

# UNFORGETTABLE: 2001 ANNUAL MEETING

By Fr. Dwight Merrick

He saw “a host of little fires scattered throughout the world, like little lights lighting up all those around them.” Those little lights then started growing in intensity, becoming big bright flames shining out amidst the surrounding darkness. Such was the vision of Fr. John Dreher, some 16 years ago, as a small group of priests began gathering together as “Fraternity of Priests’.

When Fr. Bob Giardina first heard those words, he remembers saying to himself, “I’ll believe it when I see it.”

During the first week of August, at the Regional Seminary in Trinidad, Fr. Bob saw it. Priests from all over the world—18 from the U.S., five from the Caribbean islands of Dominica, Grenada and Saint Lucia, three from India, two from Ghana, West Africa and fifteen from Trinidad and Tobago—gathered to attend the Annual Meeting of the Fraternity. The 43 priests from the Americas, Europe

(Irishmen based in the U.S.), Asia and Africa certainly looked like the “little lights” of the Dreher vision.

What an unforgettable experience for all of us. Having attended the conference at Rhode Island for the previous three years, the first attempt at hosting this outside the U.S. seemed as scary as it was exciting. The Port of Spain Fraternity had arrived at its “moment of truth”.

Accommodation at the seminary provided its own story. For most participants it was wonderful but for a few, fans and mosquito repellent were as welcome as food and drink.

Many commented that the talks by Board members, ranked among the best they had ever had. Others were thrilled by the presentation of Mrs. Ursula Bleasdel (Auntie Babsie) and at least one priest confessed after Fr. Theodore’s talk that he would not mind going back to the Seminary if he could have him as a lecturer.

It was also significant and possibly symbolic, that for the first time ever, this meeting was being attended by more priests from outside rather, than within the U.S.—an observation met with loud applause.

A normal feature of the retreats of the Port of Spain Fraternity is Holy Mass with the people and this was included in this year’s meeting with a celebration at a nearby church on the Thursday evening. Friends and well-wishers, who turned out in their numbers, were asked to consider serving as intercessors and donors and so assist in spreading the Fraternity message throughout the world.

## DO NOT BE AFRAID ...ONLY BELIEVE!

by Fr. Francis D’Abreo of India

“Do not be afraid; only believe” (Mark 5: 36). These words have become a reality in my life. Because of them, I reached Trinidad, a far off place for us from India. They were given to us by Fr. Ian Taylor, from Trinidad, as we three priests of India began to encounter numerous obstacles in preparation for our journey to attend the Annual Meeting of the Fraternity of Priests.

I had to go to the American Consulate in Bombay, India, to get my visa. Sitting in front of the officers I was nervous, because it is a known fact that it is difficult to get an American visa. The officer asked, “How many sacraments are there?” “How many Stations of the Cross are there? Tell me in order!” Being a priest I knew the answers quite well and I answered them correctly. I was happy, hoping to get my visa. But, to my utter surprise, my passport was stamped and the officer said,



LOST IN THE CROWD: Archbishop of Port of Spain, Edward J. Gilbert, stands in the center of participants of the 2001 meeting, in the chapel of the Regional Seminary.

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# Dear Friends of the Priesthood

Dear Friends of the Priesthood,

Here I sit in my room at St. John Vianney and the Uganda Martyrs Seminary in Tunapuna, Trinidad. We are some forty-two priests from all over the world gathered for our annual meeting. The weather is hot and humid, but there is a nice breeze today. Exotic plants and birds are everywhere. How great is our God, how manifold and diverse His glorious creation!

Last night Mrs. Babsie Bleasdel (Auntie Babsie) spoke to us. She is an eighty-year-old Catholic evangelist who has traveled all over the world to proclaim the gospel. She is a phenomenal woman of faith, and she loves priests. She made a statement which has stayed with me and I want to share it with you. In fact, it was a priest who spoke it to her many years ago:

“If God appoints you, He will anoint you. If God calls you, He will enable you.”

What a message for priests! Those of us already called and appointed by the Lord to be His servant-leaders for His people are already anointed and enabled by the Lord. If only we could realize it!

That means that God has so gifted us to do marvelous things and has equipped us for the powerful upbuilding of his kingdom.

So often we try to hack it all on our own, empowered by adrenalin—it wears out fast. This statement caused me to begin my thought processes with Eucharist. I, a sinful creature, have been chosen and empowered to take simple elements of bread and wine, and in the power of the Holy Spirit substantially change them into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. There is no other vocation in this entire world that can do that! Not even science in all its wonder today can accomplish such a miraculous act. Awesome!

If this is truth for us and for our lives, think of how much the Lord can do in and through us when we begin to realize that the promises and challenges of scripture are true and very real. As priests we have been anointed and enabled by the Lord to do the very things of the Lord.

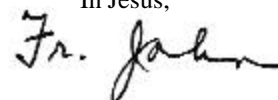
The very ministry of Jesus is our ministry driven by the same power, the Holy Spirit. Imagine, if every priest in the world truly understood his priesthood in this light. Think of the healing, the faith, the

freedom that would envelop the world—and this is God’s plan for us! Just for a moment, think of how many people one priest affects. Think of what could happen if that priest is renewed according to God’s plan. We really need to ask the Lord to stir up the power of each priest’s ordination, to fan the flames of his sacrament.

In the Fraternity of Priests our desire is to gather priests to God and to each other for prayer, growth and support. We are brother priests praying for, caring for, and challenging brother priests. How critical this is today.

Again, to you, our intercessors and benefactors, I say “Thanks” on behalf of the Fraternity of Priests. This week has been an incredible experience of Church where we were joined by brothers from Ghana, India, the U.S.A. and the Caribbean countries, all sharing a common vision: the restoration of the priesthood. This would not be possible without your prayers, best wishes, and generous donations. As more and more countries ask for us, your role becomes more and more critical to us. Be assured of our prayers in return. Again, please remember to pray for your parish priest. Send us his name and we’ll pray for him too. May the Lord continue to bless you abundantly.

In Jesus,



Fr. John



This year’s Committed Brotherhood Award went to Fr. Ian Taylor (left). In announcing the winner, Fr. John Allard (right) paid tribute to Fr.

Taylor’s outstanding evangelization and missionary efforts.

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Please send all articles, comments and photos to the editor, Fr. Ray Ratzenberger, [ratz@theriver.com](mailto:ratz@theriver.com), or, P.O. Box 2198, Benson, AZ 85602, U.S.A., or, Fax: (520) 586-3919.

Newsletter Co-editor, Rev. Cuthbert Alexander, can be emailed at [cuttya1@tstt.net.tt](mailto:cuttya1@tstt.net.tt).

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“I refuse an American visa for you.” But, two of my brother-priests received the visa quite easily. Frustrated I went home and gave up the idea of going to Trinidad for the conference.

“Fr. Francis, you are going to the U.S.A. and Trinidad; I am feeling this in my heart. The Spirit has revealed this to me,” said a nun from my parish. “Fr. Francis, I believe in the Holy Rosary and I believe Mother Mary is going to take you to Trinidad,” said another young holy woman.

If you try for a second time and you are refused a visa, you are not allowed to apply again for two years. Recently, one of our senior priests was refused a visa for the second time. I was confused and did

not know what to do but I was inclined to try a second time. The Spirit was revealing that something great would happen.

Encouraged by these words of hope I did try a second time for the visa. Dressed in my white cassock, I was there for the interview once again. The presiding officer asked, “Father, where do you want to go and for how long?” After listening to me, he told me that he had granted me a visa not for a few months but for as long as ten years, till 2011. I thanked the Lord and almost jumped with joy. Praise the Lord, Amen!

“Have faith in God” (Mk11: 22); with faith we can move the mountains too. For my journey these verses too became a reality. My flight from Bombay India to New York, J.F. Kennedy International Airport, was scheduled for Monday, July

23. Up to that afternoon, I had not gotten a German visa which I would also require, but God worked wonders, so that I received the German Visa about 2 p.m. and got onto the flight that night. Praise God. Amen!

India to New York, via Frankfurt, Germany. We had a good journey and landed at J.F.K. safe and sound. We were supposed to fly to Trinidad via San Juan but as we had open stand-by tickets, we were stranded for seven long hours.

Eventually, we were able to change the route and arrived in Trinidad via Miami, allowing us to rest for some time.

Nothing is impossible for our good Lord, I realized that God always has better plans for us; only we have to put our trust in the Lord. Really faith can move the mountains and, the Lord takes us wherever he desires us to be.

## MISSION GHANA

by Fr. Timothy Graff

‘Akwaabah’, you are welcome! This greeting was heard at every opportunity as we journeyed throughout Ghana this July. It spoke not only of the hospitality shown to the team of Trinidadians and Americans by the Fraternity in Ghana but also of their desire and openness to grow in holiness.

The purpose of this mission was threefold:

- 1.) to visit and strengthen the brothers in the Fraternity in Wa, Jirapa, Nandom and Tumu who have been meeting as Fraternities for several years;
- 2.) to preach several retreats and see if there might be interest in starting

Fraternities in the Dioceses of Tamale, Koforidua and Navrongo-Bolgatango;

3.) to be of service to others who might benefit from the spirit and vision of the Fraternity of Priests.

I believe all three purposes were fulfilled by the faithfulness of the Lord and the tremendous openness of the Ghanaian Church. Frs. Dwight Merrick and George Lewis preached a retreat in the Diocese of Wa about the need to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit. They spent a day with the members of the Fraternity there afterwards and 22 brothers renewed their commitment.

Fr. Paul O’Donnell-Duggan from New Jersey (via Ireland) preached a very successful priest retreat in the Diocese of Navrongo-Bolgatango. After adjusting to

his Irish brogue, the brothers were very taken by Fr. Paul’s great love and devotion to the priesthood. Much to his delight all the priests signed up for the new Fraternity there.

Following retreats in the Diocese of Koforidua and the Archdiocese of Tamale, two groups will begin in Oda and Koforidua and another is expected to start in Tamale, where I shared the Fraternity spirituality with sisters and priests.

In this second visit to Ghana, we saw the maturity of the brothers. They have embraced Fraternity with a true African flair. With upcoming missions to Tanzania, Fraternity in Africa will continue to grow. Blessed be God in his faithfulness.

Please send us your prayer intentions: \_\_\_\_\_

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## A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

*Jesus, Eternal High Priest, live in (name of priest), act in him, speak in and through him. Think your thoughts in his mind, love through his heart. Give him your own disposition and feelings. Teach, lead and guide him always. Correct, enlighten and expand his thoughts and behavior. Possess his soul, take over his entire personality and life. Replace him with yourself. Incline him to constant adoration and thanksgiving; pray in and through him. Let him live in you and keep him in this intimate union always.*

*Mary, Immaculate Conception, Mother of Jesus and Mother of priests, pray and intercede for (.....). Amen.*

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Franciscan University  
Steuenville, OH 43952-9671  
Phone: (740) 283-4400  
Fax: (740) 283-3622  
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