

# Maria House Project

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## AUGUST 2020 NEWSLETTER



**Father Pete pictured in  
St. Teresa's Bulletin - July 11, 1985**

Years ago, when I was in the seminary, I often had the honor of being Father Peterson's altar boy as he celebrated Mass on one of the small back altars at Saint Mark's Seminary. I remember that at the consecration, Father would always raise the host and chalice for a very long period of time. I would get "goose bumps" as I saw the gleam in his eyes and his Mona Lisa smile. I knew I was on Holy Ground and I felt a peace that warmed my soul. That image has remained with me for over sixty years. I call that feeling my "God Space" and I often go there whenever I'm anxious and/or overjoyed.

In March, prior to COVID-19, I was reminded of that image when Reverend Father Aron Maghsoudi informed me that he had selected MHP as the mission that his two parishes would support during Lent. He invited me to speak about MHP after Mass at his parishes (Our Lady Queen of Angels and All Saints Parish) in Central City, Pa.

A number of years ago, I met Father Aron at a Penance Service at Rockview Penitentiary. As we talked, he had asked if I would organize a group of MHP's volunteers to provide a Day of Recollection for the inmates at SCI Brenner. I agreed and during that weekend, I got to know Father Aron and realized that he was similar to a younger version of Father Pete. He not only shepherded his parishioners but also those who were considered outcasts and lived in the margins. Twice since that Day of Recollection, Father Aron visited MHP and attended our staff meeting, bible study and celebrated Mass with the residents. He had mentioned that he had never seen a program serving those in recovery in such a loving community.

During the Masses at Father Aron's parishes, I was brought to tears as Father held the host and chalice for a long period of time. I saw the same look in Father Aron's eyes and smile on his face that Father Pete had. Again, I felt that warming peace.

I hope that you also have the same opportunity to experience a "God Space" especially during these trying times. As Father Pete would say, "Remember don't get anxious. Our Lord is in control and He doesn't need your advice: He knows what He is doing."

*Joe Tarquinio* - Executive Director



**Father Aron Maghsoudi & Joe with a  
portrait of Saint Teresa of Calcutta by  
Edward Silvis, an inmate at SCI Rockview**



**Bob Boeh**

We pray that this newsletter finds you and your family safe and healthy during these trying times as the result of the Coronavirus pandemic. Although our men have been restricted to the Lodge in quarantine as you have been restricted to your home, they have grown stronger in their brotherhood. Our staff has done a remarkable job to keep the men involved. Together they planted flowers and a large garden, thanks to donations from Deacon Joe Cicero and Stan's Garden Center. The grounds at the Lodge look great! They hope to do some canning of vegetables as they did last year, and we purchased some pigs, and a cow to join our chickens! Although there have been no visits from family or friends, no trips into the community for Mass, no travel to community AA/NA meetings, no weekly Bible studies/community dinners at St. Andrews, and no community support services, Joe Tarquinio, and our Deacon and staff have ensured that spiritual programming continues. Most importantly, our regular volunteers, who we depend on to provide therapy groups, spiritual programming, mentoring, etc. in conjunction with our staff, have not been able to come in due to virus restrictions. We miss them and look forward to their return!

Father Pete reminded us that Maria House Project has always been under the protection of Mary, our patroness, and our men and staff have remained healthy and safe. Prior to his passing in 2013, Fr. Pete operated Maria House for over 40 years and we continue to operate this mission on very limited resources as he always did. Father focused on the healing of our men and trusted in God to provide the means to carry on his mission. We maintain that faith in God to move us through this pandemic. Like Father, our priority is always the healing of our men!

Erie Gives Day is rapidly approaching again on August 11th! We contemplated whether we should ask for your continued support considering these difficult economic times, but we simply have no option. We need your support more than ever to continue our mission. Although economic conditions are difficult this year, on Tuesday, August 11 (Erie Gives Day), we know that we can depend on you to pray for the success of Maria House Project in this, our main source of funding. When reflecting on your level of support, we would ask that you recall Fr. Peterson's spiritual guidance when he said *"Let God take you where He wants. Let Him work in you."*

This year, although GE has discontinued their match of employee and retiree donations, the new CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act) provides for a tax deduction to all taxpayers for charitable donations up to \$300.00.

Please refer to our Erie Gives ad in this newsletter for additional details and suggestions for those who prefer to drop off or mail a check to the office, or those who do not have a credit card or computer. We want to help make your gift giving easy for you. A call to the office on Tuesday, August 11 between 8:00 AM and 8:00 PM can accommodate your Erie Gives gift to Maria House Project!

God Bless!

*Bob Boeh* - Board President

**...Continued from Back Page...**

Second came *More I Could Not Ask*, a testament to a hugely fulfilled priesthood, offering a dramatic contrast to news reports of the priesthood today. This spiritual autobiography is unique, for it does not focus on a soul's struggle and conversion, but on the many people in Fr. Pete's life who have formed his life of grace. While the stories often tell of human suffering, they always breathe new life. In over 50 years of his priesthood—of finding Christ in the margins—Fr. Pete makes palpably real three things that last: faith, hope, and love. In effect, he invites us to contemplate our own relationships and find Christ in the remarkably simple, human encounters that shape our lives.



**Sr. Lisa Mary  
McCartney**

Third and last came *The Sweep of John's Gospel*, the gospel which Fr. Pete says is the very heart of scripture. As a young seminarian, John's inspired story of Jesus opened his heart to God. It can do that for us. In sharing the fruits of his prayer and meditation, Fr. Pete invites us to enter a chapter, scene, or verse, of the Gospel with him. He urges us to *empathize* with John's *characters*, as we pray. If we do so, we can accompany Fr. Pete and St. John in meeting not characters, not examples, not metaphors, but flesh and blood people who have encountered Jesus, the Christ.

Each book embodies Fr. Pete's maxim that "people are more important than things." I am delighted to recommend these books to you, for each one is palpably alive, nurtures our faith, and points us to God.

*Sister Lisa Mary McCartney, RSM, Ph.D.*

## Step Four Courage

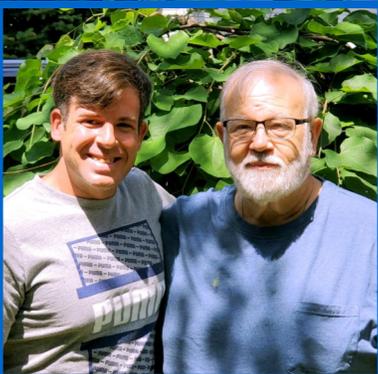
It takes spiritual courage to work A.A.'s *Step Four*: Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of yourself. With the help of his sponsor, Jim Cicero has summoned the courage to honestly look deep within. This step was critical to his recovery. He would not maintain sobriety without overcoming the anger he had locked within.

Looking back on Jim's life, anger certainly seemed justified. As he began his moral inventory, the first date to surface was December 12, 1998. Jim's Dad, a respected man, an educated man, a teacher by trade, didn't answer his phone. He was high again, thought Jim. He brushed it off but when he got home, at the young age of sixteen, Jim found his father lifeless.

This date, imbedded in Jim's mind forever, was the start of his binge drinking. He became angry at God for taking the life of his father. His drinking went on for many years; on again, off again, classifying himself as a fully functioning alcoholic.

At the age of thirty-five, estranged from the mother of his children, Jim fell in love again with a woman named Jami. He had goals; he wanted to be a better man and a better father to his sons. Jami was fully into her recovery and she gave him hope, but Jim continued his drinking. He began to get sick when he drank, so he started taking drugs to take away the pain of the sickness. He used any substance he could get his hands on: opioids, cocaine, heroin, etc.

Jami introduced Jim to his first detox as she drove him to Millcreek Community Hospital. He admitted he had a problem and completed the detox, but was never introduced to a long term program. After fifteen days he relapsed, this time taking Jami down with him.



**Jim & Deacon Joe Cicero**

Jim's Step Four inventory continues with a second date, November 6, 2016. When he woke up that morning, he found Jami lying next to him in bed, deceased. From this point forward Jim no longer cared about life.

Jim was raised a Catholic but had completely given up on God. He was a good athlete, especially loved baseball, he owned his own home, had three sons, and had a good job working beside his stepfather, Al Mele, in the family business as a plumber. Al was instrumental in Jim's career and served as a mentor until he passed away, leaving him with yet a third loss of someone he loved. Jim's addiction spiraled out of control and he lost everything as he supported a habit which cost him as much as \$700 to \$1,000 per night.

In and out of rehabs, it was in 2018, after completing a grief counseling session at Glenbeigh, that he was introduced to Maria House Project. He agreed to give it a try. He stayed the required three months but he never really worked Step Four. It wasn't long before Jim found himself homeless and struggling again with substance abuse.

At the age of thirty-six Jim was arrested on drug charges and was put into Erie County Prison for five months. It was here, living much of his time in solitary due to his anger, that he met God. Carved on the prison wall were the words *Trust in God*, and placed inside was the Holy Bible. He opened it and read Romans 5:3-5: *Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

Jim began to meditate and he clearly heard God say, "Jimmy why pay such a high price for such a low life". It became clear to him that if he didn't get things under control, his next bottom would be the grave. This led him to write a letter from his heart, addressed to Joe Tarquinio, asking for a second chance.

Jim said he owes everything to Maria House Project and Joe. He is now fifteen months in sobriety. His kids are back in his life, he has a Mom that loves him, he has re-established his own plumbing business and most importantly God is part of his everyday life. Jim is working on replacing the anger with a spirit of gratitude. Family, support groups, meetings, his sponsor Will, and giving back keep him focused in the right direction.

Deacon Joseph Cicero, Chaplain for Maria House is Jim's uncle. Going through the Lodge twice, with Deacon Joe leading the Spiritual aspect of the program, has created a special bond, another thankful connection on his journey through the recovery process. Deacon Joe said, "I am so proud of Jimmy. He has learned the importance of giving back. He does all the plumbing work for the Lodge now and donates his time and labor."

Jim was good at hiding his pain, his anger, his addiction, but God saw through it all and led him to a program where people cared. Jim hopes that his story will help others find the courage to work Step Four. The message he wants to deliver is that rehab alone is not enough. You need to follow it up with a long term program like Maria House Project. It's a must!

*Sandi Matts* - Vice President



**Sandi Matts**

## ***Come and Follow Me***

*Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?* This is the opening line to a song we hear often in the Catholic tradition; a song entitled “*The Summons*”. At Maria House Project (MHP) we are grateful for our Board of Directors, staffed with dedicated people, who all responded yes when they were summoned to serve. As a Board member myself, I can tell you from experience that each member is committed to the Maria House mission. Their diversity in talent, skill and experience assure MHP remains strong spiritually, administratively and in service to the men of Maria House.

At the May Board Meeting, after over twenty-one years of steadfast service, Deacon Denis Coan resigned from his position as Treasurer. He said after over a year of discernment, with a new budget in place and a strong Board, he felt this was a good time to take leave. He looks forward to having more time for his commitments at his parish and with family. Deacon Denis’s closing remarks were, “It has been my honor and privilege being a part of the Maria House Project board for more years than I can remember. I have been truly blessed to be a part of Fr. Pete’s legacy and Joe’s exceptional leadership of such a wonderful program, for the men who are most in need. I hold Maria House in my prayers as I will continue to support the program.”



**Deacon Denis  
Coan**

Denis, you will be greatly missed and we continue to hold you in our prayers. We are most grateful for all you have done and we wish you continued blessings as you serve at St. John’s. We hope you have a little more free time to enjoy your family and all that retirement has to offer.

We are pleased to announce that Steve Henderson was elected to fill the role of Treasurer, at the June meeting. Steve has served on the Board for many years and as a business owner, and leader in our community, brings much experience to his new role. We thank you for saying yes and are confident that our finances are in good hands.

In addition, two new members were voted in at the June meeting:

We welcome Jeff Rzepka who has been a volunteer at Maria House Project for a while, participating in the Thursday Bible Study group and Life in the Spirit. Jeff brings with him a strong technical background, a strong faith and a willingness to serve others. When introducing himself to the Board, he said, “God doesn’t call the qualified, He qualifies the called.” Thank you for answering His call.

We also welcome Gregory LaRocca to the team, who has extraordinary experience in finance and business. His resume lists his dedication to community involvement as he has served on a number of Boards in a variety of leadership positions. When Greg introduced himself to the Board, it was easy to recognize his humbleness and a willingness to be of service to others.

With a full Board of Directors in place, we trust that Father Pete leads from beyond and we remain confident that his legacy will continue to flourish.

*Sandi Matts* - Vice President

## **From Your Deacon ~ Deacon Joe Cícero - Chaplain**



**Deacon Joe  
Cícero**

Many plans have been disrupted/cancelled due to COVID-19, but dark clouds often possess a silver lining. The Lord’s hand is present in both uncertain and in good times. The residents have shown an ability to adapt to the hardships of a prolonged quarantine, while continuing to pursue their spiritual journey. Their bond as a family has grown and with it their understanding of each other’s strengths and weaknesses—their connectiveness as a body is evident.

Our men, like the first Apostles in the Upper Room, have felt the sting of anxiety and the worry that accompanies it. Throughout, though, the Lord remained in their midst—He showed them His wounds and displayed His unconditional love—leaving the men unafraid and embracing His call to evangelism. The Holy Spirit and the memory of Fr. Pete are alive and well with the residents, staff, and graduates of Maria House. To God be all glory and honor, as these men strive to attain His Kingdom on earth.

# Give the gift of giving.

Contribute to the changing of the  
MHP community through

Donations  
are made  
online through  
*The Erie  
Community  
Foundation* at  
[www.eriegives.org](http://www.eriegives.org)



VISA, MasterCard  
and Discover  
credit cards  
are accepted &  
minimum gift  
amount is  
\$25.00

**Tuesday, August 11  
From 8AM to 8PM**

If you feel uncomfortable making a donation online or don't have a credit card or access to a computer, call Joe Tarquinio on or before August 11th at the MHP office (814-454-0891) and he will assist you OR you can mail your gift directly to the MHP office at

P.O. Box 10682

Erie, PA 16514

and the donation will be processed in your name.



*"Thank God for our gifts which are to glorify Him  
and comfort His people."*

Father Pete

## MARIA HOUSE PROJECT

P.O. Box 10682

Erie, PA 16514

### ***“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”***

*Galations 6:25*

Msgr. James Peterson became the *Shepherd of Many* during his lifetime. Below is a review of his books by Sister Lisa Mary McCartney, contributing writer. Each of the books is available at the Maria House Project office.

In the last three full decades of his life, Father James Peterson, a very busy priest, wrote three amazing books: *Leisure of the Holy Spirit* (1989), *More I Could Not Ask* (1999), *The Sweep of John’s Gospel* (2009).

First came *Leisure of the Holy Spirit*, a fruit of his ministry to God’s people. While it is a primer of the spiritual life, it is by no means a generic spirituality. Fr. Pete guides his reader as a spiritual director to life lived with a person, the Holy Spirit. As such, he speaks honestly and lovingly about our various relationships with God, with ourselves and with others. Reading each chapter is like listening to a short homily or being engaged in a conversation, perhaps in a confession. As we read reflectively, we may well encounter a presence of three persons—one’s self, Fr. Pete and God.

***...Continued on Inside Page...***

