



# Voices from Home

Winter 2007

Published for Friends of Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House & The Harbor

## Transforming Lives through Spiritual Care

The Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry tries to meet, recognize and embrace our residents as complete, complex and wonderful human beings. This holistic view of people means that we attend to our residents' physical needs (via housing and healthcare), their emotional needs (via therapy and counseling), their intellectual needs (through occupational therapy and schooling), and finally their spiritual needs through Spiritual Care.

What does it mean to care for a person's spirit? At Bonaventure House and The Harbor, it means providing an opportunity for people to share and understand their own stories and journeys; it means connecting residents with local faith communities that will support them after they graduate; it means maintaining a chapel as a permanent space for prayer and reflection; it means ministering to diverse people who follow various spiritual paths; it means offering prayer services, spiritual direction, meditation groups, spiritual retreats, Bible Study, and out-trips to enjoy moments of worship, art, and beauty.

The testimony of our residents gives witness to the value of spiritual care. Most experience the healing process as a spiritual rebirth. It is miraculous to watch residents transition from the darkness of despair to the brightness of hope during the course of their residency. The transformation that takes place points to a higher power or a Holy Spirit at work in their lives. Spiritual Care gives them the space and encouragement to trust and follow that Spirit.

The commitment that our residents make towards their recovery and well-being is

*continued on page 3*



*The Spiritual Care Team, Ross Martinie Eiler & Paula Addington, in front of Bonaventure House.*

## From the President

I found it to be strangely disconcerting, when Bart Winters, CEO at Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry asked me to write a short article on the Alexian Brothers and "spirituality". Don't get me wrong, I try to be spiritual, I spend two to two and a half hours in Chapel each day, I receive Holy Communion daily and Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation. I mean for Pete's sake, I am a vowed religious. I get an allowance of \$150/month, nothing else. I have not had a relationship since my wife died and my vow of obedience asks me to say, "Yes!" whenever my Superiors ask me to follow them. But, I don't know that that is spirituality. It can lead to holiness, if applied correctly, but what else?



Each of you, reading this, is called to Holiness and spirituality. Our Lord asks every one of you to "Take up your cross and follow." The how of your response can determine the depth of your Holiness and Spirituality. The checker at Dominick's, the mechanic at the garage, and the accountant at Paine-  
*continued on page 2*

What's Inside:

- Happenings at The Harbor..... page 3
- Resident Stories..... page 2-3
- Volunteer Profile.....page 4
- Wish List.....page 4

## A Resident's Spiritual Journey

Weber, all of them have been invited to lead Holy and Spiritual lives. That goes for Muslims, Hindus, our Jewish Brothers and Sisters and everyone else. All are called.

The "Christ Event" for which we wait during Advent, is that moment in time that transcended every limit. The Holiness and Spirituality that was brought forth into our world is available to all. Without money, without price, we can all feast at the banquet of Grace.

My difficulty in seeing myself as spiritual, arises from my own nature. There is a great commercial for the Royal Bank of Scotland. In the ad, several people sit at dinner and discuss the effectiveness of the Heimlich Maneuver., while a man at another table chokes. They continue the discussion as the victim turns blue. Suddenly a man at a third table jumps up, executes the Heimlich and saves the guy's life. I am like the guy who acts, I do not plan; I do not form a study group; I do not process. My understanding of spirituality is just like that commercial. There are probably a million books on spirituality, we can read them all day, but if we do no more, we are never going to be spiritual. We can plan all the vacations imaginable, but if we fail to walk out the door, we never go anywhere. Prayer, Spirituality and Holiness are about being. They follow the surrender of our will to the will of God, but we do not achieve them by being passive, by reading books. We meet God in the quiet spaces of our hearts, BUT we have to go there first and wait, and that act of waiting is an active, dynamic and living process.

Up against Mother Theresa, John Paul the Great or Cardinal George, I am a lightweight. I will never reach them, but I do not have to reach. I can not earn spirituality-I have to pray for it, I have to comport myself in a manner that makes sacred space available to the God of my life. Once I do that,

For Mark, life is a spiritual journey with many twists and turns along the way. One such turn took place for Mark in 2002 when he attended a retreat and read the book, *Shortcut to a Miracle*. Both events helped him to gain perspective and see that he was not the center of the universe but part of something much larger than himself.

Mark was diagnosed with AIDS on April 4, 2005. He was so sick that he simply accepted the fact that he was dying. When he began to get better physically, he struggled with "what he was going to do with this disease, AIDS." At the time he was living in a small, rural community 80 miles west of Chicago that offered little in the way of medical care and moral support. Feeling isolated and alone, Mark spiraled downward into active addiction. He moved to Chicago where he "couch surfed"—slept on the couches of various friends and acquaintances—until he found himself on the streets.

God will find me. God is never lost, I am.

The best way to describe the Alexian Brothers Spirituality is to refer you to two scripture passages. The first is James 2:15, loosely translated is says that *if your brother or sister is hungry and naked and all you do is to wish them well and do not meet their bodily needs, then your faith is useless!* The second is the end of Chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew. In this moving passage, Jesus gives the first performance appraisal to His followers. The bad news is, "Guys, you do not get a raise this year." When we protest that we were with Him each day, He responds that whenever we failed to meet the *needs of the least of our Brothers and Sisters, we failed to meet Jesus' needs*. These two passages are foundational for the creation of Bonaventure House, The Harbor and Bettendorf Place.

Perhaps there is a better fit between me and the Alexian Brothers than I give

Mark began to stay at Hilda's Place, a shelter in Evanston, and eventually moved into Next Step where he was introduced to Recovery and the possibilities for life that recovery offers. He describes his first 12-Step meeting at Next Step as another turning point: "The people who spoke at the meeting had something I wanted. It was tangible and obvious." With that meeting, Mark invested himself in the hard work of recovery.

Mark's journey led him from Next Step to Bonaventure House in the fall of 2006, where he embraced the holistic approach to care that was offered to him. Mark observes that Bonaventure House "meets me where I am and allows me to expand holistically. Here they deal with the whole person. You can expand where you are and add things that you may not have contemplated. It is a fresh, clean, holistic experience, which is uniquely Bonaventure House. That's the best thing



myself credit for. When I stand before God for judgment, I believe that he will be concerned with determining how well and how often I shared, with the least of my brothers and sisters, that Divine Love which He incarnated in a manger in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. I believe that He will tell us, as Jesus told His followers in Matthew," In so far as you have fed the hungry, clothed the naked and comforted the sick and imprisoned, you have done so to Me."

**Br. Daniel McCormick, CFA**  
**President**  
**Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry**



## AIDS Fact: According to the Illinois Housing Development Authority,

it has to offer.”

Since coming to Bonaventure House, Mark’s health has improved and his mental and emotional stability and clarity have returned. This has allowed him to refocus his energies on giving back rather than just taking. He says that he is “paying into the pool and not just taking from it.” He has learned once again that he is one among many, which has led him to participate and invest himself in the process of recovery.

In addition to his leadership on the Recovery Committee at Bonaventure House, Mark has become involved with Crystal Meth Anonymous (CMA), and

chairs the CMA meeting each Saturday in the Harborview Recovery Center at St. Joseph Hospital.

Though living with HIV/AIDS, Mark’s addiction and subsequent involvement in recovery has enabled him to see that his fundamental ailment was a spiritual one: “those of us who suffer from AIDS and addiction are uniquely positioned to recognize that this is a spiritual illness and we are in a unique position to take a message of hope—which is a message of forgiveness—to other people.” For Mark, treatment for this spiritual ailment is uniquely available at Bonaventure House.

Mark continues his spiritual journey with a deeper confidence in God who gives him the “hope, peace, love and forgiveness” that enables him to proceed.

*“Those of us who suffer from AIDS and addiction, are uniquely positioned to recognize that this is a spiritual illness and we are uniquely positioned to take a message of hope—which is a message of forgiveness—to other people”*

### Current Wish List

You can support our residents through the winter months with the following in-kind donations.

- Sets of twin bed linens (sheets & pillow cases) [new or gently used]
- Heavy blankets, bedspreads, comforters or quilts (twin) [new or gently used]
- Hypo-allergenic pillows [new]
- Sets of bath linens: Bath towel, hand towel and wash cloth [new or gently used]
- Winter hats, gloves, scarves [new men’s & women’s sizes]
- Thermal underwear [new adult sizes]
- Coffee (ground or whole bean)
- Flowers for Christmas Dinner

Please see our website for our complete wish list.

## Volunteer Profile: A Privilege to Work in Spiritual Care

Paula Addington began volunteering at Bonaventure House a year and a half ago. She is a member of Fourth Presbyterian Church where she trained as a lay minister and was on staff at the Social Service Center.

At Bonaventure House, Paula began as a mentor for a female resident who had difficulty interacting in larger group settings. They met weekly and spent the time walking and sharing. Paula and the resident made a good connection. When Ross Martine Eiler became Spiritual Care Coordinator in the fall of 2006, Paula was called upon to play a more active role and was officially designated “Spiritual Care Volunteer.”

Working with Eric Crawford, Bonaventure House’s Recovery Coordinator, Paula helped begin a weekly “Grief, Loss, and Change” group. They used *Good Grief: A Constructive Approach to the Problem of Loss*, by Granger E. Westberg as a guide. The group has been a resounding success. Paula has been impressed with the residents and their willingness to talk about their Higher Power. “The residents are open and share

about their spirituality, their recovery from drugs or alcohol, and their health issues. It is a privilege to hear their stories and spirituality as they go forward on their journey.”

Besides the “Grief, Loss and Change” group, Paula still conducts one-on-one sessions with female residents because of their unique experiences. In her groups and one-on-one sessions, they talk about spiritual things and not necessarily religion. Paula believes it is important to be sensitive to other traditions that may not be ours because at Bonaventure House there is a diverse population.

Recently one resident said, “I’m going to pray but I’m not going to talk about the Jesus thing.”

Paula is blessed to have the time and energy to volunteer. She chooses to spend her time at Bonaventure House because she wants to do something worthwhile with her time and gifts. “It is rewarding to feel the trust that residents have given to me.” The atmosphere at Bonaventure House is one of sharing and growing. “The residents, staff and volunteers eat, work and share their lives together. There isn’t a sense of “they” or “us”.

*“It is a privilege to hear their stories and spirituality as they go forward on their journey.”*

*continued on page 5*

## A Story of Hope from an African Kindred Spirit

Many of us wonder if we were to travel to another city, state or country, whether or not we would meet kindred spirits. Would we find individuals who are like-minded or have similar experiences? The residents of Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House and The Harbor would answer this question with a resounding “yes”.

This November, Bridget Michello Chisenga spoke to current and former residents at Bonaventure House. She told her “Story of Hope,” as she called it. Although her story took place halfway around the world in Zambia and Botswana, Africa, it resonated with the audience because it was similar to their own.

Bridget was the head teacher at her local school and was married. Her life took a tragic turn after her husband passed away and she was diagnosed with HIV. She began drinking alcohol and picking up men. Soon her friends disappeared and she continued to drown her sorrows. Eventually she left Zambia for neighboring Botswana, in part because of the stigma of HIV and the stories that people told about her. Bridget said that at one point she was begging for her life.

Her path changed dramatically when she turned to the bible. Reading and studying the bible allowed her to congregate with friends and eventually she stopped the other activities like drinking. She began to focus on her family and especially her siblings and mother. Bridget first did this by renovating her house because she thought, “if I die at least they will have shelter.”

Eventually, Bridget began taking anti-retroviral therapy despite the many myths and misconceptions surrounding the treatment in Africa. She said that medically she should have been dead at one point because of her viral load. Bridget believes that God’s grace kept her alive and that hope is everything.

Over time her health improved and she returned to Zambia. Bridget felt that now it was her turn to help others with HIV because God saved her. Instead of going back to teaching, she worked as an outreach worker for sex workers and truck  
*Volunteer Profile from page 1*

It is valuable time spent in sitting and sharing as residents look towards their new lives.”

Paula hopes that more people will learn about the valuable and life saving work being done at Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry. For people wanting to volunteer here, she thinks

drivers. She then worked as a behavioral change coordinator and eventually took her position with Catholic Relief Services as an adherence officer. Bridget attributes her professional success to the fact that she understands and accepts her clients.

Today, Bridget discusses her HIV status openly in Zambia and is available to counsel people 24 hours per day. She has the support of her family and mentioned that her granddaughter, also name Bridget, asks her daily if she has

taken her medication. Despite Bridget’s openness, she said that there is a stigma against HIV and AIDS in Africa. It is seen as a punishment and her aunt once told her, “You reap what you sow”.



*Bridget Michello Chisenga with Bonaventure House residents.*

Bridget has turned her life around and is making a positive impact in Zambia and also here in the United States. When she heard about Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House and The Harbor, two communities of individuals living with HIV, her response was excitement and “I’m there!” Bridget admitted that she had been more candid about her life when speaking with our residents than with her fellow Zambians because often she didn’t have people who accepted her. At Bonaventure House Bridget said she was talking to friends and was speaking from the heart.

Certainly, this spirit was also felt by the residents of Bonaventure House and The Harbor. One resident commented that he felt that his story was her story and he understood the feeling of being stigmatized. Bridget’s message of hope and that God is a powerful weapon in changing one’s life and living with HIV resonated with residents.

Bridget works for Catholic Relief Services in Lusaka, Zambia as an adherence officer, where she reaches out to people in rural areas with HIV and helps them improve their lives.

they need to be sincere, giving and sensitive to diversity. “Volunteering at Bonaventure House is a privilege and good experience. It is a great place for spiritual growth. for residents, staff and volunteers. There is a real sense of community.”



# Happenings at The Harbor

## Sharing His Miracle: Ernest's Story

At 52, Ernest is a determined survivor. He's lived through homelessness, addiction, a divorce, AIDS, and cancer. He dropped out of school in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and earned a living on the streets, embracing drugs and crime to support himself.

After a period of sobriety seven years ago, Ernest began a downward spiral that would take him near death. He didn't see a doctor for more than two years and relapsed. His health wasn't a priority and when illness struck, he became gravely ill. At one point he wanted to die and questioned why God spared him. And yet, he always knew this wasn't the way he wanted to live. His family intervened, helping him find care at a variety of hospitals and short term care facilities.

When it came time to find housing, he called The Harbor and spent several



hours telling his story to the staff and undergoing a rigorous assessment. He laughs now, recalling that he had no idea where Waukegan was—he had never traveled outside Chicago, "And it was a long train ride," he remembers.

He has worked hard in the twelve months since he came to stay at The Harbor—continuing his recovery and learning new life skills. For the first time, he has a savings account and a plan for the future. He learned to take care of himself in ways large and small—he can now cook and do laundry.

What does he value most about The Harbor? "I have stability," he says. "I keep a balance now—I'm quiet and peaceful." When he graduates from The Harbor, he plans to stay in the Waukegan area because that's where he feels most comfortable.

*"I have stability. I keep a balance now—I'm quiet and peaceful."*

"The Harbor is my miracle," he says. And he wants others to know there is always hope. He dreams someday of becoming a substance abuse counselor so he can help others understand that the future is a good place. And he thinks maybe the reason he was spared is to tell his story and share his miracle.



## World AIDS Day

On December 1st, 2007, residents, staff, volunteers and community members celebrated World AIDS Day. There was a small reception and ceremony honoring friends who are outstanding supporters of The Harbor. This year, Pastor Jim Bell and the members of the Drill Team at the United Methodist Church in Libertyville received the Leadership and Service Award; George Aynilian, a member of The Harbor Advisory Council and long-time supporter, received the Volunteer of the Year award; and the Outstanding Service Provider to The Harbor was given to Anna Miller and Phyllis Raines-Jarrett of Catholic Charities of Lake County and Monica McDaniel-Collins from the Lake County Health Department.

The group then proceeded to the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Waukegan for a vigil and ceremony. Pastor Chris Fox led a moving service to honor those who we have lost to AIDS and to celebrate the lives of individuals living with the disease today. Many residents of The Harbor shared their personal stories during the service.



Ralph, Harbor Resident, gives his personal testimonial.

Please remember our Harbor residents with in-kind donations of bedding, coffee, new winter clothing (hats, gloves, scarves & thermal underwear), gift cards and other items.

*Spiritual Care from page 1*

evidence that spirituality is central to the transformative work that happens through Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry.

Spiritual Care is coordinated by Ross Martinie Eiler. He is supported by dedicated volunteers, Paula Addington and Sister Rafaël Maria Theuvenet, and the Spiritual Care Committee, which is comprised of local religious leaders.



*As You and Your Family  
Remember the Nativity Story,  
Please Remember Us.*

In the Nativity story, Mary and Joseph were poor and had no place to stay. Unfortunately that same story plays out today in our city and suburbs. Homelessness is especially devastating for our brothers and sisters with HIV/AIDS. Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry serves poor, homeless people with HIV/AIDS by providing housing and support at our two locations: Bonaventure House in Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood, and The Harbor in Waukegan. We are the only Catholic organization in the Chicagoland area to provide these services and we rely on the generous support of people like you to help us continue this vital ministry to poor, suffering people. Please keep our residents and our ministry in your thoughts and prayers during this holy season. And please consider a monetary donation or volunteering for Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry. Thank you for your continued support and Happy Holidays.

Have you visited our new homepage? [www.abam.org](http://www.abam.org)

Would you like to receive this newsletter in electronic form?  
E-mail us at [info@abam.org](mailto:info@abam.org)

*Did you know?*

You can earn points on your credit card by setting up a monthly or quarterly recurring gift on our website.

E-mail ([info@abam.org](mailto:info@abam.org)) or call the Development Office  
773.327.9921

*Our Wish List*

You can also support us through in-kind donations. Our current wish list includes: bedding, coffee, new winter clothing (hats, gloves, scarves & thermal underwear), gift cards and many other items.

Our complete wish list is available at [http://www.bonaventurehouse.org/html/wish\\_list\\_2007.11.pdf](http://www.bonaventurehouse.org/html/wish_list_2007.11.pdf)



**ALEXIAN BROTHERS**  
AIDS Ministry

Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House  
825 W. Wellington Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60657  
773.327.9921  
773.327.9113 (fax)

Alexian Brothers The Harbor  
826 North Avenue  
Waukegan, IL 60085  
847.782.8015  
847.782.0822 (fax)