



CrossRoads: Bulletin of the Passionist Alumni Association

December 2021

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**Did a friend forward this
bulletin to you?**

[Click here to register.](#)

Thinking of forwarding this?

Please forward this bulletin to a former classmate or friend who attended school in Passionist formation. The Passionist Alumni Association relies on you to build our membership. Every day we hear stories of renewed friendships and new friendships. Did a friend forward this bulletin to you because you once studied with the Passionists? If so, please **CLICK ON THIS LINK:** <https://passionistorderalumni.org/> to register with the Passionist Alumni Association to stay in touch. Thank you.

Louisville, Kentucky is the location of our 2021 Reunion.

WANT PAST ISSUES?

To read past issues of CrossRoads, click this link: <https://passionist.org/crossroads-bulletin/>

Alumni Virtual Reunion & Survey

What happened on November 6?

What they said. “Connecting with guys I hadn’t seen in years.” “Sharing, listening to and seeing everyone was special.” “It was the next best thing to having the [in person] reunion.”

SEE THE REUNION VIDEO—IN CASE YOU COULDN’T JOIN US!

Claire Smith has posted the reunion video on the Alumni pages of the Province website. Here is the link: <https://passionist.org/alumni/2021reunion/>. Because of the file size, there are 3 parts to the video, each about 30 minutes in length. The website indicates which sections of the reunion are included in each video segment.

The magic of Zoom. These are just some of the many enthusiastic comments following our first Passionist alumni virtual reunion. Since we had to postpone this year’s in-person reunion due to COVID concerns, the Alumni Council felt we might be able to pull off a reunion through the magic of Zoom technology. Carl DeLage and his planning team (Carl Middleton, Fr. John Schork, CP, Jack Dermody, Claire Smith, Mark Brockman, and Mike Owens) wasted no time pulling the program together.

Registration. Claire Smith developed an easy-to-use online registration form for the reunion, and the responses came quickly. A total of 70 alumni registered for the reunion—well beyond our expectations. We thought, “this just might work!”

The opening. On Saturday, November 6th, the reunion kicked off at 2:00 p.m. EDT with 60 of the registered alumni attending. Fr. John, “in his easy going style”, set the tone for the day with his official welcome and preview of the afternoon’s program. Carl Middleton presented the opening reflection on the meaning of belonging to the Passionist family followed by a prayer for the alumni who couldn’t join us, all members of the Passionist family, our deceased relatives and friends, and all who have nurtured us mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

That video! The Passionists of Holy Cross Province in the 21st century are undergoing a significant transformation. In many ways they are not the Passionists that we remember from our formation days. To better understand the changes underway in the Province, we watched “Retrospective”, a video prepared by Fr. David Colhour, CP, for the Province Summer Assembly 2021.

Virtual Reunion *cont'd*



The Breakout Rooms. What's a reunion if we can't get together to talk with each other? That's exactly what happened next with the small group breakouts—or what was supposed to happen! Let's just say that Mike Owens and Zoom had some major differences of opinion about starting the breakouts! Most of the technical difficulties were eventually overcome, and almost everyone made it into the correct breakout room. The goal was to group attendees by their formation years which, again, was mostly accomplished.

Fr. Hugo, C.P. LIVE! After a short break, we came back together in the large group. During the first quarter of 2021, the alumni sponsored a virtual bike ride through Haiti to raise funds for **Fr. Hugo Esparza, CP's** food ministry in that country. **Jack Dermody** invited Fr. Hugo to speak to the reunion, and he was able to join us via Zoom. Fr. Hugo thanked the alumni for their support of his ministry and spent about 10 minutes describing what life is currently like in Haiti and the challenges that they all face daily in that country. Fr. Hugo's visit was truly a highlight of the afternoon.

Live comments. Next on the agenda was the opportunity for each of the breakout groups to report back to the full reunion plus some time for individuals to share information with everyone. This was an entertaining portion of the meeting with a mixture of serious comments and friendly joking.

Interactive Opportunities. Some alumni have asked how they may become more involved with the Passionists. Jack Dermody introduced a new section of the CrossRoads Newsletter that he's titled "Interactive Opportunities". These include Reunion Opportunities, such as all class in person reunions and local gatherings, Media Opportunities such as writing articles and being interviewed for CrossRoads, Works of Mercy Opportunities including supporting the Passionist ministries and celebrating life occasions such as anniversaries and ordinations, and Leadership Opportunities including serving spiritual needs and sharing your experience and expertise with Province leadership. Jack then introduced the work of the Passionist Sisters in Agua Prieta, Mexico, their many challenges in educating and protecting young children, and the financial needs to keep their ministry safe and viable.

About the Council. Mike Owens presented an update on the Alumni Council activities, the highlight of which was recognizing **Claire Smith** and **Phil Jackson** as Honorary Passionist Formation Alumni. (See the Alumni Coordinator's Update for all the details.)

Virtual Reunion *cont'd*

The Provincial definitely onboard. We were fortunate that **Fr. Joe Moons, CP**, joined us for the afternoon, and he gave the closing remarks for the reunion. He thanked everyone for participating and stressed that the bond of our past formation years means a lot to him. Fr. Joe especially appreciated our prayers for and support of Fr. Hugo's and the Passionist Sisters' ministries. He also asked that we keep the Visioning process in our prayers and is very pleased to see the cooperation between the vowed and lay members who are participating in that important initiative. Finally, Fr. Joe asked for our prayers for the Province and him as we move forward.

The reunion adjourned about 4 pm EDT but the lines remained open for another hour for those who wanted to visit some more. About 18 members participated in the extra session.

Virtual Reunion Survey - How Did We Do?

Following the reunion, the Alumni Council sent a brief survey to the attendees for their feedback on the afternoon. We had an excellent response with 31 of 60 attendees returning their surveys. Here are some of the highlights of those responses.

What did you like most about the reunion? The most frequent answers were the opportunity to reconnect with classmates and friends, meeting in small groups, learning about the Passionists' current activities, and generally the opportunity to share with each other.

What did you like least about the reunion? Not surprisingly, the problems with the breakout process received top billing. Other frequent responses included that the time was too short, and their disappointment that more of their classmates did not attend. Interestingly, the largest response to this question was "Nothing".

Satisfaction Ratings: We asked about their satisfaction with the overall reunion as well as the individual elements of the program. Here are the highest ranked results combining the Very Satisfied/Satisfied responses:

Overall Satisfaction	94%
Online Registration	97%
Fr. Hugo's Interview	94%
Retrospective Video	93%

Not surprisingly, the small and large breakout sessions had the lowest ratings with 80% and 67% respectively. Clearly this will be our biggest challenge for any future virtual reunions.

Frequency and Length of Reunion: There were several questions about the frequency of these reunions and the preferred length of time. 48% suggested meeting every 6 months, and 26% said quarterly sounded about right. 65% said the length of time was just right while 29% thought it should be longer. Of those recommending a longer time, 42% said 2 ½ hours and 50% said 3 hours.

Would you like more information on the Lay Association? 52% responded that they would like more information. Their names have been forwarded to Carl Middleton and Mark Brockman.

Reunion Survey *cont'd*

What Recommendations Do You Have for Future Reunions? Again, fixing the breakout sessions is a clear message along with more time for the small group sessions. We were challenged to find ways to get more alumni participation in the reunion—folks want to see their friends and classmates! Updates on the future of the Passionists should be included going forward.

Thanks to everyone who participated in the reunion and to those who responded to the survey. We are pleased that our alumni enjoyed the reunion and will definitely schedule more virtual reunions along with our in-person gatherings. The lessons learned and your recommendations will help us as we plan future reunions.

STORE OR DONATE YOUR REUNION FEES? (AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE)

Many of you chose to leave your registration fees and donations on deposit for our 2022 in-person reunion. **However, if you want to donate your fees and donations, or just the donations, to the Passionists and have them counted as a donation for your 2021 taxes, please immediately contact Mike Moll, our reunion treasurer.** Mike cannot send your funds directly to the Passionists on your behalf and have it considered a donation for tax purposes. The IRS requires that a donation must come directly from you and not from a third-party.

Here is how the process will work:

- Contact Mike Moll no later than Monday, December 20th to request that he return your donation amount.
Email: michaeldmoll@charter.net
Phone: (636) 751-0167
- Mike will send you a check in the amount of your donation.
- If you still would like to make a contribution to the Passionists, you can either send a personal check or donate through the Holy Cross Province website.
<https://passionist.org/make-a-donation/>
- The Development Office will then send you a confirmation and, if applicable, a formal tax statement.

If you prefer to leave your fees and/or donations on deposit for the 2022 reunion, you do not need to take any further action.

Interactive Opportunities

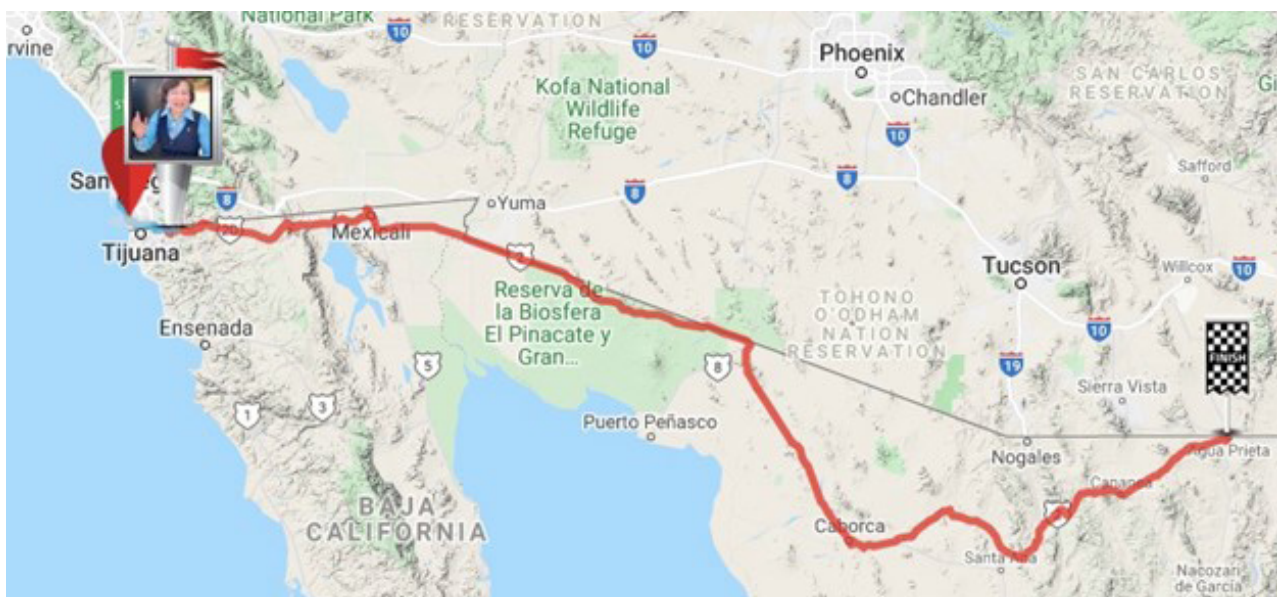
Class of 1968



Local and Class Reunions

On the heels of the all-class reunion, the Warrenton Prep “Class of 1968”—The Great ’68—held its very first zoom meeting on November 30 at 2pm CST. So good it was that it fired them up to keep catching up. They promised periodic future zoom meetings. All Great ’68 folks would be welcome! Contact Al Maryan at amaryan@hotmail.com to be added to the invite list. See Al’s report elsewhere in this issue of CrossRoads.

Join the Race to Agua Prieta – to help Passionist sisters protect children on the border



Interactive Opportunities *cont'd*

We launched **The Race to Agua Prieta** on Friday, December 10, from San Diego, the home of alumnus **Bob Duffield**. If you are on a team, check your progress at MyVirtualMission.com.

It's early in the race! You can still sign up and join at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/af93g5x6593r1k1/Signing%20Up%20Mexico.pptx?dl=0>

Do you want to help the sisters fix their roof? Here's the link to provide funds for construction materials: <https://gofund.me/62cb6154>

Want to host a house party for that roof?

What could be more fun in 'fun'draising than a party? Jack and Rose Dermody have templates to help you organize and host that party. Contact them at jackdermody1@gmail.com

HAITI

And let's not forget to continue feeding families in Haiti

Fr. Hugo in Haiti feeds many families. We continue to help fill his pantry to bring new hope to hundreds. (See fellow Passionist Fr. Rick Frechette's thoughts on Haiti elsewhere in this *CrossRoads* issue.) Consider sending regular donations to Fr. Hugo's Food Ministry via the Province website: <https://passionist.org/make-a-donation/>

Choose the Passionist Ministry you wish to support:

✓ -- Please Select --

Where it is needed most

Haiti - Fr. Hugo's Food Ministry

UPDATE YOURSELF ON OUR WEBSITE

When was the last time you updated your biography on our website?

If it's time to do so, contact Bob Duffield at bdlinwood1@cox.net

Interactive Opportunities *cont'd*

Contribute to Steve George's *Moments in Time* website

On the Home Page of Moments In Time, Steve urges us to contribute stories and other information: "If you wish to contribute your stories, please do. Your memories enrich all of us who lived this time of formation and growth. There are many ways to make your contribution. You will find them as you peruse these pages. Don't hesitate to add your Moments in Time."

Contact Steve at: <http://cp.aznetwork.com/contact/index.html>



The Great Sixty-Eight ('68), Reunited



On Monday, November 30, members of the class of '68 got together on Zoom. Twelve of us reconnected for a soulful ninety minutes. Some made do with cameo appearances, but most shared fairly equal time.

We began with no special agenda. On a round table basis, each person offered a brief summary of work, as well as scholastic and familial histories.

We all had begun our adventure between 1965 or 1966 at the Prep, and then continued together onto the Novitiate or Bellarmine. Most agreed these were extremely important formative years—unique, a communal experience that has rarely been duplicated anywhere else for over 50 years.

We laughed through old and new stories. Fond memories of togetherness revolved a lot around the choir, choral performances, and guitar jam sessions in the rec room. We shared musical idols like Simon & Garfunkel, Peter, Paul & Mary, The Mamas & the Papas, Bob Dylan, the Beach Boys – all of whom were emerging big when we were young. We found out music did not end in our youth. Today some of us participate in our parishes as cantors or choir members. All claimed they enjoy it thoroughly.

New faces included **Bill Toffenetti** and **Fred Licciardi** who showed up that day and said they hoped to communicate further in this format. Bill was a prosecuting attorney in Cook County, Illinois for 25-plus years and seems to enjoy his gardening and woodshop projects in retirement. Fred retired in 2017 and has relocated to a community near Scottsdale, Arizona. He was a member of the Precious Blood community and wore many hats during his priesthood, ten years of which was in Zurich Switzerland. Another '68er **Paul Beardslee** let us know he wants to sign on next time.

I could have said "here's some breaking news," but that's become a tiresome and nauseating chant on TV and social media platforms. Ours was more like "broken news" which, I believe, is more reflective of most senior citizens' shared information. In that light, it was also a time to reflect and grieve with those who had experienced unforeseen tragedies and found the strength to work through them.

We plan to have another session on Friday, December 17 at 15:00 CST, and we hope to add more classmates. In the meantime, we humbly christened ourselves ***The Great Sixty Eight ('68)***.

What's New on our Web Pages?

You have seen our Alumni pages at Passionist.org, right? More specifically:

<https://passionist.org/passionist-formation-alumni-home-2/>

The pages are no longer 'new,' but they improve with time. The next time you speak to **Claire Smith** at Holy Cross Province, please high-five her for the creative work she has produced, which is the lion's share of all of it. Newly appointed **Bob Duffield** will also have his hand in additions and improvements.

"How?" you ask.

Menus on every page. Every single page now includes—at the very top—a complete and easy-to-read menu of all accessible pages related to alumni topics

Alumni Home

[Alumni Home](#)
[2021 Reunion](#)
[Mission](#)
[Alumni Council](#)
[Letter from the Provincial](#)
[Registered Members](#)
[Member Biographies](#)
[Lost Alumni](#)
[CrossRoads Bulletin](#)
[Alumni Registration](#)
[Moments in Time](#)
[2019 Reunion & Photo Gallery](#)
[Contact Alumni](#)
[Alumni Privacy](#)

Welcome! Please spend some time here, at this website, to reconnect with friends, and to share memories.

We are members of the Passionist Formation Alumni. Each of us participated at some level in priest and brother formation programs of the Holy Cross Province of the Passionist Order.

Our members include everyone – those who attained profession and ordination, those who stayed a few months or years in the seminary, and the men and women who dedicated themselves to teach and support us. Whether or not you are Catholic today, give this band of brothers and sisters a try. Look back on good times and celebrate all of our lives' journeys.



A clip from the Home Page of Steve George's *Moments in Time*. New this year, Steve George's long-beloved Moments in Time became an official part of our site. Over twenty years ago, Steve's platform marked the very first attempt to link formation alumni together on the web. Steve devoted hundreds of hours updating the platform during the pandemic of 2020-2021. We can only be astounded and grateful for the thousands of hours he has dedicated to bringing us history, stories, data, photos, Gregorian chant, and so much more.

Want more? Stay tuned.

I did not anticipate my level of emotion as I sought out the obituaries and memorials of many who have passed. I'm not a big fan of *immortality*. I do know that perusing these pages led me to appreciate something: *When I take a moment to think of these classmates and mentors, I bring them back to life.* So decades later they come alive; I chuckle at their images; I miss them; I remember the good and not-so-good events that surrounded us. Perhaps some immortality has been achieved. I hope that the same thing happens to you who may take the time to navigate these *Moments in Time*.



News from the Passionist Alumni Council



Mike Owens

Alumni Council Membership Rotations

We are saying goodbye to three of our charter members who completed their terms on the Council. **Terry McDevitt, Paul Schulte,** and **Mark Brockman** made significant contributions to our alumni. We will miss them.

At the same time, we welcome our three newest members: **Jim Byrne, Bob Duffield** and **Bob Yeargin**. Each of them has told us how excited they are to join the Council. We look forward to their contributions to our alumni.

Honorary Alumni

Congratulations to **Phil Jackson** and **Claire Smith** on being named honorary Passionist formation alumni! Phil and Claire have been tremendously supportive of our alumni, especially since we established the Council in 2017.

Phil works in the Holy Cross Province Development Office. In 2017, Phil invited a group of alumni to come together to create the formation alumni association and the alumni council. During these past 4 years, he has been an active, supportive member of the council. Phil's contributions to the alumni are many—participating in reunions, coordinating the “Brother Monzyk at the Monastery” and “Passionist Alumni Family of Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin” Zoom calls, visiting alumni as he travels the US, faithfully attending and actively participating in all the council meetings, and helping with committee work whenever he is needed.

Claire also works in the Province Offices and is the Province Communications Director. Claire has also been fully involved with the alumni since 2017. Some of her many contributions are the updated and expanded alumni pages on the Province website, editorial assistance on the CrossRoads newsletters, providing guidance on complying with the province's privacy regulations and policies, creating reunion brochures and name tags, taking and posting reunion pictures, and developing the registration form that we used for this reunion. Whenever we have called for help, Claire has been there for the alumni.

Reunion 2022

While the consensus is that a good time was had by all at our virtual reunion, an in-person gathering is still our preferred way to get together. The Council is planning to hold a reunion in Louisville in the late summer/early fall timeframe. As soon we finalize the date, we will make an announcement, so you can reserve the weekend on your calendar.

Contacting me. As always, if you have any questions, suggestions or comments, please email me at:
mtowens2368@icloud.com.

Alumni Council Members

Ray Alonzo: *Chair, Spiritual Formation*

Mark Brockman: *Co-Chair, Lay Association; Technology*

*Jim Byrne

Carl DeLage: *Chair, Family Events*

Jack Dermody: *Chair, Communications: Website and Newsletter*

*Bob Duffield

Phil Jackson: *Spiritual Formation*

Carl Middleton: *Co-Chair, Lay Association*

Don Noltemeyer: *Co-Chair, Alumni Profile and Recruitment*

Mike Owens: *Coordinator*

Richard Padilla: *Co-Chair, Administration/Province Liaison*

Paul Schulte: *Co-Chair, Alumni Profile and Recruitment*

John Schork, CP: *Province Liaison*

Claire Smith: *Communications*

*Bob Yeargin

**Effective January 1, 2022*

SignPosts



In SignPosts we welcome our newest members, report the passing of all those who at some time participated in Passionist formation, and announce life changes of others. The title of this regular feature, “SignPosts,” is a nod to the original monthly feature “Sign Post” contained in Sign Magazine, the substantial Passionist Catholic magazine that many of us grew up with. It was published from 1921 to 1982. Check out a little history here:

<https://passionistarchives.org/category/publications/sign-magazine/>

Welcome New Members!

Michael Jerome “Jerry” Ryan (Warrenton Class of 1959)—Wichita, Kansas native; attended Prep seminary fall of 1955 through high school graduation spring 1959—first year was at Normandy and next three at the new Warrenton location. Left formation after that and attended Wichita State University.

Bob Padilla (Bellarmine ’68)—brother of Richard Padilla; 1961-1965 at the Prep, novitiate in St. Paul Kansas, and was at Bellarmine for 2 years before leaving.

BREAKING NEWS: Bob Gaggiano (Warrenton Class of ‘70) has become a member of the post-novitiate formation team for the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity religious order. The order’s post-novitiate house is in Chicago at St. James Parish in the Bronzeville neighborhood.

Those we mourn...

There may be a passcode to access some membership documents. If you don’t know it, ask Jack Dermody for it at dermody@cox.net.

Fr. Jorge “George” Stanfield C.P. (<https://passionist.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Stanfield-CP-Jorge.pdf>)

James Barron Over 3 years at Normandy Prep in the early 50s, brother of Fr. Clemente Barron, C.P.

Daniel R. Fusting (<https://passionist.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Fusting-Daniel-1.pdf>)

Bernie Curran (former CP priest; see newspaper clipping about his first mass at <https://chicagotribune.newspapers.com/clip/82222065/il-bernard-curran-first-mass-1965/>)

Mary Rita Ortense McDevitt (Terry McDevitt’s wife; see obituary at <https://www.ratterman.com/obituaries/Mary-Rita-Mcdevitt/#!/Obituary>).

A Moment in Time: Approaching 170 Years

Passionist Fathers Celebrate 100th Anniversary In America

Big bells rang across the fields of Sacred Heart Retreat, Newburg Road, yesterday as the Passionist fathers celebrated their 100th anniversary in America.

The bells changed while 100 priests proceeded from the retreat to St. Agnes Church for pontifical High Mass. The Passionists administer the church.

Archbishop John A. Floersch of Louisville celebrated the Mass, and the Rev. Alfred F. Horrigan, president of Bellarmine College, preached the sermon. Other high-

ranking clergy at the Mass included Bishop Francis R. Cotton of Owensboro and Abbot Agnatus Esser of St. Meinrad's Abbey in Indiana.

Every hour on the hour, laymen were blessed with a relic of St. Paul of The Cross, who founded the Passionist congregation in Italy early in the 18th Century. About 3,000 laymen visited the retreat during the day.

The Passionists settled in Louisville in 1879, just 27 years after they built their first American foundation in Pittsburgh.

The Courier-Journal (Louisville, Kentucky) · 29 Apr 1952, Tue · Page 10

It all started in Pittsburgh in 1852 with the arrival of men from Italy to introduce America to the mission of the Passionists: Preaching Christ Crucified. They were invited by Bishop Michael O'Connor of Pittsburgh and given land by the diocese upon which to build a monastery. It was a fraught transition as the anti-Catholic sentiment in America was strong and divisive. The first profession of an American citizen occurred in 1855 and the first ordination in 1860 (Fr. Andrew McGurgan, C.P.).

The brethren must have been ecstatic over the canonization of their founder, Paul Francis Danei (1694-1775)—St. Paul of the Cross—just 90 years after his death. Monasteries—more often referred to as retreats—were established on the East Coast and Midwest: Dunkirk, New York, Union City, New Jersey, Baltimore, Maryland, Cincinnati, Ohio, Louisville, Kentucky, Normandy, Missouri, and St. Paul, Kansas in the next 30 years. More monasteries were to come: Scranton, Pennsylvania and Chicago, Illinois around the turn of the century.

By the time of World War I, 11 priests of the Order were to serve as chaplains. During the Roaring Twenties, the Passionists were busy sending missionaries to China, eleven bands of more than 30 men. Some of these men suffered imprisonment and death at the hands of the Communist regime, others were eventually commended for their service to the Chinese people before and during World War II.

During that war, the Passionists of St. Paul of the Cross Province contributed more than 50 chaplains to the war effort and assigned their China missionaries as contract chaplains. Nine missionaries were imprisoned by the Japanese in Hong Kong and Beijing.

One aspect of this chronology that the timeline does not capture is the physical sacrifice, hard labor, bone-jarring travel, fiscal distress, and persecution that these men endured. This speaks to both the character of the individual and the dedication of all to their mission: Preaching Christ crucified.

You can find a very thorough timeline of events from 1852-1952 in the [Passionist Historical Archives](#).

From Fr. Rick Frechette, CP, in Port au Prince

SINCE THE ASSASSINATION OF HAITI'S PRESIDENT

Dear Family and Friends,

The year was 1963. The name of the horse was Black Jack.

Even for a 10 year old, it was both moving and troubling to see the horse with no rider following the coffin of President John Kennedy—with a spirited strut, yet not easily controlled.

The horse with the empty saddle is an ancient symbol of poignant absence: The horse without a master, the nation without a leader, the body without a soul.

We are living the painful and dangerous days after the brutal killing of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse.

The horse has no rider, and does not know where to turn.

The aftershock we were all waiting for with great anxiety, didn't happen: widespread retaliation, the breaking open of the prisons, rioting and looting, and for the gangs to take over police stations and government offices.

This is a relief, but still no one knows what will happen next.

The violence that killed the President has been the daily lived experience for all levels of Haitian citizens for many years now. It had become, each year, more terrible and more overt.

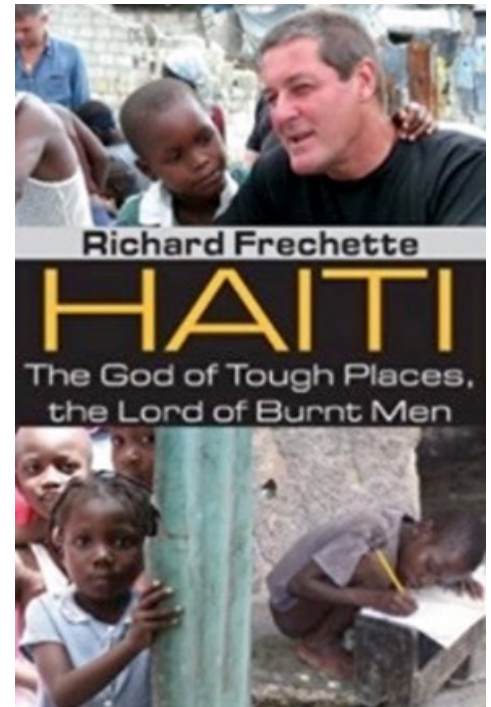
We have picked up many of the dead for burial over these last years, including those of the La Saline massacre. Countless wounded have been rushed to our hospital over the years.

This ugliness and pathos is also our lived experience (even though we have not yet suffered any direct attack), and drives our work and our prayers.

The reign of terror now has reached even the residence of the President, in a most hateful way.

The final anguish of the President as he died is to be pitied and abhorred, and the brutality totally condemned.

But equally so, the death of the countless victims, anonymous or well known, over these years, should also call for worldwide rage, and not fall into the shadows (as they have here, until now).



Fr. Rick Frechette, CP, *cont'd*

Even though there has been no widespread violent reaction to the death of President Moïse, the usual list of problems persists:

- the newest COVID wave,
- thousands of internal refugees from gang attacks on their neighborhoods,
- flight from the country,
- hunger and food insecurity,
- a disastrous economy,
- joblessness and mounting levels of frustration,
- the advance of the gangs taking over the country,
- the ineffectiveness of the Government.

Related to the advance of the gangs, the infamous 400 Marozo (who recently made international news by kidnapping 10 priests, nuns and Church members), now have our area of Tabarre surrounded.

They have taken over Croix des Bouquets and Torcelle.

Some of their “soldiers” are 11 years old, with guns as big as they are.

To give an idea of the insecurity, yesterday our team and I crossed the dreaded stretch of road through Martissant, to go to Carrefour.

Here are the visuals: full of mud and garbage, the road broken and sunken, with bullet ridden buildings to the right and left, empty streets, gunmen in the shadows, shells of burned vehicles on the road, a rotting headless corpse.

All of this is the total opposite of the well-being and dignity all people strive for, the total opposite of the dream of God for humankind: life, life fully, life always.

It is barbarism. It is hell. Anyone in Haiti will cringe at this name—Martissant. [Wikipedia quote: This area, positioned on the seismic fault, has suffered greatly from the earthquake of 2010. This is a strongly stigmatized neighborhood, with largely forgotten public services and victims of the violence of several armed gangs.]

We crossed to take some elderly Sisters who had been under our care for COVID, home to their convent at Rivière Froide. Of the four Sisters who came to us from this convent, two died within hours. But these Sisters thankfully recovered.

I was also going there to retrieve another Sister who fell and badly broke her arm two days earlier, for orthopedic care back at our hospital in Tabarre.

Life has to go on. Goodness has to proceed, un-coweringly, before evil.

And you can believe me that goodness is lived out here every day, in most heroic ways, by the vast majority of the Haitian people.

I wish that were headline news.

Someone asked me why it was, since Haitians around the world have been so successful and have made remarkable contributions in the countries where they have settled, why they can't do the same in Haiti.

The answer is simple. There are no level playing fields in Haiti. All opportunities are conditional, and the conditions are often illegal, degrading and dangerous.

Fr. Rick Frechette, CP, *cont'd*

Political leaders have unbridled influence, and this influence is most often self-serving.

In better functioning democracies where Haitians have settled, and which have accountability and punishment built into the national laws and codes, leaders are not (at least for long) unbridled.

With hard work and sacrifice, even after some battle scars because of racism, sexual discrimination or abuse, abuse of power, and other social plagues, people can evolve and advance.

Both the Ten Commandments and the Federalist Papers, the former being the blueprint for Judeo-Christian civilization and the latter being the blueprint for American Democracy, have as a premise the danger of the unbridled human will.

This realistic pessimism of human nature allows the architects of the body-politic to set up the sociopolitical scaffolding to contain it.

Here is a better way to phrase it:

“The most identifying trait about our humanity, is our ability to be inhumane.”

We can start out with good will, and then we degenerate, and rot in the heart and soul: “The heart is more deceitful than all else. And is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

Those who have become soul sick, and then violent and barbaric, showing no evidence of even a trace of mercy, are often called in Kreol “po moun”. They have the skin of human form, but nothing else is human about them.

Jesus used similar words, and very harshly, on how the whitewashed appearance of Pharisees covered an internal rotting graveyard.

We come now to an essential point.

What is it that makes a pessimistic view of a person’s will both necessary and practical?

It’s because the soul—the very center of humanity, dignity, and communion with God—can be diminished, destroyed, or take its leave.

The Holy Writings of many religious traditions confirm this.

There is no guarantee of ongoing soulfulness. Neither yours nor mine.

The soul has to be cultivated, it thrives under certain ways of living, and suffocates under others.

We know how the soul comes to us: Michelangelo best imaged it, as the touch of the fingers, God’s to Adam’s.

We know how the soul is spirited and strengthened, as seen in the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, or in the apocalyptic visions of St John.

But do you know when the soul takes its leave, and leaves us to our animal instincts? - or even worse, to demonic influences where behavior is Satanically cruel and hateful?

Fr. Rick Frechette, CP, *cont'd*

At what point to we become a horse without a rider?

Maybe this is something we all need to get good at, and really fast.

The waning of its powers and the sickness of the soul, calls for so very much attention in our modern world, and the spiritual skills to address it.

It starts with how you, or I, choose to think and act, in the face of what is really, really bad.

Do we continually choose life over death, as God instructed? Do we act out of sacrifice, goodness and reconciliation, in spite of our fears, in the face of what is really, really bad?

Only you can answer for you, only I can answer for me, but we both can encourage the young and the lost to do the same.

I have noticed over the years in dealing with gangs, that for every hundred members, about ninety are just following the only leader in town, and doing so out of need.

But they would rather, if they could, live a clean way, and be the pride and not a disgrace to their mothers and families. Given another practical way to live—and a leader who leads them to their good and not to their bad—they will follow.

Of the remaining ten, eight are fence sitters. They can be swayed toward good or toward bad, or back and forth, depending on many things, including their alcohol or drug levels.

You might lose some, you might win some, but it will take a lot of patience, skill and work.

The remaining two will be “po moun”. “Desalmados.”

No light in their eyes to hook onto with your penetrating gaze of healing.

They are gone.

But you just made them lonely, too. They now have no one to follow them.

In this time of notorious fake news, I was amazed to find a fake letter from Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, written to the youth of Haiti.

Imagine, fake news with a great message.

Learning from the disastrous genocide and civil war of his own country and against his own race, and wanting to avoid the Somalianization of Haiti, he tries to help young people see that they are quite expendable pawns, in the hands of the brokers of the big business of hatred.

Yes, hatred is enormously profitable. Just starting with guns, and even more, bullets.

The “po moun” leaders of this huge business of hatred need the frustrations and hunger of the 11-year-old soldier, to crank up their profits.

Fr. Rick Frechette, CP, *cont'd*

In this letter of fake origin but true message, the author uses powerful real-life examples to try to help the young seek peace, feel inner-worth, and refuse to be the executioners for the haters.

Let us choose good and right, all the time, with courage. Not fearless (that's impossible and imprudent), but also not paralyzed by fear.

To choose to do good today is food for the soul, and strengthening of it.

We lament when a person seems heartless, when a community seems to have lost its soul and “gone totally corporate,” or even worse, then it seems the soul of a nation is receding.

But we can hold soul-ground. Just by staying good people. It's that simple, and that hard.

Let us pray for the family of President Moise, and for all the Haitian people who have had to drink from the most bitter cup of violence.

Let us be confident that people of good will (and they are many) will be blessed by God in all efforts toward national reconciliation and a future of peace.

Fr. Rick Frechette, CP, DO
Port au Prince July 16, 2021

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