



The Romero Center  
A Ministry of St. Joseph Pro-Cathedral

# Seeds Already Planted

## The Romero Center Newsletter

Volume V Issue 2

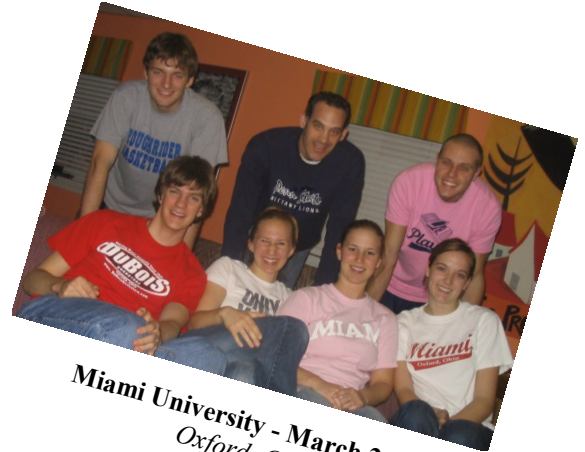
Winter 2010



West Chester University - January 2006  
West Chester, PA



St. Joseph's Preparatory High School - March 2006  
Philadelphia, PA



Miami University - March 2006  
Oxford, OH



Marywood University - March 2006  
Scranton, PA



Trinity Catholic High School - January 2006  
Newton, MA

### My Urban Challenge in a Few Words

by: Nick Harkness

Junior at Malvern Preparatory High School

To the darkness I was thrown,  
From the darkness I was carried,  
The shell was cracked,  
The fruit consumed and loved,  
As snow changes to water in ones hands,  
So I changed in the hands of they,  
They who have naught but love,  
They who want naught but love,  
They took me in with nothing,  
And guided me out with everything.

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# From the Director: Watch Your Language!

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God, in the Hebrew Scriptures, is The Word. The New Testament identifies Jesus as The Word made flesh. We all use words to communicate, to paint pictures and images. In fact, our Liturgical gatherings are a celebration of both the spoken Word (Scripture), and the embodied Word (Eucharist). So, the challenge that faces people of Faith is to ask ourselves about the impact of the words we use and the words we hear.

Undocumented immigrants are called aliens. In one sense, that creates an image of a pretty scary invader. Can you imagine the image conjured up in the mind of a child when they hear about the presence of aliens in our midst? Is that healthy? In a Biblical sense, aliens are those whom we are called to welcome and embrace. Often, the test of Faith is how we welcome the orphan, widow, or alien. How about if we, at least, refer to undocumented immigrants as our sisters and brothers.

Most of us struggled with our moral response to the invasion of Iraq. A lot of words shaped images, and influenced our thinking. We heard plenty of words from those who justified the war. Did we include the words of Jesus and our Church moral leaders in our dialogue – our moral response? Do we believe Jesus, when He preaches, “Love your enemies.” “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God?” Pope John Paul II declared the preemptive bombing of Iraq as immoral, unjust, and a defeat for humanity. As talk escalated about a U.S. attack on Iraq, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger began stating unequivocally that "the concept of a 'preventive war' does not appear in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*." His comments were published as early as September 2002. How many of us were aware of the moral words of our last two Popes? Most Mass-attending Catholics heard more about the fictional DaVinci Code than about the reality of the Church’s moral response to war. “Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening.”

Part of the mission of the Romero Center is to introduce students and adults to the sacred words of Catholic Social Teaching, sadly called “our best kept secret.” They come here to serve, but primarily to learn from people whose stories and histories are very unfamiliar to them. They learn by keeping company with their sisters and brothers who are poor, sick, without shelter, without proper nutrition, and neglected. Those who are poor truly gift those who come to the Romero Center. We hear this in their shared reflections. Some of the articles in this newsletter tell part of the story of transformation. The students and adults who grace the Romero Center give us all a reason to hope. I pray that as they return to their familiar environments that they will watch their language – that their words reflect the vision of Jesus – that they will speak boldly of their solidarity with all of God’s children – that they will respect and protect the special place that the poor have in God’s Kingdom – that they will have the courage to live the Lord’s Prayer as the Prayer of radical sisterhood and brotherhood – that they will respond to the motto of our Camden Bishop, Joseph Galante, “Have the mind of Jesus.”

This is the call of all the baptized. We recall these relevant words prayed during Baptism - "May the Lord Jesus touch your ears to receive His word, and your mouth to proclaim His faith, to the praise and glory of God." Let the whole Church say, “Amen.”



Larry DiPaul



"There is your brother or sister, naked, crying!  
And you stand confused over the choice of an attractive floor covering."  
*St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, 340-397*



## St. Philip Goes to Camden by Bob Hamilton

Each class of Diaconate Formation names itself after a Saint. Our class picked St. Philip as our namesake, one of the first seven deacons (Acts: 6). As part of our effort to grow spiritually, learn more about the challenges of our diocese, and build shared experiences, we attended a weekend retreat in August at the Romero Center.

A Romero Center Urban Challenge Weekend is not like most retreat weekends, which, primarily, center on a journey inward. The Urban Challenge journey for me was a journey inward and outward – to find God in the people I met, and see God working in and through them in extraordinary ways. These relational encounters stoked a fire and a change in me.

First, we heard some in depth teaching and reflection on Social Justice as equally important with charity and liturgy in the life of the church. The gospel story of the Good Samaritan was relayed in a way that challenged me as a check-writing, suburban Catholic. The prominent quote "So you say you love the poor? Name them," is a direct challenge to my comfort.

The quote begs the question, "How can you say you love your neighbor, whose name you don't even know?"

Second, we met people making sacrifices for the disenfranchised and the poor. These sacrifices are not fantastic in nature. They are simply sharing the gifts they have directly with a person in need. To see the joy and the gratitude, the shared blessings among the ministers and those for whom and with whom they minister, is an invitation to a deeper practice of our living Faith.

So, I was inspired, and the idea of the Camden City Cruise was conceived. The experience was to be a day trip into the city of Camden. My hope was that others might see firsthand what they otherwise would never experience, and to spark in them what had been sparked in me – a desire to take a step in my relationship with Jesus. That step involves leaving what is comfortable, and, at times, most uncomfortable.

Twelve hearty souls departed from St. Rose of Lima in Haddon Heights at 7:45am on the last Sunday in October. We had four goals.

- To meet people who minister and witness the joy they get from simple, Christ-centered service.
- To experience the wonderful spirituality that exists in our church in the city.
- To be challenged and invited in our faith journey to a personal, unconditional "love of neighbor"
- To understand that a simple gift is a precious gift. We don't need to have extraordinary talents to have an impact in someone's life.

I think that the Holy Spirit helped us embrace those four goals. What we needed was to enlarge our territory and our hearts. We met ordinary people both serving and served. The people we got to know treasured and needed relationship. They are not asking for a savior, they already have one. What they need is a companion on the journey. Don't we all!

Bob Hamilton lives in Audubon with his daughter, her husband and their three children. A parishioner of St. Rose of Lima Church in Haddon Heights for 25 years, Bob is in his third year of diaconate formation. He has worked in various ministries but I especially love working with children and the elderly. "On my tombstone I hope they write, 'He loved well'."



## **Joining the Staff of Romero Center Ministries --Cheryl Mrazik**

As the new face at Romero Center Ministries, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Cheryl Mrazik and I joined the staff in August, 2009 as the Associate Director. I grew up in Harrisburg, PA and received my undergraduate education at the University of Scranton. At Scranton I first learned about Oscar Romero and his courageous and inspiring fight against social injustice. My Jesuit education and many of the service and justice experiences I had at Scranton, changed the course of my life, and really led me to where I am today.

After I graduated from Scranton, I joined the Augustinian Volunteers and spent a year in San Diego working in campus ministry at St. Augustine High School, tutoring at an after-school program on the border, and helping out at an orphanage just south of Tijuana, Mexico. These experiences challenged me to grow in my own faith and reaffirmed my desire to somehow synthesize my interest in social justice issues with education. My time at the orphanage, in particular, taught me to see such good in an area surrounded by crime, drugs, and poverty, and to see hope in places where hope is sometimes hard to glimpse – a truth which has resonated with me again during my time in Camden thus far.

At Romero Center Ministries, I have found a place where I can work on important social justice issues in the context of faith and the tradition of Oscar Romero that I love so deeply. In addition to working with the hundreds of students that pass through our doors each year as part of the Urban Challenge experience, part of my job entails expanding the Romero Center's involvement in policy issues on a local, national, and international level.

I had the opportunity to do just that during an event in December, organized in conjunction with Fair Share Housing Center, Lutheran Governmental Ministries, and the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of New Jersey. After Governor-Elect Christie threatened to dismantle many of New Jersey's current affordable housing laws, including laws that permit organizations like Habitat for Humanity to build homes, Fair Share Housing Center conceived the idea for an advocacy event using the theme of "no room at the inn" from the Christmas narrative. On December 17, Mary and Joseph figures journeyed through Trenton, from the State House to Christie's transition office to the Crisis Ministry office asking publicly if there was room for them, and for families like them, in the state of New Jersey. In a particularly poignant moment, Mary and Joseph were turned away at Christie's transition office. The event garnered significant press coverage, and, as a result, a group of faith-based organizations in New Jersey is in the process of forming a coalition dedicated to ensuring equitable housing opportunities for all in the state of New Jersey.

I look forward to many such future opportunities to advocate for social justice, and to continuing to learn more about the city of Camden and the wonderful people who live and work here.

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## A Romero Center Story of Search and Discovery

When you look back over your life, there are those moments that your life took a radically new direction and, in the process, the person you were changed into the person you are today. One of those moments for me was my time at the Romero Center, both in 2005 and 2006. My first experience with the Romero Center occurred during my sophomore year of college at DeSales University. I arrived in Camden after a particularly difficult fall semester in which conflicts with many of my closest friends called into question the Catholic identity that I had fought so hard to reclaim after my bout with agnosticism. I knew that I did not want to embrace an understanding of my faith that judged others and built up walls between those who were different, but I did not know what alternative visions existed to grab onto. Enter the urban challenge experience where I was submerged into the world of Catholic social justice and discovered what I had been missing all along.

In retrospect, this week was a highlight of my entire collegiate career, but at the time, I was engulfed in waves of conflicting emotions. I was forced to process a myriad of experiences that were rapidly destroying many of my preconceived prejudices and beliefs. And I was unwilling to let them go without a fight. I remember journaling mid-way through the week that Larry was “angry”, “bitter”, “burnt-out” and “an ideologue pushing an agenda”. By the end of the week, however, I had completely changed my tune. It was not Larry who had a problem. It was me. I had become so comfortable in my little middle class, suburban bubble that I had missed the broader world with its injustices and diversity, its hopes and its suffering. Suddenly, I had discovered a way to authentically live out my Catholic faith in a manner that was true to my new perspective of the world and its people, of my sisters and brothers of every race, religion, and socioeconomic background. But this road would come at a cost. I would need to be willing to surrender my prejudices, my assumptions, my comfort zones and enter into the world in all of its shades of gray.

If you flash forward five years, you will now find me in Washington DC entering my third year in the seminary for the Oblates of St. Francis DeSales. I have travelled to Houston, Texas to offer emergency assistance after Hurricane Katrina. I have spent 48 hours as a homeless person living on the streets of Washington DC. I have shared a Subway meal with a homeless panhandler. I have been part of a religious procession in a poor Mayan village in Mexico. I have written a thesis on the continued effects of racism. I have become a voice for a variety of social justice causes. I am a different person than when I climbed out of the van in Camden 5 years ago.

The Romero Center opened a door and ushered me into a new way of being. Faith was no longer strictly for the cathedrals, but was a reality experienced in the hands and faces of the prostitute, the AIDS patient, the gay couple, the homeless addict, the social worker, the illegal immigrant, the illiterate eighth grader. What had once been a purely intellectual exercise in discussing issues of poverty, homelessness, immigration reform, health care, or racism had become a matter of actual people with names, stories, hopes, and fears. My vocation to serve the Church as an Oblate is a natural outgrowth of this broader vocation cultivated by the Romero Center. Both the Oblates and the Romero Center push me to go outside of myself and love Christ in the sisters and brothers all around me. So thank you, Romero Center, for helping me become the Oblate, the Catholic, and the child of God that I was and am called to be.

Brian Zumbrum, OSFS is currently in his third year with the Oblates of St. Francis DeSales. After spending the previous year in Michigan, Brian professed his First Vows on August 15, 2009, surrounded by his Oblate confreres, family, friends, and even a few Romero alums. He currently resides in Washington DC. At the time of publication Brian is working on his Masters of Divinity Degree at the Washington Theological Union and is also assisting as a part-time campus minister at Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School. Brian is a graduate of DeSales University and a two-year former participant in Romero Center’s Urban Challenge Program

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# Romero Center Notes

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1 - Sara Flounders, one of our Associate Directors, is leaving to return to teaching. We thank Sara for sharing so much with so many at the Romero Center. We hired two more Associate Directors, Megan Allen and Clare Strockbine. We'll do a profile on Megan and Clare in our next newsletter. They are full of God's Spirit and Heart.



Briefly: Megan graduated from St. Joseph's University in May 2004 with a BS in Sociology, and minored in Business. Megan joined the Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC), and was placed in Seattle, WA, working as an advocacy minister at the Matt Talbot Center in 2004-2005. After JVC, Megan worked at Covenant House in Philadelphia, PA, as a youth advisor, prior to coming to the Romero Center. Clare graduated from the University of Scranton in May 2004 with a BA in Communications and Spanish, and minored in Counseling and Human Services. Clare participated in the Rostro de Cristo Volunteer Program in Duran, Ecuador, and has worked as a community coordinator for the past two years, prior to joining the Romero Center staff.

2 - The Romero Center is expanding into Parish-based Peace and Justice Education and Formation in the Diocese of Camden. Our Romero Staff can be a resource for any Parish seeking to include Catholic Social Teachings in any of your Parish ministries. We're already invited to Sacred Heart in Camden, St. Peter Celestine in Cherry Hill, Holy Saviour in Westmont, and Resurrection in Marmora. Please contact us, if your Parish is interested. This July, we will sponsor our second annual priests' retreat at the Romero Center. That's Good News!



3 - We thank everyone who supported our Sixth Annual Romero Lecture Series, featuring Dr. Diana Hayes as Keynote Speaker. Hopefully, the events and topics of the day gave everyone some serious food for thought. Given that each year more and more people are living in poverty, the moral issue of economic justice, and the moral imperatives flowing from our Church's teachings on the economy demand our attention.

*Romero Center Staff with Dr. Diana Hayes (24 March 2006)*

4 - The cost to run the Romero Center is around \$1,000 a day. As we expand our mission, hiring more staff is ministerially wise and financially challenging. So, we put the donation envelope in the newsletter, for those who might be in a position to send a donation. For next year, there will be the natural increases in expenses. However, we will not increase our fees for those who come to the Romero Center. So, we're reaching out to you to help fill the gap. So, we thank all of you who have supported the mission of the Romero Center through your donations and contributions.

5 - Attention High Schools. Here's a way that you can help us. How about a "Dress Down Day" for the Romero Center? That's a good way to help us keep our fees reasonable. Let us know if you can do that - or just surprise us! If anyone else has any suggestions, please give us a call.

*Temple University Students (March 2006)*



6 - We already have 35 groups scheduled to come to the Romero Center in 2006-2007. High School, College, or Parish Groups interested in coming to the Romero Center should consider reserving the days you want as soon as you can.

Our parish communities are measured by how they serve "the least of these" in our parish and beyond its boundaries—the hungry, the homeless, the sick, those in prison, the stranger (Mt 25:31). We need to build local communities of faith where our social teaching is central, not fringe; where social ministry is integral, not optional; where it is the work of every believer, not just the mission of a few committed people and committees.

*Communities of Salt and Light, 1993*

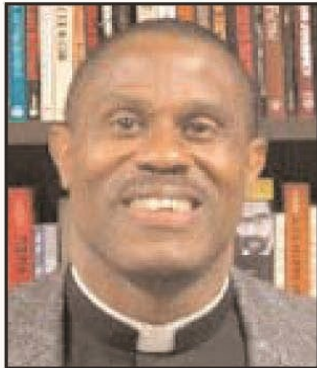
THE ROMERO CENTER PROUDLY PRESENTS THE

# 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Romero Lecture

FRIDAY, MARCH 26, 2010

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY, CAMDEN, NJ

## "The Hidden Faces of Racism: Excluding the other in Our Church, Our Society and Ourselves"



### Rev. Bryan Massingale

LEADER IN U.S. CATHOLIC THEOLOGY  
AND NOTED LECTURER ON ISSUES OF  
SOCIAL AND RACIAL JUSTICE

- Film, Workshops & Panel Discussion Starting at Noon
- Keynote Presentation at 7 p.m.

*Special prices for 10th Anniversary Lecture:*

\$10 ADULTS • \$5 STUDENTS WITH ID

**AFTERNOON SESSIONS ARE FREE OF CHARGE!**

**GROUP RATES AVAILABLE FOR MULTIPLE ATTENDEES**

*"Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church. Despite apparent advances and even significant changes, the reality of racism remains. In large part it is only external appearances which have changed."*

- U.S. CATHOLIC BISHOPS PASTORAL LETTER ON RACISM

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL CHERYL AT 856-964-9777  
visit: [www.romero-center.org](http://www.romero-center.org) • email: [info@romero-center.org](mailto:info@romero-center.org)

# THANK U



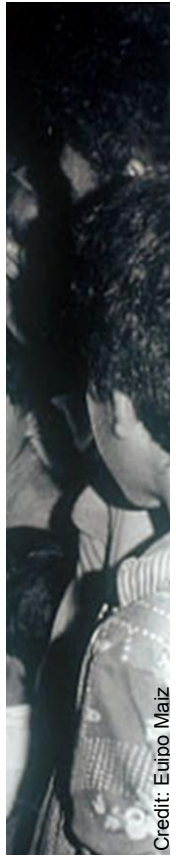
Bethesda thanks the following schools for their volunteer work at OBP:  
Notre Dame College Fordham West Chester  
Niagara Assumption College  
Morehouse College Alumni Association



Rah! Rah! Rah! For the Romero Center and their continued partnership with Bethesda!!!



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