

A religious painting featuring St. Philip Neri in the foreground, looking upwards with his arms outstretched. He is wearing a red and gold patterned robe. In the upper left, the Virgin Mary holds the Christ Child, with three cherubs below them. A lily is in the bottom left corner.

# ALL IS GRACE...

-St Philip Neri

HAPPY  
BIRTHDAY  
FATHER  
GEORGE  
TOROK, C.O.







*Celebration of the life, service and humility of  
Father George Torok, C.O.,  
on the occasion of his 90th birthday.*

*Gift of his brothers in the New York Oratory  
and grateful parishioners,  
whose lives he touched over so many years.*

*October 15, 2021*

***"The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus. When you see a priest, think of our Lord Jesus Christ."***

***-St John Mary Vianney Holy Cure of Ars***



***"For when you see the Lord sacrificed, and laid upon the altar, and the priest standing and praying over the victim, and all the worshippers empurpled with that precious blood, can you then think that you are still among men, and standing upon the earth? Are you not, on the contrary, straightway translated to Heaven, and casting out every carnal thought from the soul, do you not with disembodied spirit and pure reason contemplate the things which are in Heaven?"***

***— St. John Chrysostom***

***"The Ecumenical Council will surely be, even more than a new and magnificent Pentecost, a real and new Epiphany, one of the many revelations which have been renewed and are continually being renewed in the course of history, but one of the greatest of all."***

***—John XXIII. Apostolic Exhortation 'Sacrae Laudis' 1962***





***Thank you Fr George!***

***“What tongue, human or angelic, may ever describe  
a power so immeasurable as that exercised by the  
simplest priest in Mass? Who could ever have  
imagined that the voice of man, which by nature hath  
not the power even to raise a straw from the ground,  
should obtain through grace a power so stupendous  
as to bring from Heaven to earth the Son of God?”***

***— St. Leonard of Port Maurice***

# Happy Birthday Fr. George!

Only once in a lifetime do we meet someone like Father George; his vision and dedication have brought the Oratorians to Rockland County, and we are eternally grateful for that even though we no longer live in New York, our fond memories of St. Ann's stay with us. Many blessings to you, Father George, and a happy birthday to you.

-Victoria Ficco-Panzer & Arthur Leibowitz

**"Father George never fails to uplift you in his Homilies or in his other contacts with you. His every word and gesture is to support one in their journey to be a better Catholic Christian as well as a better person. If there is anyone on Earth to be cloned to have that person remain with us forever, I am voting it be Father George."**

**-Dennis Lynch**

Dear Father George,

We were blessed to travel with you to the Holy Land and had the benefit of your extensive knowledge and your humble awe of holy sites including Bethlehem, Cana, and Jerusalem. We remember how kind and understanding you were to all of us—never too busy to have time for us. We love your sermons and your monthly sessions on the Promises of the Sacred Heart of Jesus encouraging us to use our imagination to place ourselves in historical situations such as being with Jesus at the home of Martha and Mary. Your close relationship with God and desire to help us to get closer with God is evident in your joy of life and nature, your encouragement of relaxation and your fun-filled holiness which we feel when you enter a room!

Happy 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday.

With love and gratitude, Marcella Amorese

Whenever I see you Father George you make me smile. You are so down to earth and I feel you are speaking to me. You are a living example of Christ, humble, sincere and devoted to the Church. Wishing you a Happy Birthday and may God bless you with good health.

—Elizabeth and Stan Stimek

Fr. George Thank you for your blessed ceremony and blessing. Wishing you a happy 90th birthday we want to you to stay young.

-Philomina Thomas

Here is one of the first impactful memories I have of Fr George:

When I first moved into the area and found OLSH, I attempted my first Mass, yet ran late. I was upset with myself for not making it on time, yet was on time for other events in my life that were less important. However, as I was rushing up the stairs 5 or so minutes, Fr. George was standing at the outside doors of the church and he spread out his arms and hugged me and said, "Welcome." Immediately all the bad thoughts I had left, I felt lighter and I knew I found the parish for me.

-Diana



Father George, while we have only been parishioners at OLSH since 2017 (when we relocated here from Manhattan.) I have enjoyed hearing your homilies and they often help me think more deeply about my faith. In particular, one salient point which recently resonated with me was when you spoke about re-framing our mindset in the context of how a mother's attention and care would be more focused on her sick child, the one who needs her the most, so my take away was to focus on the benefits that child is receiving versus lamenting the child is sick. Thank you for sharing your passion and experience with us, we are a richer community for you!

Take good care, Kerry & Jed Salter,  
McAllister, Brendan & Patrick

I became a Trustee when Fr George took over as Administrator of St John's. As a result, I have had many dinners where my co-trustee and I would take Fr George to dinner almost always at Fresco. His stories of escape from the former Yugoslavia to his time at the Vatican were captivating. That same gift for story telling and teaching were present in his homilies on Sunday. He is truly one of the most amazing people I have ever met and I am happy to have him as a friend.

-Jim Pontone

The first time I had the honor of sitting in on one of your Masses, I realized what a beautiful soul you had. As a teacher myself, I always considered priests to be similar: some you can fall asleep on and some catch your attention and fill your mind with a plethora of knowledge.

That particular day you caught my attention and kept it through the entirety of the Mass. You spoke about nuns that were advanced in age that claimed they were having problems praying the entire rosary without losing focus. I thought that was so funny because (although I'm not elderly,) I too become scatter-brained while praying. Your solution was to just say, "I love you Jesus" and He would hear your prayers. I still do this when I am having an arduous day and feel as though I can't concentrate. It makes me feel good about myself, closer to God and I can do it anywhere at any time.

Fr George, you have been gifted with your sense of humor and innate ability to comfort people with God's blessing. You are outstanding, both in your ministry and your gentle soul.

I wish you the happiest of birthdays and may God continue to bless you!

Sincerely, JoAnn Kingston

Dearest Fr. George:

Leo and I are so pleased to have you in our lives...You have helped us through many hard times....Many happy birthday wishes...We wish you much health. Love,  
Leo and Theresa Canzoneri

Dear Father George, we are sitting here together and the first thing that came to us is a big smile! Your loving understanding and wisdom are such a gift to all of us. You make us a better community. Thank you for changing our lives by teaching us to be still before the Lord. May you be blessed with every grace on your birthday. Much love and admiration,  
-Peter and Bernadette Masiello

My dear Father George. We were so fortunate to have you celebrate Mass at St. Paul's— 12:00. Always enjoy your sermons.  
—Mr. Peter H.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY FATHER GEORGE ON THIS MOMENTOUS BIRTHDAY!

TONY AND I COULDN'T BE HAPPIER FOR YOU! YOU HAVE MADE OUR LIVES SO SPECIAL IN JUST US HAVING YOU AS OUR PASTOR AND PRIEST AT OLSH. YOUR HOMILIES HAVE MADE SUCH AN IMPACT ON THE WAY WE LIVE AND CONDUCT OURSELVES ESPECIALLY DURING THESE CHALLENGING TIMES. WE THANK GOD FOR BRINGING YOU TO OUR PARISH AND HOPE YOU HAVE A BEAUTIFUL DAY AND YEAR AHEAD!

FONDLY, LORRAINE AND TONY (MOTTA)

Father George administered the sacrament of First Reconciliation to the children of St. John's in the most loving, beautiful way of any priest I have ever seen in the 51 years I have been working with young children. I felt as if I was in the presence of Jesus.  
Kathleen Dunn



Happy Birthday Father George!

May god bless you always and bless you with many more years! Something memorable from your homilies are that you always preach while visualizing what is going on and it helps us get a more powerful connection with God! Have a blessed day Father. -Yaneth Magana

Its always a pleasure singing at the masses that you officiate! Best Happy Birthday wishes.  
Denise Weber (5:00 choir)

Happy 90<sup>th</sup> Fr. George!  
You have reached a fantastic milestone and my warmest and most loving wishes to you! You are indeed the kindest, wisest and most loving man. I have been most fortunate to have known you. I look forward to receiving your wisdom and blessings in years to come. May God Bless you on this very special day and days to come!  
Lots of Love and big hug  
Larry (Kwan)  
(parishioner of OLSH since 1979)

### Meeting Father George

Funeral mass for my son James Wells

It was a special moment from the time he and I shook hands in greeting before he addressed the casket and our family proceeded down the aisle.

Louise Wells, my wife, had passed away three weeks earlier. All other parish priests were on retreat. God sent us Father George. Father had done his homework. He delivered a marvelous homily, addressing me personally, incorporating Louise, Jim's mother, and touching the entire congregation.

Father George accompanied us to Gethsemane Cemetery for the burial. Then he exited quietly where I never got a chance to say thank you for creating such a God filled blessed event.

My family and I wish you a very happy birthday from the bottom of our hearts.

Sincerely, Bill Wells



Although there are many fond memories of Fr. George, the one that stands out for me was 14 years ago when we visited the Holy Land. Despite the hip problems that he had and the knee problem that I had, we successfully limped to all of the sites which Jesus made famous. There was no limit to his determination to visit all of the sites; I will never forget him or his willingness to see everything. Tom Smith

Dear Father George,  
Like an angel, you appeared into our lives four years ago after the death of our son and brother, Conor.

There are no words to express how thankful we were when our family needed comfort, understanding and love. You opened your heart with all your prayers, humility and grace. For all you do, we are truly blessed! You will always be a part of our family.

Happy 90th birthday! May God bless you always with health, love and happiness.

Love always, Gerard, Rita, Ryan and Barry (Grant)

Dear Fr. George,  
Happy Birthday and God Bless you.  
You look great.  
Charlie and Anne Scholl

Happy birthday Father George. I sit quietly in the back of the Church and have very often been inspired by your honest, genuine sermons. May you continue to have good health, happy times and laughter. Enjoy your special birthday.  
Theresa Foiles

Fr. George said the way we listen to a homily is important. He said so many memorable things in his homilies at Daily Mass that I have so many from which to choose. Whenever we got together, Fr. George taught us that we make Jesus present in our midst. By praying and loving, we make Jesus real. Over many years, Fr. George had great influence when he shared:

- Practice, practice, practice- what are we going to practice today? How are we going to remember and practice the Gospel?
- Adoration- we all get distracted: How long am I out? How long am I in? Stay awake. Don't get distracted.
- Hope- heals the memory. Pray, Think, Act. Use your reason.
- Fear- do not be afraid. You are under the protection of the Blessed Mother.
- Forgiveness is a process. Make the decision to forgive. Forgiveness frees the forgiver. I forgive you and I ask you to forgive me. Forgiveness brings peace.
- Look at one another with kindness and compassion. Have a compassionate heart.
- We don't have to be successful- just faithful.

There are miracles in time- keep praying.

According to Fr. George, Mother Theresa was so pleasant in her smile, had joy in her inner self, never raised her voice or was irritated, was patient and calm, and told him so much including: We can touch Jesus at all times and are in touch with Jesus 24 hours each day. Spend time before the Blessed Sacrament, it's a good investment. Don't leave Jesus alone. She gave witness to Him.

- Gratefulness and Thankfulness- we are grateful we are here.

We are eternally grateful for the Spiritual Teachings of Fr George.

Sincerely, Kathy Skae

Dear Fr. George: Happy, happy 90th birthday! Thank you for everything you have done for the parish. You are such a special person, who is kind and caring. I really enjoyed the Spiritual Exercises which I attended a few years ago. I also enjoy your inspiration homilies. Enjoy your birthday and every day!  
Love, Linda Hayden

Happy 90th Fr. George! Thank you for being such a comfort to Diane & I, before I underwent surgery a few years back. You prayed with us & it made all the difference, Bless You, Paul & Diane

Father George is the reason I am a parishioner at OLSH. When I moved to Pearl River in 2012 we attended mass at several of the local parishes. We just didn't seem to click until we were told about the wonderful parish of OLSH. Father George made us feel welcome and at home from the first moment we met him. He is a loving and compassionate man. He introduced me to a parishioner who was homebound and in need of company. As a result I became a very good friend of hers and would often spend time with her and Father George. He gave me a renewed faith in my religion. His warmth and understanding helped me get through a very difficult time when my husband passed away. I consider him to be one of my most treasured friends. Nothing makes me feel better than to see him on the altar saying mass on Sunday. Many happy returns on his birthday. It would not surprise me if one day he becomes a Saint.  
I love you Father George.  
Gloria Donohue



Dear Father George,  
Happy Birthday! I wanted to take a moment to tell you how you have truly touched my family. Six years ago, my mom, Kathy O'Shea, passed away from battling cancer. Prior to her passing, she was attending mass daily and spent some time with you. She used to tell me how much you helped her cope with the troubles she was facing. When her health took a sharp decline, you came to visit her in the hospital to bless her and spoke to my brother, sister, and me. My mom was very fond of you and I know it brought her a great deal of peace to see you in her final days. After my mom's passing, you met with my siblings and me in preparation for performing her funeral mass. During an overwhelmingly difficult time, you brought my family some peace. We are forever grateful to you. Since her passing, there have been many weeks where I am missing my mom more than usual, and it always so happens that you end up being the priest at the mass I go to, and it reminds me of the peace you brought me in those difficult days.

I know you've touched so many lives, and I will be forever grateful that you touched mine. I hope you have a wonderful birthday and I thank you!

Sincerely, Lauren Amicucci



In April of 2018, I was fortunate to join the pilgrimage to Holy Land organized by the St Paul - St Ann Church in Congers, New York and Fr. George was our spiritual guide.

Throughout our trip, Fr. George would reference a passage in the Bible relevant to the holy sites we visited. This made me see the place as it was then and enlightened me more on the Holy Scripture.

Today, when I read the Bible or listen to it being read in the Holy Mass, those places would be mentioned and I would recall and relate to them.

My trip to the Holy Land has given me a better insight of my faith and it has truly deepened it.

Thank you so much, Fr George!

God's blessings to you always!  
Teresa Garingo



Father George -

It may have been one of your hugs, smiles or homilies that just seems to instill a sense of calm, kindness and caring. Which ever of those it is you give us all a true image of what a Good Shepard is all about.

Thank you for your love, concern and prayerful leadership.

Wishing you many more birthdays and may the Lord keep you always I His hands and heart. Happy, Happy Birthday!

Love, Donna and Steve Bodner

Greetings Fr. George,  
Congratulations on your 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. You are definitely one-of-a-kind. You speak with such conviction and emotion in your homilies that you make us feel what you are saying. You must have been another John the Baptist in your heyday. You express yourself in a simple but truly uplifting way. We love your facial expressions (when you rub your chin or touch the top of your head.) You are as natural and as beautiful as a cool autumn day.

Keep feeding us for many more years---LORD willing.

In Christian love, Jerry and Terry Caterino

It's a blessing to be wishing you a happy birthday today father.

For all of your messages, words of wisdom and for the joy and light you bring to the lives of so many, we want to thank you for your dedication and kindness.

The impact you have made on our lives, in particular, is enormous, we are so truly thankful to you and to our great Lord for blessing us all with you. May God continue to fill your days with health and happiness.

Marge and Ralph Olsen St John's Church



**Fr George  
with Alex  
and  
Armando**

Dear Father George, For me the Gospels come to life through your gift of 'storyteller.' Your homilies sometimes make me cry, smile and laugh out loud but mostly they inspire me to become more insightful and reflective; be more open-hearted and loving to share with my family, "Guess what Fr. George had to say!"

Thank you Father and here's wishing you a Happy 90th Birthday! May your birthday wish come true! With gratitude and love,  
Peggy McCormack

Dear Father George,  
You have always shared your love of God with others. He is our strength and we are truly blessed. I am grateful for this opportunity to wish you a Happy & Healthy 90th Birthday! May it be filled with JOY. God bless you always-with my love and prayers. -Rose Anne Frascello

Whenever I see you on the altar, I am delighted because I know I will be learning something new about God and me. A few years ago you presided over the funeral Mass for a young woman, O'Gorman was her last name. You said that your father died on same day you entered you entered the priesthood. You had to handle tremendous joy and sadness at once. You answered God's calling and persevered with the strength He gave you. I thank you for the strength you give all of us to carry on in the toughest of situations. May God continue to shower you with His many gifts.  
Patty Brady

Dear Father George.

Congratulations on your 90th Birthday.

I will always treasure the time we shared on the Bermuda cruise. *You should write a book. I especially enjoyed it when you joined my brother and me on our day trip to St George. I have some great pictures. You were a good sport when you took a picture of you in the stockade. We also got to spend a little time on the beautiful beach.*

*May God bless you with many more happy and healthy years.*

*With love and affection. -Josephine Carrature*

Fr George,

Fr. George brought to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish a wonderful group of priests. He was a holy, and dedicated Pastor of our parish. His kind words were always welcome and fitting for all occasions. Fr. George has a very reassuring smile, and sometimes, a smile, and some good advice, helps you get through a day! We are all fortunate to know and love Fr. George!

-Eileen M. Foti



## ***Our Soul Whisperer***

Scripture for Him Is a Well  
What Wisdom He'll Draw Who Can Tell?

\*\*\*

His Sermons Envelop  
As They Weave and Develop

\*\*\*

It's as If Father George Casts a Spell

*The Sullivan-Doyle Family*



Happy 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Father George!  
Your presence in our lives has been a wonderful blessing. Your wise counsel has always guided me on my path toward Jesus and your enthusiasm for our congregation has always inspired me. I shall always want your spirit of faith, love and kindness in my life.

God Bless You on this very special birthday!

Yours in Christ,  
Denise Ferri

Happy 90th birthday! God bless you!

Carole Finning and Robert Finning

Thank you for filling the dry wadi of our souls, and the souls of veterans across the country, with your gentle and beautiful spirit!

Greg M (participant at veteran's retreat

When Fr. George first came to St. Paul and St. Ann he exuded happiness that flowed over the entire congregation. It was my first impression. Since then, I have attended either in person or by internet his classes on meditative breathing in prayer....learning to empty ourselves and so we can open mind and heart to the word of God in our silence.

I attend Mass each Sunday with the hope that Fr. George will be saying the Mass. He walks with a peacefulness that is tangible. I feel like a child who will hear her grandparent tell a story in that special way. I wait in anticipation of his sermon! When he officiates at the Sacrament of the Eucharist you feel the Apostle's gathering....as if he is one of them.

I have often heard the same sentiments from other parishioners....you have a following!

So....on your 90th Birthday Father George I wish you not only joy and peace, but a celebration filled with laughter and love. Thank you for all you have done for this parish..... you have reached the hearts and souls of many.

Mazel tov!!!!

Love, Chris Prescottto

Dear Fr. George,

Remembering our wonderful relationship through the years! You have always been our Good Shepherd! I also loved spending time at Hallel with Anita and Mary.

Then there's the special pilgrimages I was able to enjoy with you that have created, this day, wonderful memories of spiritual experiences at these Holy Sites! I thank you profusely for that. We are all blessed because of your caring and loving ministry to us.

May the Good Lord continue to bless you and keep you! Happy 90th Birthday!

Love and Special Blessings! Elda Zamparo

My dear Father George, It has been a special blessing to have you at St Paul's. I look forward to your sermons with great attention. God bless you always and may you be well until God takes you home. -Regina C.

Fr George, Happy, Happy Birthday!

Your spiritual, thoughtful and profound words have made such an impact on all of us throughout the years. Your love and compassion have given us grateful hearts.

We're sending our love and best wishes for a wonderful 90th year!

XOX Kate (O'Hara,) Dave, Meg and Will (Majewski)

Father George

The Coyle family would like to wish you a wonderful 90th birthday. We thank God for Him sharing you with us. You said a Mass when my father-in-law passed away unexpectedly. Your kind and comforting words helped us tremendously through those difficult times.

Happy Birthday and wishing you many more.

God bless.

Love,

The Coyle Family

Fr. George,

We, the Catholic Daughters Court St. Anne, would like to thank you for your warm leadership and spiritual guidance. You have been an ever-present source of inspiration to us. We thank you, we love you, and we wish you many years of joy and comfort to come. We need you!

Love and Prayers,  
Catholic Daughters Court St. Anne

My father's impending death came upon us suddenly on a very hot day at the end of June in 2014. I called St. John's somewhat frantically, hoping someone could come to Englewood Hospital to administer last rites. Within 15 or 20 minutes Fr. George was a welcome vision in the doorway of my father's hospital room. In seconds a sense of calm and grace enveloped the room. He blessed my father in the most loving way and assured all of us that my father's goodness and purity was seen by God, and that any sin had been absolved. Fr. George wanted nothing from us but for us to have a deep understanding of this simple fact. I think my mother, my sister, and I all agree that it was one of the most peaceful moments of our lives.

Fr. George, you are everything a priest should be and somehow so much more.

Sending our love and wishing you many blessings on this milestone birthday,

The Family of Gabriel Armstrong



Our Dear Father George :

Our hearts fill with joy & thanksgiving  
whenever we lift you up in prayer - during  
Mass and special homilies. Our admiration  
has no end - we cannot put it into words.  
How many times did you come to our rescue ?  
when we went through hard times ?

And now, as we celebrate your 90 years here  
on earth - may Jesus and our Blessed Mother  
protect you and keep you in good health -

Marie Harrow & Fam.

**There is only ONE Father George  
& there will be no other - ever !**

Dear Father George,

This is the day the Lord  
has made! Happy 90th  
birthday Father  
George!!

I give special thanks  
today and always for  
all you have done for  
my family....you  
married me and you  
baptized all of my  
children. We are  
forever blessed that  
you are part of our  
lives.

You radiate goodness  
and have the heart of  
Jesus.

It truly shows to all  
who meet you.

I thank you, I love you,  
and I wish you the  
most wonderful  
birthday,  
Heidi Dangler and  
family

Dear Father George,

Here's what I wrote about you in our anniversary journal in 2002. *"Hope...the word of the pious priest who seems to have been sent to us...Sacred Heart just for us, will stay with us all year-don't think so much and have peace in your heart."*

What a blessing that you have been part of our lives since then. Whether you are embracing us in one of your special hugs or speaking to either one-on-one or from the pulpit, you have the gift of knowing what is in our hearts and saying what we need to hear. You have guided our lives in ways you can never know and we thank you for that. Renewing our wedding vows for our 25th anniversary will always be a special memory and I did share your words about Matt being too far away!

May all of God's blessings be yours as you celebrate your 90th birthday. With our love and appreciation for the gift you are to us!

The Zebiak Family (Steve, Karen and Matt)



Dearest Father George,

You do not know how much you have touched the lives of the people around you. When you get to Heaven I hope Jesus will let you see all the good you have done for people who have been lucky enough to know you. I am one of these people.

When I first met you, you hugged me. At the time I was startled and shocked and I had a visceral reaction. You see, I had been abused as a child by my grandfather and as a result, even 20 years later, I had severe aversion to being touched-especially by an elderly gentleman.

But somehow, with you, it was okay, Then the next time I saw you, you hugged me again and again and again and somehow it was okay. You made me feel safe, like Jesus was hugging me. I am still averse to being touched, but somehow it is okay with you. You are so very special and I love you. Please pray for me as I pray for you everyday.



With heartfelt gratitude:

Happy Birthday

Daniel 12 :11-13

Love from Catherine R. O'Brien

Father George is ever close to our hearts. He counseled us when Charlotte converted to Catholicism, and held a blessing for our marriage. His sermons are vivid and memorable. It has been truly wonderful to know him.

William and Charlotte Hoffman

Happy Birthday to a very special priest who brought so much love and devotion to our parish. Many fond memories but the very best and never to be forgotten was visiting the Holy Sights in the Holy Lands with you and walking the same paths Jesus walked two thousand years ago. God Bless you Father George. And thank you.

Harry and Josephine Weber

Fr George,  
Happy, happy birthday! Your spiritual, thoughtful, and profound words have made such an impact on all of us throughout the years. Your love and compassion have given us grateful hearts. We're sending our love and best wishes for a wonderful 90<sup>th</sup> year!

xox Kate (O'Hara), Dave, Meg, and Will (Majewski)

***"A joyful heart is more easily made perfect than a downcast one." St Philip Neri***

***"Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier.***

***Be the living expression of God's kindness:***

***Kindness in your face.***

***Kindness in your eyes.***

***Kindness in your smile."***

**-Mother Theresa**



We have spent limited time together over the years, but you have made a strong impression on me. You combine elements that are too rare in this world: intelligence, empathy, and caring. In addition you have shared your creativity, positive attitude, common sense, and realism.

The last thing I want is for you to get a "fat head", but you deserve this praise and more.

Best Wishes. Harvey Bernard

Father George,

In the course of my life I've met and admired many people because of their intellect, prestige and power. However it has been refreshing to know you, a humble man of great intellect and insight, through your sermons and visits at St. John the Baptist Church. I looked forward to your visits to our church because I knew that you would provide interpretations and insights into the gospels that would give me a better understanding of my faith and the role of the church in today's world. I remember you talking about your visit to Mother Theresa and how you came away knowing that you had truly met a humble person doing great work for the church. The same can be said of you.

Happy 90th Birthday

Nick McCauley

**FELIX NATALIS  
DILECTUS  
PATER TOROK**

That's Latin for Happy  
Birthday Precious Father  
Torok in Latin

Cum Multa Caritate

Oscar

Happy 90th Birthday!!! An  
amazing feat to serve the  
Lord all these years and still  
active at 90. God Bless You!  
-Joann Merla



Dear Father George, have a very happy and healthy Birthday and many more. When I attend mass at St. John's I am greeted by you with a warm hug and a friendly greeting. Your concern regarding my health problems are well appreciated and very thoughtful of you. You are a mentor, a guide and you touch the lives of so many, not least to mention mine. Each of your sermons speak to me and have such a profound impact on me. May God continue to watch over you with love, today and each day to come.

Tony Rossano

Dear Father George,

In one of your homilies, you mentioned your sister asked why she was suffering so much on her last days and you said to her not to think about the physical suffering but 'washing her hands' here on earth, instead of in Purgatory. I felt so touched by your homily. God answered me through you. My mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's dementia in 2015 and I watched my strong, beautiful and independent Mother deteriorate and become so dependent on others that I was always asking, or should I say, daring' God about 'why' my mother was having to go through that terrible disease. Your sermon gave me the answer. My Mom was washing her hands, and knowing her she was sacrificing herself and washing her hands for my father who died less than 30 days after he was diagnosed with leukemia two years ago and may not have had the chance to "wash his hands." My Mother was like that. My Mother was kind, selfless and willing to give everything, even herself, for the ones she loves.

Father George, thank you for helping me deal with the pain of watching my Mother die for 6 years and to deal with the pain of losing her just a few months ago. Father George, thank you and may God always bless you because you are a blessing to all of us.

Sincerely, Carmen Zanabria

Dear Father George,

I am a parishioner at St John's and I always loved it when you gave a homily because I would smile, your words stayed with me sometimes in a happy and beautiful feeling, and sometimes sad but still touching., and never forgotten. I honestly felt like you were family. One of my favorites was the time you spoke of your Mother and it tied in with the sermon. You said you called her by her first name because she was your Friend!

Another moment with you was he Sunday I walked into Church and you were sitting on the bench in the very back before Mass. Your head was slightly down and you did not have your robe on. I nodded and walked by and a second later, I backed up and said, Father George! You were sitting there like one of us and I did not realize it was you. You said, "I am one of you" and hugged me.

I could go on but I want to leave room for the many other wishes.

Happy Birthday and thank you for all you have given me!

Love and prayers, Connie Conace



It's hard to describe in a few sentences what Father George means to us. We have been inspired by his sermons and overcome with gratitude for all he has done for our St Paul-St Ann Parish. We are truly revitalized.

Of the many memories we have, one stands out. It was a summer Sunday, 9am Mass during the early days of being embraced by the Oratorians. Fr George was the celebrant and in his inimitable way, he looked around the Church, wiped his brow, and said, "Boy, is it hot enough for you? It is for me. We hope to change that but there isn't anything we can do about that right now. Meanwhile, there is something you can do--OFFER IT UP!" Those three words evoke memories of hearing the same thing in our youth. We compared notes about our early childhood and the lessons taught. We use it often when things don't turn out as expected.

Father George continues to inspire us as well as keep his promises .  
God bless you and keep you. Barb and Mike Standish.

Happy 90th Birthday,  
Father George!

My family always thanks you for being there for my parents through the most difficult times. We are blessed to have you in our parish.

May God continue to watch over you with love today and each day to come.

Elena Ciofi Williams and family

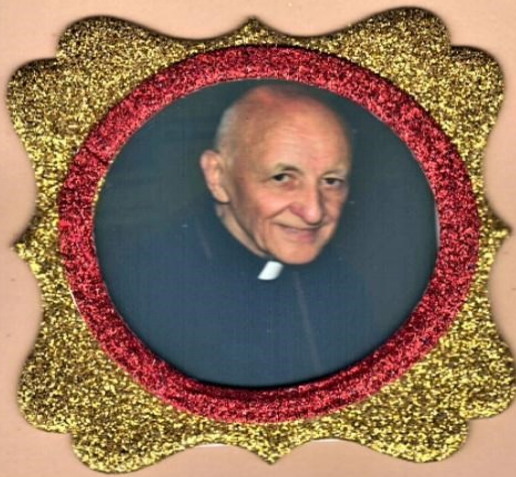


Happy Birthday, Father George! Thank you so much for the healing Masses you do. Three years I went to a healing Mass before Lent , and you sent me to Heaven in that Mass! God bless you.  
Love, Edith Nova and family

Father George's presence during the best and worst times of life has been a beacon of light. His wisdom brings hope, his acceptance brings healing, his humor brings happiness. I love and appreciate Father George and thank God for the blessing of him in all our lives and families. Father George is a true gift from Heaven. May he celebrate this milestone birthday surrounded by all the love and laughter he gives and deserves, and may he continue to enjoy many more years. He will be with us always, and we are with him. His cherished stories of courage and compassion from his upbringing through his pastoring are examples for all history and humanity. Happy 90th Birthday, Father George!  
Patricia Stush

One of my fondest remembrances of Fr. George was on a trip we took to Israel in 2008. Up until that time, I viewed him as a very holy, spiritual, and loving person, but also like a saint on a pedestal. However, on this trip I had an interaction with him which showed him as very human and as vulnerable as the rest of us. We happened to be by ourselves near one of the old Roman Aqueducts. I had asked him for a blessing, which he did by placing his hands on my head. Then he asked me for a blessing - which surprised me - but opened my eyes to his humanness.

Trudy Smith



Dear Fr. George,

You are God's gift to us. We thank God for all you are to us. Your open heart, listening ear, a love that comforts us, your strong faith shows us to a life that seeks God's way.

Thank you for your good works and for sharing His grace with us in so many ways. God's choicest blessings to you on your birthday and always!

Love and peace be with you,

Rob and May Pang

You are....



SPIRITUAL	PREACHER
PASTOR	FAITHFUL
FORGIVING	LOVING
SHEPHERD	LEADER
FRIEND	MENTOR
TEACHER	BLESSING
DEDICATED	KIND
FILM PRODUCER	
PRIEST	ORATORIAN
UNDERSTANDING	WISE
COUNSELOR	SERVANT
BOSS	INSPIRING
PATIENCE	FATHER
COMFORTER	SHEPHERD
THOUGHTFULNESS	CARING

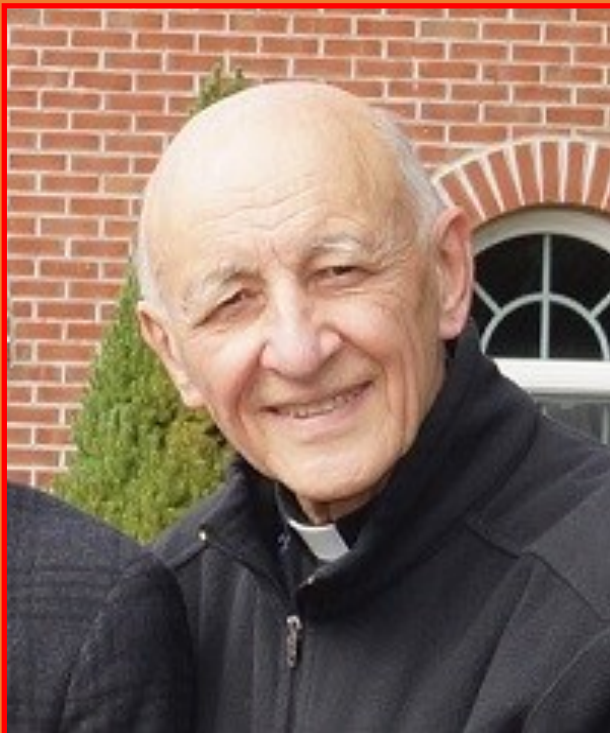




FATHER GEORGE,  
FROM DEACON LUKE:

For me, Fr George embodies what is said in  
Isaiah 66:2B-

“This is the one I esteem: he who is  
humble and contrite in spirit, and  
trembles at my word. “



Happy 90th Birthday, Fr George!

It is very difficult to find the words to  
adequately convey the impact Fr George has  
had on myself and Deacon Luke! How did  
we merit such a profound blessing?

Fr George has influenced countless  
people over his long, fruitful, life. He fills  
hearts with the light of Christ, the joy of the  
Gospel, affection of Jesus, the love and  
mercy of God the Father and humor of the  
Holy Spirit! His homilies linger long in  
memory.

My first experience of being anointed at one  
of Fr George's healing Masses broke open  
my heart.

With grace and humility, Fr George  
provides each of us with a living example of  
how to truly love others as God loves them.

Thank you Fr George. Abundant blessings to  
you on your birthday and always.

With so much love, Nancy Conroy

He's been all around the world and he has been a servant to many. When a family member of mine was going through a very difficult time, brother and Father George was there to help. Simple words, his presence, confidence and intellect were extremely reassuring.

Without him, where would our 4 Churches be? I am sure he comforted many people from great distress. He has helped countless to prepare to meet their Creator.

Thank you, Father George for bringing Christ's love and your brother priests to our community.

Keep praying. Tom Fabri



Dear Father George,

Here's what I wrote about you in our anniversary journal in 2002. *"Hope...the word of the pious priest who seems to have been sent to us...Sacred Heart just for us, will stay with us all year-don't think so much and have peace in your heart."*

What a blessing that you have been part of our lives since then. Whether you are embracing us in one of your special hugs or speaking to either one-on-one or from the pulpit, you have the gift of knowing what is in our hearts and saying what we need to hear. You have guided our lives in ways you can never know and we thank you for that. Renewing our wedding vows for our 25th anniversary will always be a special memory and I did share your words about Matt being too far away! May all of God's blessings be yours as you celebrate your 90th birthday. With our love and appreciation for the gift you are to us!

The Zebiak Family (Steve, Karen and Matt)

From Peter and Mary-Anne Partridge

RE: Father George Torok

There have been many wonderful moments spent with Fr George. The most memorable for me was in Capernaum, Israel, next to the Sea of Galilee. We were at the house owned by St Peter's Mother-in-law. We were wandering around the site and trying to understand its proximity to an ancient synagogue. At the time, I was fascinated with the "temple period" of early Christianity and studying the well-preserved ruins. Fr George called me over and said, "Peter, Peter! Come over here!" Earlier he had told us that he had been to the Holy Land so many times and had assisted in so many archeological excavations that he was given an Honorary Tourist Guide License. He pointed to a window near a wall close to a corner of the ruin we were studying and said, "Peter, do you see that corner there, this space that is formed on the edge near that wall?" I looked intently through the tumbled stones of a millennium. "Yes, I see it." "That was Jesus' bedroom." We are so fortunate to have such a priest serving us who invites us always to be closer to the Lord.

Another time at his animation center he invited me to bring in the New Year singing Worship and Praise songs. At the time I was playing for healing Masses and prayer meetings. We dutifully brought in the New Year in the best manner that our creativity could imagine.

Mary-Anne has two favorite moments from our Holy Land trip. Fr George said Mass in a cave in the Garden of Olives where Jesus used to pray with his Apostles! What a sacred space! Proof that it had been revered for centuries were the ancient frescoes on the inside top of the cave. Another special moment was when we went to the Jordan River. It was a dark, rainy day until Fr George started blessing us with the River Jordan water. At that moment the sun suddenly came out and was dazzlingly bright the whole time!



Wishing you a very  
blessed and enjoyable  
birthday.  
Farther George.  
God Bless  
Brian Dwyer



Dear Father George, have a very happy and healthy Birthday and many more. When I attend mass at St. John's I am greeted by you with a warm hug and a friendly greeting. Your concern regarding my health problems are well appreciated and very thoughtful of you. You are a mentor, a guide and you touch the lives of so many, not least to mention mine. Each of your sermons speak to me and have such a profound impact on me. May God continue to watch over you with love, today and each day to come.

Tony Rossano

Happy Birthday to a very special priest who brought so much love and devotion to our parish. Many fond memories but the very best and never to be forgotten was visiting the Holy Sights in the Holy Lands with you and walking the same paths Jesus walked two thousand years ago.

God Bless you Father George. And thank you.  
Harry and Josephine Weber

Prior to Father George's arrival, St. Ann's parishioners had no knowledge of Oratorians.

Father George's vision has become a spiritual blessing. His wisdom and spirituality continues to deliver a tremendous impact on our own spirituality and prayer. Father George always begins Mass with a question that engages the congregation:

"Are you all enjoying the weather," or  
"Did you have any trouble with icy roads today."

Father George in his homilies interjects his lifetime experiences which not only commands your attention but is a complete reference to the gospel. His delivery is captivating.

Happy Birthday Father George.  
Elissa & Bill Dailey

Dear Father George,

Happy , Happy Birthday! You are so special. One Sunday after Mass we asked you to bless our new wedding rings and you blessed the rings & then us, in your gentle way. Another Sunday I came to Mass very upset with a new problem and your homily touched my heart and helped me handle my problem. It was 8/13/2017 and you said:

1. Take time and pray before making a decision
2. God doesn't come to destroy. He comes in a quiet way.
3. Persevere when asking God for something, never give up!

Your message was so important to me that I came home and wrote it in my book. Thank you for always inspiring us with your gentle, thoughtful and God-centered advice.

Many birthday blessings. Marianne Duggan

My favorite recollection is a conversation I had with Fr George one day when he told me that his sister, who is advanced in age, was complaining about why is she still here at this age??!

Fr George said that he replied to her, "Don't worry, God has an expiration date for all of us!"

LOL Marie Olivier

Thank you so much Father George for all you do to help us feel and see the love of God. Your humility inspires us .

Your gentleness is a path to follow. Your homilies lift and guide us. Whether it is asking all of us to try to be "little saints" for the rest of Holy Week, or patiently teaching us how to empty ourselves, so we can listen to God's gentle and quiet voice, we are so grateful for your example, and your desire for each one of us to truly know, love and listen to our incredibly loving God.

Wishing you the very happiest of birthdays, with my admiration, gratefulness and love, Patrick Duggan

Happy 90th Birthday!!! An amazing feat to serve the Lord all these years and still active at 90. God Bless You! -Joann Merla

Dear Father George,

Congratulations on your 90th Birthday! My husband Al and I want to thank you for the many wonderful homilies we feel privileged to have heard. Your manner, style and most of all your faith and love in God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit shine through every homily. We both believe that you are truly blessed and are a living saint!

One such homily really touched me and strengthened by belief in the Holy Spirit. In this homily you mentioned that we should pray to the Holy Spirit by asking the Spirit to "come to me." I now regularly include the Holy Spirit in my prayers-particularly when things seem difficult and I need the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to help me make decisions or find the right words.

My husband and I feel blessed to know you and to have you at St Paul/St Ann Parish.

Happy Birthday! May God continue to bless you!

Sincerely,

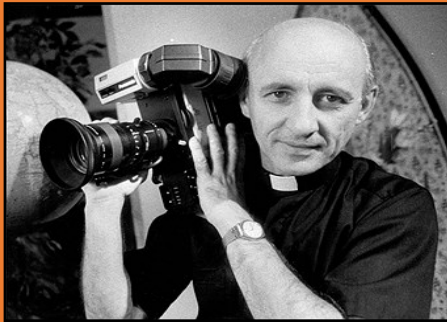
Paula (and Al) Acunto





<sup>31</sup> Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup> They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. <sup>33</sup> He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup> Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” <sup>35</sup> And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. <sup>36</sup> ” -Mark 7:31-36





In Aramaic, the word Hallel means “praise” and forms the joyful acclamation of praise to Yahweh, “Hallelu-Yah,” “Alleluia.”

It also refers to the Hallel Psalm (Psalms 113 through 118). Lord Jesus concluded the Last Supper by singing the Hallel Psalm with his closest friends.

Hallel Institute is the legal name of the not-for-profit, tax-exempt corporation registered in New York State in 1974.

Hallel is also a “private association of the faithful” in the Catholic Church. Its members share the gift of community friendship and contribute to the evangelization of the world through means of social communications.

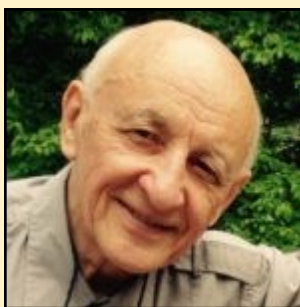
Hallel brings together people representing the diversity and richness of the people of God. Their responsibilities are at times different, yet they have equal opportunity to share in Hallel life and mission.

Although originally founded as a private association of the Roman Catholic Church, Hallel seeks to establish the bonds of friendship with other Christian Churches and other religions.

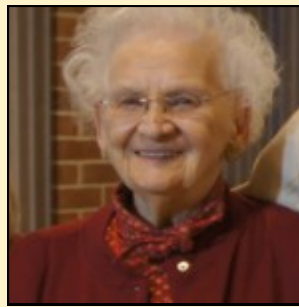
We believe that there is no greater love than to lay down our lives for each other just as Jesus offered up his life for us. In Hallel “love to the end” is a real and ultimate challenge to live a service-oriented existence.

We venerate and love the glorious Mother of our Lord under the title of “Mother of Divine Tenderness” (“Eleousa”). We ask her to draw us into her own unique, intimate union with Jesus.

**MISSION:** To use media in the service of Spirituality and Faith. *“Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation.” -Mark 16:45*



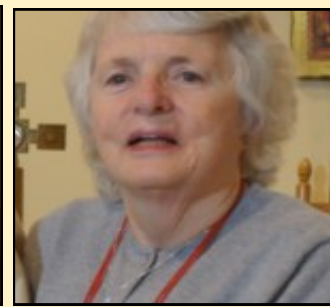
Fr George Torok, C.O.  
President-Founder



Mary T. Grena  
Treasurer and  
First Vice President



Anita Schultz  
Vice President-  
Promotion



Marion Saya  
Secretary



Frank Keffas  
Director of Engineering



Fr. Jean Paul Ruriho



L-R: Martina Collins, Marion Saia, Mariska Grena,  
Anita Schultz

## HISTORY:

Hallel was born from the persecution of the Church in Slovakia. In 1950 its founder, Fr. George Torok, crossed the river Morava, leaving behind homeland, losing every material possession in the waters of that river and reaching the other shore with a quest for freedom.

For many years he was involved in the biblical, catechetical and liturgical movements that prepared the events of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council.

He was privileged to have had an active part in the work of Vatican II, an unforgettable and most formative experience of life. The love for that Council is noticeable in everything we say and do in Hallel.

Since 1976, as a film and video production company, Hallel crews set out on endless journeys around the world to see and portray the faceless poor and oppressed in all the continents of our world. They will always remember their awesome plea for justice and human dignity.

We were associated with the work of missionaries around the world. Since we do not claim an exclusive identity, we have adapted and felt at home even in the most remote jungles of this world.

As citizens of the world, we are inspired by friendship as a universal form of human relationship. Since the very beginning, we were graced by the Lord's own friendship and we share it with all peoples.

Our ancestors were evangelized by Saints Cyril and Methodius. Even to the present time, our people are rooted in the Christian traditions of the West as well as of the East. We celebrate the divine mysteries in the rite of the Roman Catholic Church as well as in the rite of the Oriental Catholic Churches. We envision a church that spans from East to West in making a perfect offering to the Father.



# ***The Gift of Vocations***



## ***New York Oratory of Saint Philip Neri***

The New York Oratory of St. Philip Neri is a community of laypeople and priests. The intent of the community is **to evangelize and, for such purpose, to use the means of social communications**. The work in social communication is very characteristic of the mission of the New York Oratory.

The community owns a television production studio, supplies video programs to broadcasting entities, and streams audiovisuals religious contents.

The hallmark of this community is the spirit of friendship. We treasure the gifts of the Holy Spirit and accommodate the different spiritual lifestyles. We enjoy gatherings and celebrations. On the First Friday of the month, we celebrate the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Every Thursday we celebrate Seder, a joyful remembrance of the Last Supper, and an invitation to friendship with the Lord.

The Oratorian community serves three parishes: **Our Lady of the Sacred Heart** in Tappan, **Saint Paul and Saint Ann** in Congers and Nyack and **Saint John the Baptist** in Piermont. Spiritual care is offered to the sick in Nyack Hospital. We organize annual tours/pilgrimages. We appreciate the volunteer contributions to the apostolic work of our community. Our vocation is an invitation to Jesus' friendship.

# *New York Oratory of Saint Philip Neri*



(From left to right) Fr Tom, Fr. Peter, Fr. Joseph, Fr. Jean Paul, Fr. Francis, Fr. George, Fr. Roman, Fr. Vladimir, Fr. Ravi, Fr. Martin, Fr. Raj

***“Dearest Jesus, please grant me the grace to know my true vocation. In baptism, I was signed in your name and have grown to share in the work of bringing the father’s love to our world. I respond to the special life’s work to which you are calling me. I ask that many will hear the particular call to serve in the church as a priest, religious, and laypeople. Whatever you ask of me, may I freely, courageously and lovingly fulfill. Amen”***

## Fr George Torok, C.O.-Provost Emeritus

*"All is grace. "—St Philip Neri*

No one in my family would have believed that I could become a priest. And since I became a priest outside of my native country, Slovakia, after having escaped imprisonments and concentration camps in Communist Czechoslovakia, my family was without any news about me until I came to the United States in 1968.

I cannot say that I received at any time a priestly call. There have never been calls, revelations, special graces, or events that are sometimes connected with a call to the priesthood. I like to think that before my mother conceived me in her womb I was set aside by the grace of God to be a priest. As far as I can go back in my memory, I always sensed that I would be a priest and that I could be nothing else but a priest.

I grew up under Communist oppression and always desired to live in a country with democratic freedoms. My dramatic escape from Slovakia in 1950, under Stalin, truly represented an Exodus from slavery to freedom, and I was willing to pay the price in perils and suffering in exchange for freedom.

I became a priest in Italy and since I had expertise in film production, I was allowed to pledge my life to working in media. The Lord allowed me to travel extensively around the world, producing film and television documentaries depicting the conditions of the poor, exiles, marginalized and underprivileged. Since I settled in the United States I reported on the workings of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council. I was privileged to be part of that most important event in the recent history of the Church.

Because I was separated for more than 50 years from my own bishop in Slovakia, I always desired to belong to a family of priests approved and blessed by the Church. In 1998 I began the formation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in New York. This undertaking received a special blessing from Edward Cardinal Egan and from the Holy Father Benedict XVI. In 2007 we were established as a Pontifical Community of St. Philip Neri in New York.

Before I made the choice of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, I carefully examined the alternatives offered to priests by the church and realized that the Oratory was the most joyful, liberating, and family-oriented institution that I could find in the Church.

In a few years the Lord has blessed our Oratory. Today it has eleven priests, with activities in parishes, media, hospital, healing ministries and hopefully more to come. Please pray that the Lord may send workers into His vineyard, into our Oratory, for the glory of God and salvation of many.



***“O Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I would like to be filled with love for You; keep me closely united with You, may my heart be near to Yours. I want to be to You like the apostle John. O Mary of the Rosary, keep me recollected when I say these prayers of yours; bind me forever, with your rosary, to Jesus of the Blessed Sacrament. Blessed be Jesus, my love.”***

**-- Pope John XXIII**



***Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.***

***He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.***

*Letter to the Hebrews 5:1-4*

## Fr Vladimir Chripko, C.O.-Provost

*“The Priesthood of Jesus Christ is the joy of my life!”*

I was born in Slovakia, the oldest of four children. I have two younger sisters and one brother. I first experienced my vocation to the priesthood in high school ... my pastor asked me if I was thinking of becoming a priest. At that time, enrollments in the seminary were very limited due to the Communist regime's persecution of the Church in our country.

From the age of three, I served as an altar server and was at church almost every day to serve at 6 am and evening Masses. We practiced our faith to witness our faith in a hostile Communist environment. We were an underground church. Catholics met in people's homes for prayers and mutual support. We could not leave the meeting together at the same time. We had to leave one-by-one to avoid notice. When I was in high school, I was repeatedly called to the police station after Sunday Mass for questioning about my being an altar server. After high school, I was unable to apply for higher education due to my service as an altar server; the Communist party controlled education. I served the mandatory two years military service.

Communism fell in 1989. In 1990, I entered the theological seminary and was ordained a priest on June 17, 1995. I never thought of going to America. My mother came to work in America in 1994 to earn some extra money that was used for the family and also to pay for the expenses of my first Mass celebration. After ordination, I worked as a dean of studies and discipline at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in the Archdiocese of Kosice. My sister moved to America, and I loved to visit her. I came to America several times and enjoyed getting to know this country better.

I had the opportunity to visit the Slovak communities in America and learned that they desperately needed Slovak priests ... I believed in my heart that God was calling me to serve them. I spoke with my bishop, and he allowed me to stay in America and to study English, which I did at BOCES from November 1999 to February 2000. On one of my visits I heard about Fr. George Torok, who at that time was serving the Slovak community in Clifton, NJ. I went there to attend Mass and to have the opportunity to meet Fr. George. It was a providential meeting, prepared, I believe, by the Holy Spirit. In 2002, I began working with Fr. George and served as a priest to many communities, including the Slovak parish of St. Michael in Trenton, St. Cyril and Methodius in Clifton, the Dominican Sisters' communities in Sparkill and Blauvelt, Holy Cross in Sleepy Hollow, and also, as a Catholic chaplain, at Rockland Psychiatric Hospital. I won a green card through the lottery and obtained citizenship five years later.

I realized after meeting with Fr. George that I had discovered, through the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, how I could fulfill my own way to be a priest. The Oratory of St. Philip Neri is not a religious order but a community of apostolic life. It adopts a more democratic governance. The Oratory is to be first of all a community of mutual support and love. The spirit of joy of St. Philip Neri animates our every action and prayer. Every Wednesday night we gather for a community dinner, each taking our turn to cook for the others (It's fun!). On Thursday nights we celebrate our Christian Seder, a beautiful tradition instituted by Fr. George. Continued...

***Fr Vladimir Chripko, C.O. continued:***

Fr. George began the process of establishing an Oratory in 1995. I was among the four priests who co-founded the New York Congregation Oratory. On the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, Pope Benedict XVI issued the decree of our foundation. On August 15, 2007, the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we officially received the papal documents authorizing us to be the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in New York.

**My hobbies?** I love to grill. I love to cook, and every Oratorian takes turns cooking for our community. I used to play hockey. Now I love to walk around Rockland or Congers Lake; sometimes it is difficult to find the time for such pleasure, but I try.

**What is my hope for the parishes cared for by the Oratory?** My hope is that we can do something beautiful for God together and also for all of us to enjoy one day the eternal life in heaven. What is most important is that we be united in love and joy, work together as friends and family. Nothing is more important than a family that works and prays together and where love reigns. We work for the glory of God, and that will bring us together. The people of God in St. Paul and St. Ann's church are my joy!

**Inspiring quotes?** All is Grace – St. Philip Neri – Be good if you can. There are people in your life whom you unknowingly inspire simply by being you. If being a Christian were illegal, would there be enough evidence to put you in jail? Enjoy Life, It has an expiration date. Be patient. God isn't finished with me yet.





## Fr Roman Palecko, C.O.

***“My great joy as a priest is to see the Sacredness of Sundays  
observed at Mass.”***

I grew up in a large city in Slovakia in a family of 13 children; I have six brothers and six sisters. Nine of my siblings still live in that city and so does my mom. My dad passed away seven years ago. In the second grade, I began my very happy experience as an altar server at the Cathedral in my city, where I served until I entered the seminary two years after the fall of Communism. Five boys in my family served in the Cathedral as altar servers. There was a rectory connected to the Cathedral, and we had a constant rotation of young priests who were a very good influence on all the altar servers. Over 12 years I met so many young, wonderful priests! We played football with them and worked side-by-side with them, helping in the rectory, the garden, even washing the cars. We listened to many homilies, and some of their preaching had a strong influence on me personally. Sometimes it was their work with families that was an inspiration.

In those years it was very difficult to practice our Catholic faith due to Communism. My father was called in for questioning many times about our family being in Church. It made him angry. He never joined the Communist party.

***Was it difficult to leave your family and home country to live in America?*** Personally, it was exciting to think of coming to America to serve as a priest ... I had curiosity and wonder about what it would be like. I had been to America before entering the Oratory when I came for five summers on vacation, though being on vacation somewhere is very different from living and working in that place. In preparation to work here, I studied English every day at BOCES in Nyack, never knowing I would serve at St. Ann's parish one day. I used to come to St. Ann's to pray but did not know anyone. I believe it was God's providence! I've learned in life that no matter how many plans you make...none will ever be as perfect as God's plan for you.

***What gives you joy about your vocation as a priest?*** In my priestly ministry, what I really love and enjoy so much is to see young families with children sitting together at Mass. It pleases my soul and it's what my own family did every Sunday. It reveals that parents understand Mass is good for their kids. Sunday is set aside for God and family ...it is “the Sacredness of Sundays in families.” I also love when someone makes a really good confession ...this is a great moment. Confession is a sacrament of God's mercy.

Continued...

***Fr Roman Palecko, C.O continued:***

*How did I come to the Oratorian community?* I started to come for vacations in 2006 to visit Fr .Vladimir and Fr. Martin, friends who were three years ahead of me in the seminary. This is how I met Fr. George. At that time, they were preparing to open the Oratory. I was here in August 2007 and was present when our bishop from Slovakia and Cardinal Egan came to Tappan for the establishment of the New York Oratory of St. Philip Neri. The Oratory is a community of brother priests who live and work together. They support each other spiritually, pray together, and provide understanding and good advice. It is healthy for priests to live in community with brothers who support them in their work as priests. The Oratorians live as a community in friendship.

*What is my hope for the parishes of the Oratory?* I would like for the parish of St. Paul-St. Ann to be the early, shining example of a healthy, merged parish in this area, to become the model of the future: two parish families becoming spiritually stronger together, growing in God's love and will for us. Merging is a model and the future within the Church....

*What are my hobbies?* I love swimming and to be by the ocean. I also love walking. Since having problems with my back, I use a Fitbit to track the number of steps when I go walking. When I was in high school I enjoyed walking two hours back home from school, sometimes.



# Fr Peter Budjos

## *"The Lord is My Shepherd"*

I was born in the regional newborn hospital in the city of Svidnik, Slovakia, but grew up in another city, Stropkov. I have three brothers and one sister (the youngest) and I am in the middle. My family was a very nice, good, Catholic family who went to Mass every Sunday due to the faith of my parents, especially, my mother. Our family prayed every night together (my mother never missed!). During Communism, it was not easy to practice Catholicism. The Communist Party told parents if they gave their children religious education, they would not allow them to go on to higher education, and their children would just be workers. My parents were committed to teaching us the faith so we expected to be workers, but all of us finished Universities in Slovakia. As a child I never served as an altar server. Many priests heard the inner calling to the priesthood when they were altar servers, but this was a later calling for me. I was in the military service for one year at a time when there was no conflict. We lived in the barracks and helped if there was a flood, etc.

This was the time I changed my meaning for my life. For the first time I was alone, without my parents and siblings. In the military you have to sign up to go to Mass. I remember the first time going to Mass without my family. I started thinking about my own spiritual life. In this year, in my heart, I began to feel maybe I should give my life as a sacrifice for God. After the military I worked for one year before going into seminary at age 21 (a bit old for formation at that time.) In the last year in seminary (pastoral year) and for the next three years as a priest, I enjoyed living and working with the homeless. There were one or two priests and three to five lay people living with 60 to 80 homeless people, including men, women, families, and the sick in an old, dilapidated, large rectory. We helped build the housing.

**How did I come to the Oratorian Community?** I knew Fr. Vladimir since I was student in seminary; he was Director of Discipline. He invited me to visit in 2002, my first time in America. I visited Fr. Vladimir three or four times in Tappan. On my visits I observed the community life of the Oratorians. This community attracted me to come to this country. As a diocesan priest, we rotated in different directions. In the Oratorian community, we are all diocesan priests who are friends; we work, pray, and have dinner together. We are ten priests who support each other, a very healthy family, like brothers.

**What gives me joy about my vocation as a priest?** I love my priesthood and give praise to God for everything I receive in my priesthood. Being a priest is a public ministry ... but with love always comes sacrifice. After the initial enthusiasm of becoming a priest, there is a sober realization that there is much to learn. As a priest for 16 years, I am always learning; every day I'm learning something new. I am really thankful to God for everything. I have joy ... and awareness of God's love. "The Lord is my shepherd" was the motto for my first Mass. The parable of the workers in the vineyard is my favorite. There is the worker who works all day and a worker who works for one hour. It is not easy to work in the vineyard, but the work is worthy. Working in God's vineyard gives me joy. It doesn't matter how long one is working in the vineyard — only that all people are in the vineyard — it is the Kingdom of Heaven.



***Fr Peter Budjos, continued:***

*Was there anyone in particular who influenced me to become a priest?* There were three seminarians in the military with me; at the time, studies were interrupted for military service. One of the seminarians was older and very special; a good man, passionate about his faith, and brave. We all attended Mass together and talked about spiritual things.

*What is my hope for the parishes cared for by the New York Oratory?* My hope is for the parish to grow in faith, be strong in cooperation, respect, identity, and love.

*What are my hobbies?* I like every kind of sport. I was a serious soccer player. I love running, cycling, hiking, swimming, skiing, traveling, and reading. I do not follow baseball or football but some parishioners asked me to pray for the Yankees!



***"He made them, the vicars of  
his love."***

***-St Ambrose***

## Fr Tom Kunnel, C.O.

*"That your joy may be complete."*

I was born in Kerala, the cradle of Christianity in India. St Thomas the Apostle came to this part of India and established the Church, which to this day is a vibrant community. I have 5 sisters and an elder brother who has settled in Germany. I lost my younger brother when he was 22 years of age. As I write this my mother has just turned 100!

Our family home was next to a large convent and the nuns were my teachers at the primary school. Though I was extremely mischievous as a kid, they took a special liking to me and trained me to be an altar server and attend daily Mass in the convent, where no outsider was allowed to enter. This was an early, positive influence in my life.

In India, various congregations run *Apostolic Schools*, which are modelled on the regular state curriculum of Education with a great emphasis on Scripture and Catholic Doctrine. The vocation promoters go from school-to-school inviting students to join the Apostolic Schools. I joined the Apostolic School run by the Salesians of Don Bosco at the age of 10, for a course of studies for 7 years which ended with the graduation at Pre-University level equivalent to the 12<sup>th</sup> Grade in the US. At that point, I decided to enter the Novitiate of the Salesians thus beginning a 10-year course of formation towards priest hood.

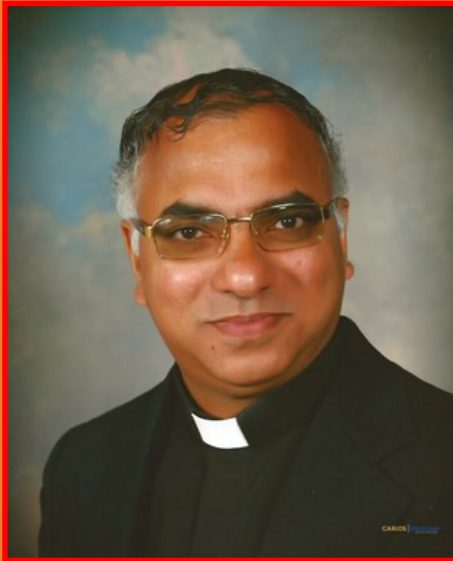
I lived and worked as a missionary priest in North East India among the tribal population for 15 years. When a call came asking for help in the field of youth ministry and communication, I volunteered for African Missions. I came to the US for training in Film Production at Hallel School of Communication in 2001. After that, I spent 8 years establishing Media Production Centers in Africa. After the death of my father, the responsibility for the care of my mother fell on me. So, I left the Salesian Order and joined the Oratory knowing that my experience in Media Ministry would be strengthened and the charism of St. Philip Neri was familiar to me as Don Bosco took inspiration from St. Philip.

My vocation to the priesthood gives me great joy. I like to remind myself daily that I am a 'broken-healer' in the hands of God and he can use me as He wills. This is a privilege that I need to be grateful for constantly.

In our Oratory we all hope to create the atmosphere of belonging to a family and to be close to the parish community by being available, approachable, and friendly.

In my personal time I enjoy designing Film studios and working on music and media production.





## Bosco Eastern Africa Multimedia Services - BEAMS

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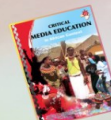
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FILM & VIDEO PRODUCTION



MEDIA EDUCATION



ALL DONE IN DIGITAL FUTURISTIC STUDIOS



We also offer Media Education at our Institution and also at your Centre





## Fr Frantisek Conka, C.O.

***"...And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them."*** (1 Jn 4, 14-16)

I was born in 1974 in Vranov and Toplou, Communist Czechoslovakia at the time. I spent most of my childhood in the small village of Zalobin, near Domasa Reservoir, which is in eastern Slovakia, an independent country and member of the European Union now. My father, Frantisek, who recently passed away, was a plumber and my mom, Maria, worked as a teacher. We were not allowed by the regime to go to church nor to receive the sacraments. I have two siblings, Kristina and Peter, both of them happily married and living in Slovakia.

Although I used to be an altar server as a kid, I never imagined I would become a priest one day, much less stationed in the United States of America. It all began around the time when I was graduating from the high school as an engineer in the beautiful city of Presov, along with working as a bartender, part-time, during summers. Under unusual circumstances, I felt the need to change my life and become a better man. I had two options; either to continue my studies at the University of engineering or attending the University of theology to become a priest. In other words, either build bridges between



two river banks or to between people and God .

I heard about the Oratorians and Saint Philip Neri when I arrived in the United States in 2006 to study English language and met Fr. George Torok. He explained to me what it meant to live out one's priestly life in the community of the Oratory. It reminded me of old times in Slovakia where I shared moments of joy or sorrow with my four best friends and 'colleagues,' priests, Fr. Roman, Fr. Dusan and Fr. Marko. Once a week, when we had a day off, we would get together to pray, say a Mass or just relax, being out there for each other as brothers. However, it was not officially endorsed by the Vatican unlike now in Tappan, New York.

There is this Slovak saying that goes "JOY MULTIPLIES BY SHARING IT WITH OTHERS" + "True source of joy is our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament" I particularly enjoy my priesthood being shared with that of my brother priests.

I come from the Saint Francis of Assisi parish. My parents gave me the name in his honor. When I attended high school, the dorms I was staying in were next door to the Saint Francis of Assisi church in what was formerly a Franciscan monastery. So, Saint Francis of Assisi has always been watching over me. My maternal grandmother, Helena, had been a very important person in my life and so were my parents, as far as deciding for a vocation to the priesthood was concerned.

First and foremost, my hope for the Oratorian priests is to serve and love the people of God in these parishes. Also, to be open to reach out in ministry even farther. Last, but not least, to implement St. Philip Neri Healing ministry, Hallel, and social media for evangelization wherever our Lord sends us.

My hobbies? Wow! I've got quite a few, actually... I like to ride a bicycle, swim, go for a walk, play pick-up basketball, travel around the world, read books, listen to music (especially Depeche Mode, my favorite band... ha ha). Above all, however, I enjoy spending time with my friends and family.



## Fr Jean Paul Ruriho

*"All is grace."-St Philip Neri*

Fr Jean Paul currently works as assistant to Fr George Torok in evangelization, technical production of film, recording, social media, printed materials and books through the ministry of Hallel-Spirit MindSpring. In 2017, Fr Jean-Paul worked in a refugee camp in Uganda helping South Sudanese refugees get access to clean water and sanitation and providing education and spiritual care. He returned to the Oratorian community and was welcomed back to his ministry with the New York Oratory. In addition, Fr Jean-Paul is minister for the French Haitian Community and serves in counseling capacity in Rockland Psychiatric Center.



## Fr Ravi Dasari

***“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” -John 10:10***

I was born in India. I'm the oldest in the family and have a brother and a sister. Both of my parents came from large families; my Mom was one of 9 children and my Dad was one of 7. My paternal grandparents stayed with us in our early lives. My grandmother, a convert to Catholicism, strongly influenced my journey of faith because of her encouragement to go to daily Mass and say a daily rosary. We come from a farming family, my Mom was a housewife. Both of my parents completed high school and could read and write; this was a very good achievement in our village. Our parish did not have a Catholic school and there were no Catholic schools within a 120-mile radius. Education was very important to my parents. They decided to send me to a Jesuit boarding school when I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and sent my sister to study with nuns when she was in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Our other brother stayed home because my parents needed someone to love! Most of my schooling was with the Jesuits. The order was very generous to farming families in my country who could not pay tuition. I admired the kindness of the Jesuits. During that time, I learned about St Francis Xavier, who had traveled to India. The story of his life was very instrumental in my faith. As students, we went to a Jesuit camp one year and it was there I saw the movie, *Mission* (with Jeremy Irons and Robert Deniro.) The film opened my heart to vocation to the priesthood. Another strong influence was the life of St Francis of Assisi. While in seminary, a biography of the life of St Francis was our dinner reading one year. I was with the Jesuits for 5 years but then left.

I had my challenges in responding to the call to the priesthood. At times, I felt God was putting blocks in my path and maybe didn't want me. Then, God would open a door or window again! After a few challenges, I was ordained a priest. My first assignment was as principal of a high school. This paved my path of growth in compassion and kindness. When I became principal, it brought back to me the financial struggles I went through. I was able to be compassionate toward the students who also had financial difficulty and whose parents did not have money for their education.

Eventually, this led me to pursue pastoral ministry abroad and I came to the United States in 2009. I served for about 5 years in the southwest and then came to New York in 2015 to serve at St Aedan's in Pearl River. While at St Aedan's, I became attracted to the spirituality of St Philip Neri. It was the spirit of *joyfulness* that drew me to the Oratory of St Philip Neri in Tappan.

My journey with the Oratorians is about spreading that joy through various ministries. In my own experience as a priest, I recognize the humanity in people. For me, this humanness is a constant reminder of the challenges, temptations and sinfulness in life, as well as the holiness and deep sense of spirituality. When I was young, members of the clergy, religious and nuns were elevated to a pedestal. I am no great saint. We all have our demons in life. There are great moments, great days, but also difficulties. I like the humanness of my priesthood, though there are challenges of being a priest due to structures of the lifestyle. Continued-



***Fr Ravi Dasari continued:***

My education has greatly helped me in my ministry. I have 3 bachelor's degrees, philosophy, education and sociology and I also pursued theological studies. I have a Master's degree in Public Administration and completed a post-master's degree in Personal Public Management. Currently, I am working on a master's degree in marriage and family therapy through Seton Hall. I am very interested in Bereavement therapy, as well with the focus on healing, celebration and gratitude.

Through my homilies I feel I am able to pursue the path to holiness. My message is always of joy and hope. I love to lead small pilgrimages and trips and visit churches and cathedrals, where I get to know people personally and listen to their stories and faith. This enriches my priesthood. I am currently involved with a monthly ministry called, "The Daughters of St Ann." The group has about 80 women, widowed or single and never married. Originally, the group was for widows and was called, "The Voice of Ruth." In my ministry as hospital chaplain, I have found so much comfort in being with the sick and dying. It has humbled me in many ways to be present at that time in their lives and I try to share with them the spirituality of dying with dignity. In my role, I also have an opportunity to work with United Hospice of Rockland and offer spiritual and sacramental support.

One other thing for me...in my heart I feel every believer has the opportunity in life to become a reflection of God. In the sacramental celebration of a wedding or funeral, I try to bring meaning and dignity to the faith of people and the community. As Oratorians, we communicate a sense of 'personal touch' through all the ministries that we do.

In my free time I like to play golf, go for a walk, bike ride or swim. I do these things in my personal life to relax. It is important to practice self-care and avoid feeling drained in a busy life. I also enjoy watching some shows on Netflix. These things help to remind me I am human!

My favorite scripture quote is John 10:10. I also love two parables, the prodigal son and the woman caught in adultery. I try to center my ministry around these parables. In the lowest moments in life, it is important to recognize the strength and power of forgiveness. I remind people all the time that if God chose me to serve Him, then God has time for each of us.



## Fr Joseph Ravi Kumar

***“You are precious to me, for I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,  
“plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a  
future.” (Jeremiah 29:11.)***

**Whatever God plans, is what I want for me.**

I was born in Ravipadu, a village in South India, and attended Catholic School from nursery to 10<sup>th</sup> grade in our Church premises. In the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I received my First Communion and in 8<sup>th</sup> grade the sacrament of Confirmation. After 10<sup>th</sup> grade from my school Catholic students who are pursuing to be ordained Priests went to 2 different vocation camps; diocesan camp (6 days) and religious camp (15 days,) during which vocation promoters (PRIESTS) from various congregations came to us to explain their charism and way of life. In 1995, I entered diocesan seminary and began 12 years of formation where I studied Spirituality, philosophy, Theology, in secular studies B.A. in political science, Specialty in English, and B.Ed. in teaching. As a part of my training, we were under Salesian formation for four years. Prior to this I was in seminary for three years. That time I was not completely sure in my heart that I was called to be PRIEST. But during formation period, I became serious about my vocation to the priesthood...I was 19 years old. In my journey with Salesians their charism spirituality motivated and molded me to be a complete servant of God. Salesian Spirituality is characterized by Gospel based virtues of humility, concern for downtrodden and liberty of spirit. Salesian's support and assist poor youth and their families. It is through both educational and vocational schools, social and work force development programmes. It helps youth to break the cycle of poverty and lead productive and happy life. It's the BASE for what I am today.

When, in the course of our philosophy and Theology, we were sent out for ministry in nearby parishes where I helped Mother Theresa's sisters caring for the poor, giving shaves, and trimming nails for the homeless men, teaching value and moral education classes in nearby Catholic school. I was ordained a priest on Feb 18, 2007 and served two years as in charge of a boys boarding, a teacher in boys' high school and as assistant priest in parishes and then as pastor 4years. In 2013, came to USA to serve in the diocese of Gallup, New Mexico. Where I am friends with Fr. Ravikiran. In 2015 August my brother Fr Raj came to work in the Oratorian community of St Philip Neri in Tappan, NY. I traveled to New York City in September 2015 to visit my brother Raj, Ravikiran and to see Pope Francis. Where I had an opportunity to see Holy Father in St Patrick's Cathedral prayed Vespers with him. I stayed with Oratorian community for about two months and had wonderful experience with all the Oratorian priests. This was a beautiful experience in my life. I fell in love with them. With the recommendation and encouragement of Fr. Ravi Dasari I showed my interest to come here. Fr George welcomed me, saying your brother is with us "You too can come here, we have a place for you." I returned to New Mexico and found my heart was still with the Oratorian community...like Mother Theresa said, I had experienced a second calling, "the call within a call." In March 2016, I received all necessary permissions to come to the Oratorian community and continuing my Spiritual journey in the charism of St Philip Neri and the Oratorian way of life. I become energized in my priesthood through the Priests living in the Oratory community.

***Fr Joseph Ravi Kumar continued:***

In my vocation as a priest, I was always happy to help people and I like how priest can do so much to help people in need. If someone calls me, I love to serve, that if I get a call, I have this urge to immediately respond. My father was an example in my childhood; as parish council member he was always helpful to everyone in the Church and in our village too...and still is today. My father had 4 first cousins who were nuns and a blood brother who entered seminary, he became sick with leukemia and was never ordained. My grandmother was very strict when we were young and told us many times to pray. If we didn't go to Mass or misbehaved in Church, she would not give us coffee! Our family life and our schooling centered around the Church. As students growing up, we were strongly influenced by the priests around us. "I'm joyful as a servant of God. I try to spread that joy through my ministry and the sacraments to whomever I encounter."

I have three favorite scripture quotes that guide me in my vocation as a priest:

Two more favorite scripture quotes:

***"Whoever exalts himself, will be humbled and whoever humbles himself, will be exalted."*** (Matthew 23:12) I love this in my life.

***"And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be it to me according to your word.'"*** (Luke 1:38) I want to do the will of God.

My hobbies include reading scriptural books and commentaries, Vatican encyclicals, etc that are helpful in my homilies. I love to travel to new places, visit shrines and enjoy lonely, quiet places like the forest, for solitude. I like to spend my personal time in prayer and enjoy sitting quietly in a chapel. In my free time, I love cooking and trying new foods and I enjoy walking and biking.





# Fr Arogya Raju Narisetty

*"I can do all things in Christ."*

I was born in India, in the state of Andhra Pradesh, in the village of Ravipadu. We were 5 brothers but the oldest passed away when he was 5. I have 2 older brothers (including Fr Joseph) and one who is younger. Ours was a very pious Catholic family. It was not difficult to practice our Catholic faith. The village was a mostly Catholic village, though there were families of other faiths, too. My family was always in the Church before the 3<sup>rd</sup> church bell rang (when the Mass was to begin.) My brothers and I served as altar servers from around the age of 7-8 and each served for approximately 8 years. We were a hardworking family, the sons of a farmer. My mother was a homemaker. My brothers and I worked on the farm; cultivating, sowing, harvesting and threshing. My father and mother taught us to be hardworking and honest. I give tremendous credit and respect to my parents for teaching us good values. In my country I was a teacher of children and the principal of a junior college. I taught grade 11-12; in that school system the teacher of this level was called a "junior lecturer." I have a master's degree in social work.

## *What gives you joy about your vocation as a priest?*

I received the call to the priesthood at age 12-13, after the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. My vocation to the priesthood is purely inspired by God. There was not one priest or person, in particular, who influenced me. The call to the priesthood came from God before I was born. "I feel it, it is God's call. My priesthood itself gives me joy; being a priest, administering the sacraments, being able to minister to the needs of the people and preaching God's Word, as directed by the Spirit."

## *How did I come to know the Oratorian community?*

I came to know the Oratorians through Fr Ravi and Fr Joseph, who is my brother. Originally, I was ordained a Salesian in India.

## *What is my hope for the parishes cared for by the Oratory?*

My hope for the parish of St Paul and St Ann is to be a parish of faith centered around the Gospel and love of Jesus Christ, accepting and celebrating their differences and also giving a profound, solid foundation of the Catholic faith in the upbringing of their children, the young generation.

## *What are my hobbies?*

I read a lot of books and love sports. I love to play soccer, basketball and volleyball. In college I was captain of the cricket team. I go to the gym and like to stay fit. I also enjoy hiking but don't have much opportunity.



*"If we...all of us...accept the grace of Jesus Christ, he changes our hearts and from sinners makes us saints. To become holy we do not need to turn our eyes away and look somewhere else, or have as it were the face on a holy card! No, no, that is not necessary. To become saints only one thing is necessary: to accept the grace that the Father gives us in Jesus Christ. There, this grace changes our hearts. We continue to be sinners for we are weak, but with this grace which makes us feel that the Lord is good, that the Lord is merciful, that the Lord waits for us, that the Lord pardons us-this immense grace that changes our hearts."*

**-Pope Francis June 2013**



***When you know how much God is in love with you, then you can only live your life radiating that love.***

***-Saint Theresa of Calcutta***

## Brother Steven Neier

***I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)***

I was born in what was once, Mary Immaculate Hospital in Jamaica, Queens. I am the oldest of four children with two younger brothers and a younger sister. My mother and father worked hard, and still do, to support our family. I grew up in a two-bedroom house in a middle-class neighborhood in Queens with grandparents a few miles away, cousins in the next town over on a street where neighbors took the time to get to know each other. My education through sixth grade was in public school and from seventh grade onward, I was a Catholic school student. I graduated from St. Gregory the Great School (now Academy) in Bellerose and Archbishop Molloy High School. My family relocated to Rockland County when I was in college, shortly after the birth of my sister, and I stayed behind for the better part of two decades. I think the seedlings of my call to the priesthood sprouted in the seventh grade and I first became aware of the call when I was in high school. However, the seeds were actually planted long before that, as I can remember how meaningful my First Holy Communion was to me. On a Boy Scout camping trip/retreat for Catholic scouts in high school, the Holy Spirit placed me in the presence of the Vocations Director.

As a first-year college student, I attended college seminary but chose to leave. I continued my education, began my career and worked in a number of positions. Over several years, I visited my family in Rockland County right around the time the NY Oratory arrived at St. Paul and St. Ann. I came to St. Ann Church in Nyack during the Octave of Christmas for daily Mass around the noon hour. Advent and Christmas are *my favorite* liturgical seasons. It was important to me to fully celebrate the Christmas season of the Church, something that so easily gets lost. I can see in hindsight, that this had become like an annual mini-retreat, of sorts. It was not Christmas for me if I didn't make this retreat. The priesthood had been in the back of my mind and somewhere on my heart for many years. I think God used those mini-retreats at St Ann to expose me to the Oratorians and to call me back to the vocation of the priesthood. In those still, peace-filled, joyful days of the Church calendar, surrounded by the beauty of St. Ann Church and among the faithful people, God was still calling to me. It was as if God wanted to surprise me with a model of priesthood that I never could have imagined, and truly that is what God created through St. Philip Neri- a priesthood that is neither diocesan, nor religious order. Finally, after about four years of this (and right before the pandemic struck us,) I contacted Fr. George to learn more about Oratorians and, in particular, the New York Oratory of St. Philip Neri.

I chose the New York Oratory of St. Philip Neri because in it I find a community of joyful priests who love their priesthood, love our community and love the people whom they serve. We are a Clerical Society of Apostolic Life of Pontifical Right (how's that for a tongue-twister?) quite young as an Oratory (our Oratory just turned 14 years old.). Oratories are families and the particular gifts of each family member are celebrated and nurtured. When I was on those informal Christmas mini-retreats, I was inspired by the way the Oratorians celebrated the liturgy and preached as well as the gentle example of holiness that I saw in them. What I had once searched for was finally made known to me in a subtle and unexpected way. "C.O....What's that?" I asked myself as I walked out time and again with a St. Ann's bulletin. Some basic Google research provided me with early answers but meeting with Fr. George and having a period to discern within the community that has helped me to understand the significance of those letters after each of our Oratorians' names. Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri: a community of prayer, of love and of joy.



***Br Steven Neier continued:***

The things that give me joy in my vocation, are the people I encounter, those alongside whom I have the opportunity to serve and minister, and the faith that is shared by the witness of people both young and old.

Many people influenced my vocation. Some of these were fantastic priests in the Diocese of Brooklyn where I was raised, including: Fr. Kevin McBrien, Fr. Joseph Cunningham, Fr. Mike Tedone and Fr. Remo DiSalvatore, O.F.M. who was my pastor at another St. Ann's in Hoboken, NJ. Others were early classmates...now, Fr. Jean Delva, and others who came after me like Fr. Patrick Dorelus. My maternal grandmother was also a large influence on my life and her faith doubtless had a powerful impact on my vocation. Each parishioner whom I meet, speak with and spend time with-is influencing my vocation and I am grateful for this.



***My Jesus, if you  
want me, cut the  
fetters that keep  
me from you.***

***-St Philip Neri***

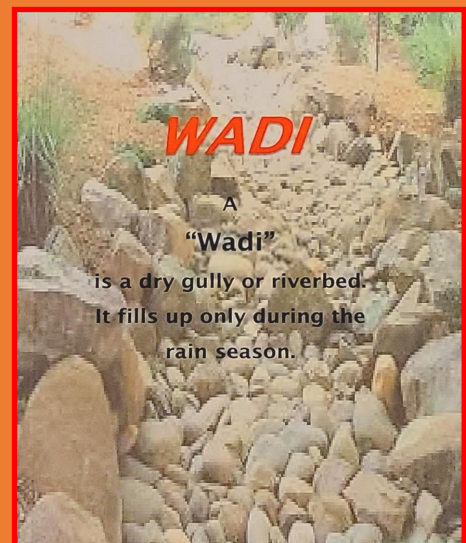
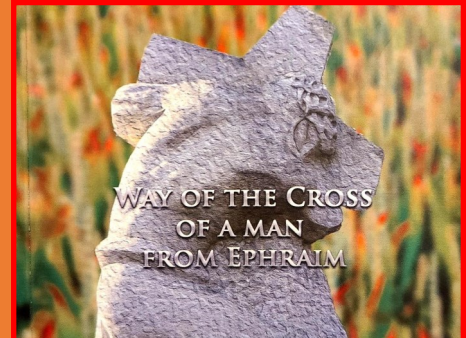
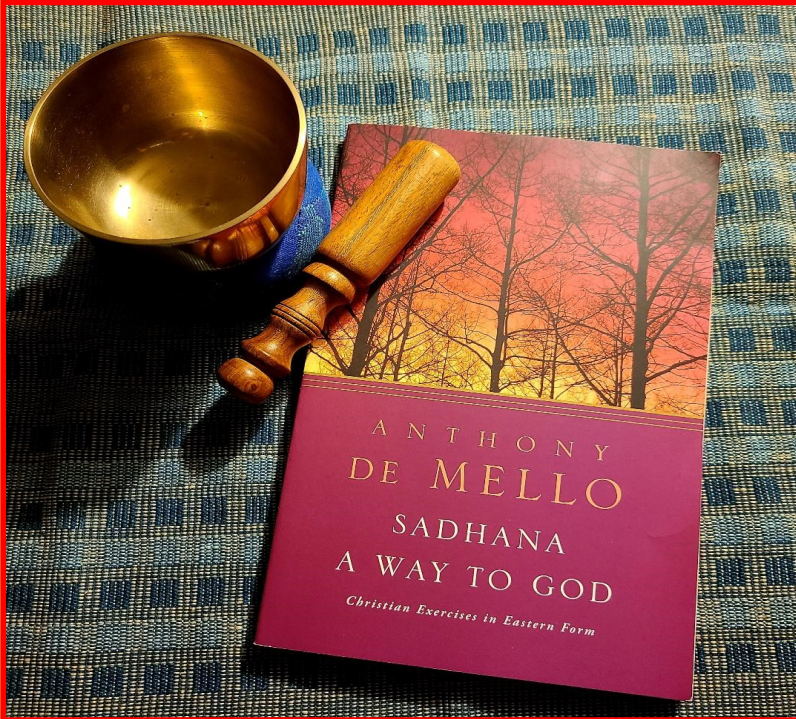
***A joyful heart is  
more easily made  
perfect than a  
downcast one.***

***-St Philip Neri***





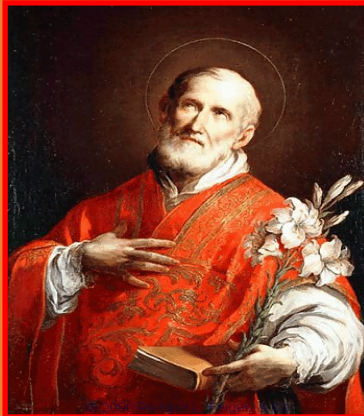
# ***Awareness...***



***Life is a banquet. And the tragedy is that most people are starving to death.***

— Anthony de Mello, Awareness





***Men are often carpenters of  
their own crosses.  
-St Philip Neri***

***The best way to prepare for  
death is to spend every day of  
life as though it were the last.  
-St Philip Neri***







### ***Prayer of thanks for the Gift of Priests***

***Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of our priests.***

***Through them, we experience your presence in the sacraments. Help our priests to be strong in their vocation. their souls on fire with love for your people.***

***Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and strength they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.***

***Inspire them with the vision of your Kingdom.***

***Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel.***

***Allow them to experience joy in their ministry.***

***Help them to become instruments of your divine grace.***

***We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as our Eternal Priest.***

***Amen.***

***(USCCB)***