‘Tis the Season to Share and Simplify Christmas!

“The great danger in today’s world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor.”

— Pope Francis

Friars attend training workshops

“An enjoyable and valuable morning!”...“The presenter’s humor made the discussion of difficult things easier.”...“This was a great workshop. [The presenter] offered open and honest reflections that really made us dive into the problems. I hope that we can have more stuff from him.”

These are not the kinds of comments one might expect from friars attending a mandatory workshop as part of their regular training regarding sexual misconduct. But Paul Ashton, the presenter at this most recent gathering of friars, elicited compliments from almost all who attended at either of the workshops recently held in Detroit and Milwaukee.

The province’s Office of Pastoral Care & Conciliation invited Paul Ashton to help the friars focus on healthy relationships. Ashton is a noted presenter for the VIRTUS training program, and his expertise has been utilized by the Conference of Major Superiors of Men at some of their regular gatherings and training sessions.

Ashton, a former Augustinian friar, holds a bachelor’s degree in religious studies; a master’s degree in clinical pastoral counseling, a doctor of ministry degree in counseling and marriage & family therapy, and a doctorate
in psychology. He presents workshops, courses, retreats and training seminars in dioceses across the U.S., and his work in the area of child sexual abuse prevention and healing includes training facilitators, developing and implementing curricula and retreat programs, counseling and support groups facilitation development. Ashton is the author of numerous articles and education support materials, and the book *Etched in Hope* (ACTA Publications).

Paul Ashton works with victim survivors/thrivers of sexual abuse in the area of recovery and healing. Additionally, he works with priests/religious offenders whose ministries have been restricted. He is the founder of “Open Hearts HIV/AIDS” ministry, and has supervised support and bereavement groups for over 20 years. He lives and has a private practice in Boston.

Ashton’s recent workshops with the friars focused primarily on the importance of healthy, intimate relationships for celibates, a concept that is often intimidating to priests and religious who have been formed in their vocation to be suspicious, if not frightened by intimacy. “Our celibacy/chastity often makes us afraid to touch and be touched,” Ashton told the friars. “The one’s who normally touch are usually the ones who get into trouble; and those who don’t touch should! We need to touch and be touched...There is nothing wrong with intimacy if it is holistic.”

“Do you know who you are? That was the main question posed to the friars during the three-hour workshop. And the presenter challenged many of the assumptions friars have regarding their religious life and ministry.

At one point, Ashton asked the friars if there were individuals in their lives who tell them that they love them! And if one doesn’t have a confere within the religious community who says that to them, hopefully one has one or more individual friends outside the community who communicate that. Too often, he contended, we don’t nurture ourselves; rather, we put
all our energy into ministering to others. The result, often times, is that the people of God may think we’re wonderful, but the reality is that we are filled with anxiety. Anxiety, he said, comes when one feels little about oneself and doesn’t know who he is. Priests and religious need healthy personal relationships. When that is not the reality, we can become dangerous.

“Talk to people and ask them who they think you are! Ask yourself who you are: Who are you as a sexual human being? Who are you when it comes to love and hate? Who are you in your familial life? What do you need everyday...and how are your needs met?”

It was a challenging morning for the friars, but his style and humor not only made those challenges bearable, it made them enjoyable.

**Friars gather to focus on fraternal collaboration**

Approximately fifty friars gathered recently at St. Martin de Porres in Milwaukee for an afternoon conference on fraternal collaboration, i.e., our arrangement to bring friars from other provinces to live and minister here. Featured presenter for this gathering was Henry Alva, provincial vicar of the Province of Central Canada. With a humorous, but challenging demeanor, Henry helped the friars understand the many subtle ways in which friars coming from foreign countries need to be welcomed and understood.

**Welcome...and Congratulations!**

♦️ Our brother, Madalai Muthu (Province of India), who has been living with the community in Chicago, has completed all of his documentation, and is now free to travel and reside in the USA. Muthu was ordained this past April, and will be residing and ministering at St. Lawrence Seminary in Mt. Calvary WI;

♦️ Our brother, Joshua Minden — recognized for his scholarship — was recently inducted into Phi Theta Kappa, a prestigious honor society serving two-year colleges around the world.
Lois Heinen, sister-in-law of Conrad Heinen; Thomas Wenkmman, brother-in-law of Larry Groeschel; and Mary Ratkowski (long-time employee of the province) died recently.

Linda Koenig, sister-in-law of Paul Koenig, recently had surgery for ovarian cancer.

Kay Tiritilli, mother of former friar Matthew Tiritilli, recently had a pacemaker implanted.

James Cotter, brother of Pius Cotter, recently suffered with pneumonia and serious lung infections; Ann Uehlein, sister of Pius Cotter, suffers with bronchitis.

My sister, Marianne Kaminski, thanks everyone for cards and prayers on the death of her husband, Joseph. She feels close to the Capuchins. Thank you for your prayers, concern and expressions of compassion.

— Wally Balduck

Thanks for all the prayers and words of encouragement on my recent hip replacement. There’s great therapy here in Kaukauna, and I’m improving rapidly. I appreciate your support.

— Gus Seubert

Advent Credo

It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss— This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life; It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction— This is true: I have come that they may have life and that abundantly. It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever— This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace. It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world— This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world. It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the church before we can be peacemakers— This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesies, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall have dreams. It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history— This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth. So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ— the life of the world.

From Testimony: This Word Made Flesh, by Daniel Berrigan, S.J., Orbis Books, 2004