prefer to be with God’s people; praying with them, playing with them, teaching them, listening to them, laughing with them, and just being with them.



Above: Br. Javier playing Connect 4.

Left: Br. Javier with some of the youth from Santa Maria in Colón.



A Calling Into the Deep

Br. Joseph Spears, SOLT

When I think back to “that moment” of feeling called to the priesthood in many ways it seems like it was yesterday. I don’t remember who the priest was that was speaking. I don’t remember what he was saying, but the one thing that I remember is this feeling that one day I would be doing what he is doing as a priest. It was a feeling of excitement and fear all at once, but more importantly it was a precise moment that I can’t deny.

The Gospel of John mentions the precise hour when Andrew and another disciple first heard Jesus and followed him. I often think of my own moment when I felt this call and wonder if in some small way it was similar for Andrew and the other disciples of Jesus.

Since that moment up until now the Lord has taken me to a number of different places, which have aided me in my pilgrimage back to Him. When I graduated from Franciscan University I knew I wanted to serve and discern God’s will. This led me to serve in Belize for one year as a missionary-volunteer and another year as an aspirant with the SOLT community.

This past year I completed my novitiate year in Corpus Christi, Texas. The year was dedicated to prayer, work, and discernment with the community. It would be hard to try to encapsulate my novitiate year in so few words as I have here. Yet, one thing comes to mind from the first meeting I had in novitiate where my Novice-Servant said that Christ has called each of you here today to set out in the boat with Him and put out into the deep.

I’m extremely grateful for my time thus far in formation and know that I am just getting started. One of the big moments in this process of formation was making my First-Promises on the 8th of July. I feel that this is just another step toward that initial calling I felt when I heard that priest speaking so many years ago. I’m grateful to be in the boat with Christ and slowly pushing out into the deep. I pray that he continually makes me aware of His Grace so that I may remain with Him in the boat as I push out into the deep with my upcoming years of seminary.



Br. Joseph after his First Promises.

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Faithful in Small Things, Faithful in Big Things

Br. Nicholas Coombs, SOLT

In 2012, I began the process of discerning my vocation. Little did I know the journey would be this incredible. When discerning religious life with the Society of our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity I wasn't sure what to expect or where it would take me. I was blessed with the opportunity to talk with our founder, Fr. Jim Flanagan about religious life, and he shared with me, "SOLT is a family and the brother keeps the family together." From that moment on I was sold!

After making 1st Promises on July 17th, 2013. My journey as a brother began at Most Holy Redeemer in Detroit, MI with the other brothers in formation. The next 2 years serving there were challenging and unexpected areas of spiritual growth. One of the brothers shared with me that the goal of the spiritual life is the Resurrection, but first we must go through carrying the Cross, our crucifixion, and our death. In the summer of 2015, I was assigned to Our Lady of Corpus Christi in Corpus Christi, TX. I continued to persevere in prayer and service with SOLT unknowing of what God was going to do next with me. Just when I thought that perhaps God was closing the door on my vocation, He opened the door for me to serve at St. Anthony of Padua in Robstown, TX.

I have been blessed with the opportunity to serve at St. Anthony. The little ways that I serve have become very fruitful, especially when preparing for daily Mass. I find myself in prayer with St. Veronica who simply offered her veil to wipe the blood off of Our Lord's face. This simple act of love was a stepping stone in my preparation for perpetual promises. If I was faithful in the small ways, I could be faithful in the big ways as well.

I was blessed to make perpetual promises on July 19th, 2018. The summer leading up to that moment was truly heart warming! Actively seeing God unfold my vocation reminded me of how God has called His chosen people throughout salvation. To be chosen by God for this particular vocation, at this particular moment in time is truly awesome! I continue to serve with great joy at St. Anthony at daily Mass, with our youth group, at the school, or wherever needed!



***Little did I know
the journey would be
this incredible.***



Home

Br. David Snow, SOLT

“Welcome home!” were the hearty words of Fr. John Robinson that began my summer assignment. Two years after joining SOLT as an aspirant God sent me back to Belize, this time as a brother. What he was going to show me I could never have imagined.

Following Fr. John’s boisterous greeting, I loaded up my suitcase, jumped in the car, and we drove 80 miles to Benque Viejo, a small town on the nation’s western border, the location of our SOLT mission. Over the course of my first week, God’s grace poured forth in abundance as I received a warm welcome from parishioners, former colleagues, former students, and the current corps of volunteer teachers. “Mister, where have you been?” were the first words from Beyoncé, a student whom I had taught a few violin lessons. I answered her question, and she replied, “You’ve been gone for so long. I thought that before, when you were here, you were going to be staying in Belize.” The Lord continued to bless me with such reunions for the duration of my assignment. At the beginning of July, I was preparing to leave Belize, and as I said goodbye to Sonia, one of our parishioners, she looked at me and said, “You’re leaving already? I was thinking you would be here to stay with us.” After I replied that I had to continue my studies in the seminary she responded, “Well, hopefully you’ll come back soon as a priest or deacon; this is where you belong.”

As my summer began to wind down, I was afforded some time in Kansas City to rest and visit family and friends. My close friend Sean, a parish music director, asked me, “So, where have you been this summer?” I recounted my travels from the past months, and as our conversation progressed he said, “Well, maybe someday they’ll send you to the SOLT mission here as a priest or deacon; it would be great to have you here in this diocese.”

In some sense I have never really left my family or my home, but God has blessed me abundantly by giving me the Church as home and family. He has not replaced my family or my home, but rather has expanded both. Even as one called away from my former life, the loving Father, wherever I am, has given me a place to call home.

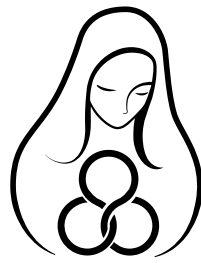


Top: Br. David with his Spanish teacher.

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Br. Uriel Lopez on Belle Isle in Detroit, MI.



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On the front cover: Br. Joseph Spears celebrates his first promises.

Right: Br. Nicholas Coombs, center, with SOLT brothers, after making his perpetual promises.



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