Interview with Brian Daw June 16, 2015 at Avon Lake, Ohio. Interviewed by Kirt Bromley

*“We must realize that not only do the weak need the strong, but also that the strong cannot exist without the weak. The elimination of the weak is the death of fellowship.” Quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, which appeared in an early Faith and Light brochure created by Brian Daw in 1985.*

**How did you come to Faith and Light?**

Through L’Arche… when we were setting up our organization, Cornucopia, we had heard about Jean Vanier because the family of my first wife Ann had met Jean during the first Faith and Light Pilgrimage to Lourdes. Of course, I had known Pearl Cahoon through my work with the Cleveland Diocese…

**Kirt**: with Father Phil Pritt

**Brian**: Yes, and before him it was Father Goebel. And anyways, when I was planning Cornucopia, I wanted to go to L’Arche and see how they did it. And the retreat “Celebrate Jesus” had happened here in Cleveland, another Vanier type of movement; it happened even before anyone had gone over to Lourdes. So we went and visited the L’Arche communities in Erie and in Iowa, (Clinton, Iowa) and spoke to them about the idea of L’Arche and what they were doing. We kind of started our organization going already (The Bin and Cornucopia), so we had written to Jean about The Bin becoming a L’Arche community, and at that time there was a L’Arche community in Cleveland which we didn’t even know about, kind of a whole other group of people that were involved and we didn’t even know it. All of us were coming from a parish, St Malachi, where Father Jim was quite active, and he had come back from his retreat with Mother Therese, and he is talking about Jean Vanier and Mother Therese, and we are talking about Jean Vanier and L’Arche. Cleveland was definitely at the heart of L’Arche USA at the time. We had come to understand what L’Arche was about at that time, and Jean discerned that it would not be good to have two organizations running L’Arche in Cleveland, so he advised us that it would be best for us to start with Faith and Light. So we started a Faith and Light community at Corpus Christi House, which was one of our community homes. There was Jonah House and Corpus Christi house.

**Kirt:** Did you have contact with the Odens at that time?

**Brian:** Yes, through regular visits to The Bin, but they also knew my wife Ann and her family. Yes, so we began Faith and Light through the Corpus Christi community. It was probably 1979. And prior to that I had gone to a Faith and Light Sharing Retreat with Father Jim in Canada (Lake St Mary’s Retreat House), and Father Jim and I had lunch with Jean Vanier and some Canadian Bishops. Following that, I met Jean in Detroit and discussed our having a L’Arche home. He had told me then that it would be best if we moved toward creating a Faith and Light community rather than a second and separate L’Arche home. At that time too, I was quite involved with Pearl Cahoon and what she was doing for people with developmental disabilities. I was involved with her since high school actually, through the day camps. It was in 1966 that I first started working with the diocese, the Apostolate (outreach to people with developmental disabilities).

It was then that I think Pearl hooked me up with Father Cal Ganreas…the national chaplain after Father Jim. Father Cal then asked me to go to the International in Weatherby in Yorkshire, England March 1982. We had been active in the Faith and Light for several years. And at that conference Jean asked me to go back to the USA and help get Faith and Light more firmly organized there. Sister Pat Murphy also came; she was the regional coordinator for the East Coast. So when I came back, then Pearl and I and Terry Jungquist called a national meeting held at the St Joseph Retreat House in Euclid, Ohio probably in late 1982 or early 1983.

What I have found is that Faith and Light, like other spiritual movements, has grown more from the message of the Gospel, and the retreats, and the coming together of people informally, than it has from an organizational structure like the Scouts, or something… There’s no chapters and no big formal applications…

**Kirt**: it’s people…, maybe it’s individuals. Maybe they “catch it”… connecting a parent to other parents and getting them going. They may call and say, “I’m a parent and I feel isolated, but I like the message of Jean Vanier, and can you offer any help?”

And we say, “Oh yea. We can.” So it’s connecting her to some similar parents, and getting them going, and people joining. But kind of helping them just kind of get the ball rolling a little bit

Brian: You were talking about that new group where there are only two or three people, really, that’s a nice little group to start. I hope people sense that there’s no requirement (for numbers), when there’s three families together, they’re strong enough to be a community. And we’re always open to new people joining us, and having new growth. It’ll come on its own when someone else hears your message and sees your witness. Pearl and I often talked about growth, and Faith and Light always seems to be growing.

When we returned from England, Pearl and I saw that we needed to structure this a little bit. We needed to pull people together, and talk about the larger community, the national community. To come (to a perspective of who we are nationally), and we brought people in from Faith and Light communities in other parts of the USA that Pearl had been in correspondence with. We needed to nourish each other and form a national committee. What we came to do there was discern leadership, and purposes. We discerned a whole new national team then, myself as National Coordinator, Pearl Cahoon as the National Secretary, and Eric Gauchat was the new Treasurer. Father George Matejka was the National Chaplain. Following that meeting and the discernments, then I prepared legal documents. We registered Faith and Light USA as a 501c3 non-profit corporation.

**How has Faith and Light blessed your life?**

**Brian**: It’s pretty evident from what we have spoken about already, that the community of people (in Faith and Light , Cornucopia and The Bin) meant an awful lot to me; and it gave me a real purpose. Since the first time I met people with handicaps, I had a real purpose. Up until then, I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I had no clue. I thought I was going to be a computer scientist. I loved Math, but when I met people with handicaps, I said “This is cool.”

My first association happened when a religious brother at my high school said, “ I want you to do something this summer; I’m going to find opportunities for you. He then told us they needed someone down at Lakewood Park to teach swimming to kids. I said, “Great. I love swimming. I love kids. I’ll do that.” I walked down and there, and I saw a lot of kids with developmental and physical handicaps. I didn’t know what I was getting into, but I said, “This is great.” But from then on, I had a purpose in life, and it has been like that ever since.

My purpose in life was very directed until I left Faith and Light in late 1987. Since that time, my life has been taken up with my children and grandchildren. There’s more than 40 of us together when we celebrate. This is wonderful. It has been something that I have shared for over 30 years in a different way. And my extra curricular activity has been coaching kids. I was a high school coach for 25 years, and for the past 5 years coaching my grandchildren. I’ve been able to share the idea of community, the importance of each person, and the continuity of the team. So for me, Faith and Light has been something that affected my whole entire life, and now has given me a chance to live and enjoy and share community, whether it’s with family or work; it’s a vocation. And yet I have sense right now at this time in my life, that there may be something else. So I’m open that, but I know that whatever it is that it will involve some community, that it will involve sharing of my life with other people in the Body of Chris and my family and I are open to that.

The Faith and Sharing Retreat coming up this month may open a door to something new. It will be a time of quiet to just listen to God, and if there is an answer, then I am open. It may or may not happen, and we will wait.

**Kirt:** God loves you, that’s for sure.

**Brian**: Yes, I know that, and that He is a forgiving and loving God. It is an amazing thing if we can remember that more than anything else. That is what Faith and Light has brought to me, that community of love, the message of Love, the message of the Gospel.

Tell a story about a memorable person you’ve met in Faith and Light

There are so many people…Father Jim O’Donnell and Pearl, Danny and Therese Millar. I’ve always maintained communication with the Millar’s; they’re in Tacoma. There very welcoming people. They’re a married a couple and Pat and I were able to share a lot with them. Father Jim Boyle at the time, George Matejka…

Probably the most influential person was a guy by the name of Ray Hill; he had different colored eyes, one blue and one black. He was paralyzed from his waist down and mentally challenged. He had lived in institutions his entire life until he came to live with us at Cornucopia. But singly the most influential person in the creation and change of our institution was Ray. Almost everything that happened within Cornucopia, I can tell you, happened because of him. Ray was an exceptional person, in our Faith and Light community. They were changing his colostomy bag and he died during the operation. He was young too, 26 or 27 years. He was the single most influential person because he spoke to us of what he needed. We thought we knew what he needed, but he (knew better.) He told us what we could do together; he saw ways that we could give him things that he could do. But it was really creating so much more. One day he is frying doughnuts; months later we are running a deli-bakery because everybody liked his doughnuts. One day he was making straw flowers for us; we ended up becoming the largest producer and distributor of straw flowers east of the Mississippi. It happened because one day he was making straw flowers and we said, “You know you can do this, Ray. We’ll just keep giving you straw flowers.”

We started the farm because of him. We always wanted to go farming. That was the original dream of Cornucopia. When we brought him out of the institution, there was no way that I was not giving him a job and a home. We had a plot about the size of the back ground of my house. So we told him,

“O.K. Ray, we are going to grow pickles back there. You can scoot along the ground and plant them and weed.” And he did. It was our very first crop.

There was so many things that we did that he had a hand in. He needed a house. We got a house, actually two houses next to each other, they were named Jonah House. We bought the houses because of Ray, and it gave us room for more people with handicaps and staff to live there.

**Kirt:** That’s great! God chooses the weak to move the world, whether it’s Bernadette at Lourdes, or the children at Fatima, or Mary the Mother of God.

**Brian**: Ray had every strike against him, you know, but he did things. There was nothing he wouldn’t attempt. I remember a snowstorm. He lived all the way over in Warrensville Heights, on the other side of Cleveland. He had to take several buses and with transfers to get here on the west side of Cleveland and on this particular day, and there was deep snow. People were calling me up and canceling. People who lived five minutes away were canceling coming to work, and here comes Ray as faithful as could be, on his crutches, through the snow, after riding the buses from the east side of Cleveland. Here he is coming down Madison Avenue in the snow, plugging along with his crutches. Meanwhile, people are calling off who live a mile down the road.

Another time, we had a building across the street and he was packaging Brussels Sprouts, that was another job we did. We began packaging our own line of vegetables, and we had boxes that would come to us packed with donated fruit and vegetables. We had to get rid of the boxes that the supply of fruit and vegetables came in, so we would take them down the street and a guy would cut them up and use them for his coal furnace, before it got out-lawed. It benefitted him and us. It was a good walk; maybe 500 feet down the street. There would be 40 or 50 boxes out there at the end of the day, and somebody would take them down the street. And on this day, toward the end of the day, I was in a meeting and Ray comes up to me and says, “Is there something I can do?”

Since I needed to be at the meeting, I said, “If you could take care of those boxes out there, it would be great! Get somebody to help you.”

 Well, he couldn’t get anybody to help him. I had forgotten about it until I came out of the meeting and saw all of the boxes removed.

I asked him, “Ray, who helped you?”

He said, “Nobody. I got it done.” Here he is, a guy on crutches, moving all these cardboard boxes 500 feet down the alley. That’s the kind of guy he was. I get emotional about thinking about him.

 **Share one of your most memorable moments**

 **Brian**: I think one of the most memorable moments was at the national Faith and Light conference in Seattle in 1984. The whole meeting was such a special time; it was the first time that the national team was able to meet in a retreat atmosphere… it was more than a meeting; it was really good. Father Jim Boyle was there. We had a great time. It was a typical Faith and Light time; we relaxed together, we prayed together, we shelled oysters together…we just knew that this fellowship was really happening. The Pilgrimage to Our Lady of the Snows began to be formed at this meeting. The First National Pilgrimage and it was really a good one.

In Rome 1984, we met with the Pope (John Paul II). We were Faith and Light representatives from about 18 countries. And he spoke with each one of us in our own language, only a minute or two for each of us. He was very focused. He only wanted to know one thing; he wanted to know what was going on in your country to bring people with handicaps into the life of the Church. Then he addressed everybody as a group as to his position and his beliefs about how the life of the Church needed to grow with the handicapped person and the handicapped person through the life of the Church. And it was wonderful. I’ll never forget that meeting. First of all that you are in the presence of the leader of the Church, and the leader of Christ’s body here on earth, Then to hear him speak to us, and listen to each of us. It was amazing! The Pope wants to know what is happening … to bring handicapped people into the life of the Church. And what happened after that was a large movement to bring people with handicaps to visit the Pope in Rome. He was very heartfelt about what we were doing and what he was addressing us to do.