



SOCIETY of OUR LADY  
of the Most Holy Trinity

# gray robes

SPRING 2021







*We look not to the things that are seen  
but to the things that are unseen; for the  
things that are seen are transient, but  
the things that are unseen are eternal.*

2 Cor 4:18

## GRAY ROBES FORMATION PROGRAM

### SACRED HEART MAJOR SEMINARY IN DETROIT, MI

Theology II: Br. David Snow (MO)

Theology I: Br. Joseph Spears (KY)

Philosophy II: Br. Andrew Rowedder (MD)

Philosophy I: Br. Robert Blair Burton (CO)

### PERMANENT BROTHERHOOD IN MISSION

#### Year IV

Br. Uriel López (Mexico) - Detroit, MI

#### Year I

Br. Adam Schmitzer (OH) - Detroit, MI

### NOVIATE IN CORPUS CHRISTI

Noah Burdett (PA)

Gregory Rice (PA)

### ASPIRANCY IN BELIZE

Matthew Esserman (MO),

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Dear Friends and Benefactors of SOLT,

Greetings to all in this joyful Easter Season! Jesus Christ's emergence from the tomb opened and unveiled a dimension of Christian hope that is truly otherworldly. It is a hope in the "silent statement"

of his resurrection that nothing is ever irrevocably lost, outside the scope of retrieval, or beyond redemption. Jesus permitted, even coaxed death to take him. He absorbed, swallowed, and subsequently annihilated the power of death, the first and most grave consequence of sin. Now, those who believe in him and participate in his divine life through baptism can lay claim to an inestimable hope, a hope that looks beyond the scope of human sight and perception to know with assurance that He cannot be overcome.

It is abundantly evident to all that we live in unique, even unprecedented times. The confluence of Covid-19, the ever-increasing impact of technology on culture, and the near dominance of "the dictatorship of relativism" demand of us that, more than ever, we must stand on the solid footing of Christian hope. We must be assured that it is our Father who is scripting history, vigilant over all his children, and who is providing for his faithful the grace to "look... to the things that are unseen."

Here in Detroit, the men in formation forge forward. It is impressive to see their resolve as they have slogged through these months, short on natural consolations and encouragements offered by the basic joys of life. For weeks, the happiness of shared time with classmates was exchanged for prescribed "screen time" for classwork. Yet, the SOLT brothers continue to find ways to be renewed, to connect with God's people, and to delight in one another's company. I would wager that it is the faithfulness of the Lord to these SOLT brothers and the brothers' generous response in dedication and prayer that make up the supernatural synergy and sustenance that has provided for their growth and inner joy.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the Gray Robes that offers a potpourri of what has made up our lives as we navigate these days in communion with the Lord.

God's blessings to you,

*Fr. Mark*



# Stories of Christ

*Br. Adam Schmitzer, SOLT*

1,436,300,000,000. Wow, that's a big number! Slices of bacon we ate in the house of formation last year? Nope, not even close. Number of years since the Cleveland Browns last made it to the NFL playoffs? No, that was actually just eighteen—long enough for sure but not quite 1.4 trillion. No, the glory of this digit belongs to the estimated number of pictures that were taken on devices last year, and according to some, it's projected to climb another 12% in 2021!

That's a lot of pictures and it's easy to understand why that number is so high: we love them. They make us laugh and remember where we've been, they bring us close in heart when we can't be together in person, and they can inspire us, even sometimes deeply enough to change our thoughts and the way we live our lives. Behind every one of our pictures is a story, and who doesn't love an incredible story?

Well, there are about twenty pictures I saw this past year whose story did affect me. They were of all various shapes and sizes, each cut out and glued onto a poster board that was hung on the back wall of the seventh

grade classroom here at Most Holy Redeemer elementary school. They were pictures of holiness, a collage of relatively recent saints and blessed of whom we have actual photographs. The story told in their eyes was Christ's. There was the matter-of-fact look of St. Bernadette Soubirous, Lourdes visionary, content to live in the closet of convent obscurity after her meetings with the Mother of God; St. John Paul II, whose face, even as a child, convicts me to rise up and be done with lesser things; and let's not forget Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati, holding himself vertically on a rock climb, daring me to reach up with him toward the heights.

The inspiration they gave me was to do just that: keep on climbing toward sanctity, toward letting their same story of Christ be my story. They reminded me about the call of all Christians to live the adventure of grace and echo the same satisfaction and joy of St. Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

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keep on climbing toward sanctity...***



**Above: Br. Adam** in front of the seventh grade saint collage at Most Holy Redeemer School; **Br. Adam** with students.



# Winter Wonderland

*Br. David Snow, SOLT*

The winter semester began, and I felt like I had been thrown thrown out of the frying pan and into the fire. Online classes, zoom formation seminars, and computer work had more or less confined me to the house of studies. Though we were only two weeks in, I noticed all the screen time and outside urban noise was already starting to wear me down. I needed to get out of the house, out of the city for awhile; I needed a change of scenery, even for just a couple hours.

One Sunday in January, the opportunity came, so I seized it. After lunch, I asked some of the brothers if they would be interested in going to Maybury State Park. Half an hour later we were on our way—Br. Joseph, Br. Andrew, and I. It had snowed the previous night, and as we drove from Detroit to Northville, Michigan, fresh flakes began to fall. We arrived and were greeted with a scene of sheer beauty. Tall, barren trees were draped with clean snow. The ground was a soft, white blanket. I listened...no car engines, no honking horns, no sirens, no blaring stereos. I inhaled...no exhaust fumes, no street dust. I felt the ground through my boots...no rumbling traffic, no jackhammers. All was silent and still. The only sound, the only activity came from other folks who had the same idea we did.

We walked through the woods, enjoying the crunch of the snow and greeting others along the way. Eventually, we arrived at a lake, completely frozen and carpeted with the soft, pure powder. I took in the scene, gazing across the vast expanse at the trees on the opposite side. Since I had been looking at a computer screen for several hours a day, my eyes were pleased to explore such a grand vista. We walked around on the dock for a bit, relishing the calm, and then returned through the woods to the car.

I arrived home totally refreshed and rejuvenated, ready to take on the coming week of studies. It had been the perfect afternoon getaway. God had reached out to me, touching the depths of my heart with his peace. My eyes had gazed in wonder, my heart had rested in a silent hymn of rejoicing. He had said, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). My soul had sung, "How great thou art."



*Br. David enjoying a winter trip to Maybury State Park.*



***We walked through the woods,  
enjoying the crunch of the  
snow and greeting others  
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# Christ, the Gentleman

*Br. Joseph Spears, SOLT*

Within seminary formation there are four dimensions (Human, Spiritual, Intellectual, and Pastoral formation) that are assessed while a man is preparing for Holy Orders. However, human formation is considered the foundation for the other areas of growth. Pope St. John Paul II writes: "The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation." The goal of human formation is to imitate Christ as the perfect gentleman and true man of communion. Jesus is the icon of this gentleness and communion.

In Mark's Gospel Jesus heals a deaf man. Rather than making a spectacle of the man, He heals him "aside from the multitude privately." This is a sign of Jesus' respect for the man's dignity. Jesus' miracle is about healing the man and not about drawing attention to Himself. Jesus was attentive to the man's needs and chose to heal him in a unique way, thus bringing the man into communion with others and ultimately Himself.

Similarly, in St. John's Gospel, Jesus heals a sinful woman at Jacob's well who had been repeatedly treated in an undignified manner. Jewish culture looked down upon men conversing with women in public, especially sinful women. However, Jesus treats her with honor, dignity, and respect by being a true gentleman and man of communion. This

woman came to draw water at the middle of the day, presumably to avoid others due to her shame as a sinner. Jesus meets her where she is at while seeking to bring her into communion with Himself. He assures the woman that everyone who drinks of the water that He will give will no longer thirst. The woman quickly recognizes that He is the Christ and leaves her bucket at the well—implying that she has left her attachment to sin behind.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly shows that He is the icon of a gentleman and a man of communion. Men in formation are called to be ambassadors of Christ and gentlemen like Him. Thus, rather than obstacles, we must be bridges to Him, meeting people where they are at.

Human formation is about aspiring to be a gentleman like Christ. It involves everything from diligently carrying out the various duties of daily life to being a man of goodness in all things, from stepping up to doing the dishes to readily giving up your seat for someone else.

In the small acts of life, we are all called to be ambassadors of Christ and thus bring about true communion with Christ and one another. The goal of each Christian is to imitate the human goodness of Jesus by being His ambassadors so that we may reign with Him. Let us strive to imitate Christ in a virtuous life while being people of communion.

*Above: Stations of the Cross statue exhibits the gentleness of Christ during His Passion; Br. Joseph at Sacred Heart Major Seminary.*



# God, on Facebook Live

*Br. Uriel López, SOLT*



*Br. Uriel set up to livestream Mass at Most Holy Redeemer Parish.*

This past year of pandemic has been incredibly difficult for everyone. Some of us have lost loved ones or even gotten sick ourselves from the virus. But one blessing that I have seen is that it has gotten us closer to God and to our loved ones. And without God, this life would be meaningless.

When the pandemic started it was really sad because many churches had to close their doors, including ours. It was heart-breaking for me when I had to tell some of our parishioners that our church was going to be closed until further notice. It brought some of the parishioners and even me to tears since we could not receive the Eucharist together. For the first time, we were one in the Eucharist spiritually but not physically. Our church was closed for two months.

When I was asked if I could begin livestreaming the Masses on Facebook, I had no idea how I was going to do it. The first thing I did was gather whatever I could find from our computer room. I found our webcam with a tripod and a used laptop. As I look back, I feel like it was providential. All the equipment was there once I started looking, as if God had put it there, ready for me to grab. Now, it has been a year that I have been livestreaming the Sunday Masses. When I first started, I was able to read the comments that people would write—everything from how they missed receiving Holy Communion to informing us of problems with the audio. Thanks be to God, most issues have been improved, and we are in the process of getting slightly better technology than what I first found in the computer room.

God also blessed me with some help from Carmen, one of the parish employees, who would inform me about the audio issues and the small improvements needed for all to see and hear the beautiful Mass. And He also sent me a small angel in Maria, a parishioner who gives me a break by livestreaming one of the Masses. As I sit behind the pillar in the sanctuary, recording, I have been blessed to be only

feet away from the altar as Father consecrates the host. I often reflect on how the people confined to their homes might never have been able to see Mass from this perspective without the livestreaming ministry. Even in difficult times, God finds ways to bring us closer to Himself and each other.



# His Yoke is Easy

*Fr. Dave Brokke, SOLT*

It's hard to believe that I have been a priest for half a year already. Time has certainly flown by! It feels like I just got ordained, but as I reflect over the past six months, so much has happened.

There is no way I could have predicted what my first year of priesthood would entail. From getting ordained in the midst of a global pandemic to getting Covid within my first two weeks of my first assignment, I have experienced four different quarantines as the virus hit our priests and missionary volunteer community at different times. I have lost count of the number of funerals I have done for people who died due to complications from Covid. Reaching out to parishioners and the local community has not been easy, especially when in November North Dakota became the place with the highest mortality rate in the world due to the virus. Even with all of these hardships, I can honestly say that His yoke has been easy, and His burden has been light (cf. Matthew 11:30).

When I think back over the past six months, the overarching theme has been one of joy! I love being a priest! It is amazing to me how much I love praying the Mass and offering the Holy Sacrifice. It is surprising to me how much I love presiding over beautiful liturgies and getting our missionary volunteers excited about it too.

Our missionary volunteer community has been thriving! I have been assigned as chaplain for our volunteers, and it is hard to think of a better fit for me. I am amazed at God's goodness and His providence in placing me here. Initially, I was afraid of the cold, I was afraid of the particular difficulties of this mission, and I was afraid of living in the middle of what seemed to be nowhere. But the Lord knew better.

This time has been filled with many blessings for our SOLT team on Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation. I have found different ways to be a visible presence to the community here by blessing cars at the local food drive,



*A curious toddler approaches Fr. Dave as he prays at the cemetery.*

by helping hand out boxes of food to families in need, and by being a source of comfort for family members who are grieving. There have been difficulties, but I am continually reminded that working in the vineyard of the Lord is a joy.

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I love being a priest!***

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*Fr. Dave gives a blessing at the mission in Belcourt, ND*



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*The SOLT Ecclesial Team at Most Holy Redeemer Parish in Detroit, MI.*



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*On the front cover: SOLT brothers at Most Holy Redeemer Parish in Detroit, MI.*