

# *Maria House Project*

## *Celebrating 50 Years of Ministry*



Fr. Pete

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Joe Tarquinio

### Newsletter - August 2023

I have read Father Peterson's book *Leisure of the Spirit* many times. He talks about us "plunging our life into the Spirit." We do this to know the Father, the Son, ourselves, and other people. Often we do not look at the Spirit, we are not aware of Him, yet in Him we live and move and have our being. Often when I was receiving spiritual direction I would tell Father that I thought that holiness was not possible for the average individual, especially me. Father told me that I mistakenly thought holiness meant being perfect. However, God does not expect perfection. God expects us to know Him, to love Him and serve Him by serving His people. Father used the analogy of planting a large garden. One does not plant a large garden all at once, but first turns the soil, then plants the seeds, waters, weeds and then harvests. If we try to complete the garden very quickly then we become overwhelmed and give up. God does not put us on a time schedule.

Recently I read Matthew Kelly's (Director of Dynamic Catholic) book *Holy Moments*. He wrote that achieving holiness is a collaboration of many Holy Moments. He explained that "a Holy Moment is a single moment in which you open yourself to God. You make yourself available to Him. You set aside personal preferences and self interest, and for one moment you do what you prayerfully believe God is calling you to do." Holy Moments are choices with powerful and positive consequences. Holy Moments are not complicated. They can be as simple as looking into the eyes of a person experiencing stress and giving them a smile, hug or a handshake. Joy not only comes to the recipient of a Holy Moment, but also to you because you have made a positive difference. Other examples of Holy Moments can be visiting a friend in the hospital, going to a funeral home, writing a note of encouragement, making a meal for a shut-in, etc. Holy Moments are doing something that helps you become a better version of yourself, even when you don't feel like it.

Recently one of the residents, Tom, had a very difficult time with controlling his temper. I asked him if he would do a big favor for me. I told him that Ed Silvis (see "Their Stories Live On..." article) was being released from the hospital. Because of the nature of his crime, no nursing home would accept him. I asked if he would provide nursing services for Ed until he went back to the hospital. Tom took on the challenge. He stayed with Ed 24-7 feeding him, cleaning him, doing for Ed things many of us wouldn't have done. I was humbled as I watched Tom nurse Ed. Many, many Holy Moments. Ed's health improved, but so did Tom's temper. Holy Moments work!

"So, decide today, once and for all, that each day for the rest of your life you will have a positive impact. Decide to be the difference that makes the difference." It's not that hard to be "Holy".

**Joe Tarquinio** - Executive Director

# Their Stories Live On...

Edward Silvis, David Asuma and Richard Badzik will forever be a piece of the heart of Maria House Project as their stories live on...

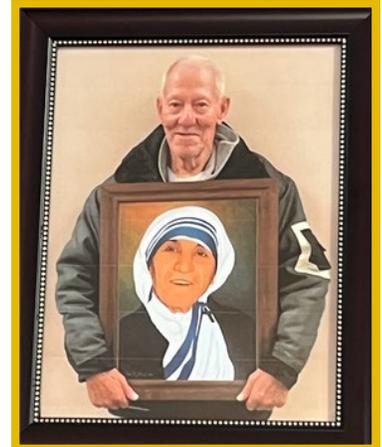


**Edward Silvis** was a man of strength, courage and determination. He met Father Peterson during a retreat, at SCI Rockview, over fifty years ago. After connecting spiritually with Father Pete, he prayed fervently that someday he would become part of the Maria House community. Although Ed was serving a lifetime sentence and was denied commutation multiple times, his dream came true on February 15, 2022, when the parole board finally granted him his wish to live out his final days in Spartansburg, PA at Father Pete's Lodge.

Upon arrival, Ed was battling cancer and heart disease but managed to live 405 days as a free man. He passed away on March 27, 2023 at the age of 83. His funeral was truly amazing. The church was filled with those that grew to love him: fellow residents, volunteers from both MHP and prison ministry, and family (some of which he had connected with for the first time). Before Mass all were invited to share a memory or thought regarding Ed. It was heartwarming and inspirational to hear the stories of how many lives Ed touched and how he managed to live a lifetime of LOVE in such a short time.

Ed was given a real gift, not only of freedom but also of time to spend his final holidays with family. Christmas gifts that year were more than those wrapped under a tree. God's forgiveness and precious healing are treasures one can wait a lifetime for. I'm not sure if Ed was able to forgive himself in this lifetime, but I am sure when he was greeted by the God he loved so much, he was wrapped in eternal peace.

Ed spent his days in prison learning to draw and paint. He said as a youth he couldn't draw a stick figure. While incarcerated he prayed that God would give him something useful to pass his time and fill his mind. After being given a paint set by a departing inmate, Ed began to paint. His talent was certainly heaven sent. On display at his funeral were many of his works of art. At Christmas each member of his family was given one of Ed's treasures. For each of us privileged to share in his life, they now serve as memories to remind us that no life is wasted, and that God's LOVE is present in each and every precious soul we meet.



**David Asuma** - Despite a lifelong struggle with addiction, Dave had a very loving, caring heart and was dedicated to helping others. Add this to his thirst for knowledge and his own experience of sobriety and you had the makings of a man worthy of the Title, *Man of the Year*.

Dave's path through Maria House was not an easy one. Shortly after leaving for the first time, he relapsed. The good news was that he recognized the importance of the spiritual connection and support he received at MHP and returned for a second time. Dave did well on his return visit and was successful in maintaining his sobriety. In fact, Dave became a leader among the community and was asked to serve as a member of the Core Team, which he did for many years. Joe Tarquinio nominated him for *Man of the Year* and he was selected to receive the award. Unfortunately a medical condition prevented that from taking place, and Dave passed away on May 21, 2023, at the young age of 58.

Dave was very active within the MHP community and was looked up to by the men who found their home at the Lodge. Having been through the program himself, he was well aware of the games addicts play and knew how to help them turn things around. Dave was well read and was a great asset at Bible studies and group sessions, offering many suggestions for books and materials most helpful for the men. Marty Radock, who leads group studies on Tuesdays, said he looked to Dave as a mentor. He said that Dave led many sessions of “Chalk Talk” with Father Martin, that he himself found most helpful.

Dave was a man of many talents who also loved to cook. He was always in the kitchen helping out, cooking for residents and volunteers. Linda, one of the volunteers, especially appreciated all the special desserts he would make when he knew she was paying a visit.

Dave’s presence will certainly be missed, but his knowledge will live on as he leaves behind a legacy of core values: to serve others with kindness, to build a sense of community, and to treat others with respect. Dave may have missed out on the *Man of the Year Award* here on earth, but I am confident that our Loving God welcomed him with the words, *Well done my good and faithful servant*.



**Richard Badzik**, who found his way to Maria House on September 8, 2021, told his family that MHP turned his life around and that he lived in the presence of Christ. In a conversation with Rick’s sister, Candace, she described her brother as a man of Faith. She said, “Since going to Maria House, he was the happiest he had ever been. He had a hard life and struggled with addiction, but now it is evident that God was working in his life.”

Candace told me that when Rick was a little boy, he used to play and pretend to be the *six million dollar man*. After personally witnessing Rick’s faithfulness, especially to the Eucharist, I am sure that Our Lord considers him to be a *loyal six million dollar man in Christ’s army*. As pictured here, whenever the Eucharist was present, Rick humbly prayed on his knees in complete surrender. After a lifelong battle he found his answer in *God’s Grace*.

Marty Radock, an MHP volunteer, was with Rick just a few days before he passed. Rick told him that his heart was failing and the doctors did all they could for him. He said, “If it’s God’s will, I am not afraid to die.”

In June of this year, at the young age of 57, Rick passed peacefully in his sleep. At first his family was sad to think he died alone, but after finding out he had a blanket with a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe with him, they trust she was right by his side.

Rick had a strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and it brings them great comfort to believe she came to lead him home.



**Sandi Matts**

All three of these men were great witnesses to the power of prayer and God’s healing touch. Each were God loving, fun loving men who have left an indelible mark on my heart forever. St. Francis of Assisi said, “It’s in giving that we receive.” As an MHP volunteer I have really come to understand that you can never outdo God’s love. I have received much more than I could ever give...I am most grateful.

Until we meet again, Ed, Dave and Rick, may you rest in God’s eternal peace.

**Sandi Matts** - Vice President

**“And who is my neighbor?”** You might remember this is the question that prompted the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:29. On the surface, Jesus defines your neighbor as the person most unlike yourself. Perhaps you believe you should even hate that neighbor, based on everything you have grown up seeing and been taught by society. But if you dig down you see that Jesus is reminding us that being His disciple requires a completely open mind, and going wherever and to whomever He sends you. At the end of the Parable, the Good Samaritan gives the innkeeper what amounts to a couple days’ wages to help care for a person he just met. Being a Good Samaritan is not easy. It takes effort and trust.



I’ve been a volunteer with Maria House for many years, and I cannot remember a single time a resident has ever asked me for as much as a dollar. I believe they might feel just as unwilling to ask for help as I do. Being independent and being able to fix your own situation is something that is bred into our culture. It’s also the first hurdle we all need to overcome, because we are not in control. God is. Only after we ask and give the situation to Him, can He help any of us.

Giving up control doesn’t happen on day one, but Maria House creates the environment where it does happen more often than not. As I heard board member, Marty Radock say at a recent meeting, with tears in his eyes, “I get to see miracles everyday”.

Those miraculous stories are echoed by many residents when you hear them say “Maria House saved my life”. Once the realization happens when we realize everything we have is a gift from God, a sense of thankfulness takes over our lives. There is not a current resident, past resident, or volunteer that does not give of their Time, Talent, or Treasure to help better the Maria House environment, so that we can recognize and take care of our neighbor. **Won’t you please join us?**

**Jeff Rzepka, Board Member**



**Jeff Rzepka**

## *We are God's Children!*

As I enter my 6<sup>th</sup> year of Chaplaincy at MHP, I’ve come to appreciate more greatly the value of family and a shared purpose.

Last fall / winter I suffered a life-threatening back surgery. Through many prayers, visits, well-wishers, and therapy I recovered and was able to return to active ministry in March. The power of prayer left me awestruck.

Before my health concerns, we completed a 7-session *Leisure in the Spirit Retreat*. It was one of powerful stories, witnessing, and redemption. It was well-attended and opened the eyes of many to the healing power of the MHP and the volunteers who help make it happen.

In recent months, we’ve lost past and present residents to death, sickness, or premature departure. The deaths of Ed Silvis, Dave Asuma, and Rick Badzik have reminded us of the frailty of life. We miss them, but we take comfort in knowing that they are in the company of the Lord and Fr. Pete.



**Deacon Joe Cicero**

With the arrival of spring / summer, we have resumed our Thursday night Bible Studies at OLP, begun planning our *Day of Reflection* in September, along with a *Leisure in the Spirit Retreat* to follow. As Joe T. likes to say, “The retreat is the mortar that keeps our MHP family rooted in prayer and thanksgiving.”

The Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Comforter, unfailingly dwells within the Maria House family. To God be all glory and praise, as our men, under the guidance of devoted staff / volunteers, strive to attain His Kingdom on earth.

**Deacon Joe Cicero - Spiritual Director, Chaplain**

## THANKS FOR CARING FOR OUR MEN!

When struggling to develop a balanced budget, our founder Father Pete, periodically reminded the Board of Directors of his financial agreement with Our Lord regarding Maria House Project. As you may remember, the agreement involved Father Pete continuing to carry on the MHP mission, and in turn Our Lord would continue to provide the financial wherewithal to sustain the mission. Fortunately, that agreement has continued for over 50 years because Our Lord works through people like you and me to support Maria House Project. Yes, we must continue to rely on your partnership and we are eternally thankful to you for your contributions as they, along with your prayers, are what sustains us.



**Bob Boeh**

Our men regularly tell us that “Maria House saved my life!” After multiple failures in various programs, Maria House continues to be successful in helping our men to heal through finding Christ and allowing Him into their lives. As a member of the MHP family, you have contributed so much to the success of our men in their healing process. Our sincere gratitude to you for your continued prayers and contributions! Your support assures that MHP will continue, fulfilling Father Pete’s dream of a spiritual community of men healing from the effects of addiction, homelessness, incarceration or other troubling issues. I encourage you to read about the stories of some of our men and their successes in the accompanying articles of this newsletter.

You are a treasured member of the Maria House family because you have cared for our men through your prayers, volunteerism, and contributions. Our men too, as treasured members of the Maria House family, also share their prayers, time and talents to sustain this family that they grow to love. They gladly give back to the community through their volunteerism at various parishes such as St. Thomas in Corry, Our Lady of Mercy in Harborcreek, and St. Paul in Erie to name a few. Through their diverse talents, they have completed numerous improvement projects thereby saving MHP thousands of dollars. We hear them repeatedly say that they want to give back to Maria House as a gesture of gratitude for saving their life. This is the spirit that has been sustained for so many years since being founded by Father Pete. We continue to be blessed with the presence of the Holy Spirit and the protection of our patroness, Mary, Mother of God!



Our primary source of income is the Erie Gives Day fund drive. Without the support that you provide on that day, we simply would not have sufficient revenue to continue. Supporters of Maria House Project have repeatedly displayed extraordinary generosity for a nonprofit of our size. We have consistently ranked among the top 20 agencies in the amount of dollars but more importantly, in the number of donors too! This is a humbling tribute to this tiny agency that is so worthy of the support of so many of you out there. Many of us were blessed to have known Father Pete and most of you know of his saintly work with his men. I assure you that

he is smiling because you are not just caring ABOUT his men but are caring FOR them! Again, we thank you for being a member of the Maria House Family! God Bless!

**Bob Boeh** - Board President

*“Carry each other’s burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.”*

Galatians 6:2

**JOIN US SUNDAY,**  
**NOVEMBER 12, 2023**  
**STARTING @ 2PM, Doors**  
**open at 12:30pm**

**BINGO!**

**AT JTP FOUNDATION**  
**EVENT CENTER...**  
**SAVE THE DATE!**

MARIA HOUSE PROJECT  
P.O. Box 10682  
Erie, PA 16514-0682

## *María House Project - Since 1971*

### Ways to join with MHP on Erie Gives Day Tuesday, August 8 from 8 AM to 8 PM:

- ◆ Make an online donation through *The Erie Community Foundation* at [www.eriegives.org](http://www.eriegives.org). VISA, MasterCard, and Discover credit cards are accepted with minimum gift amount of \$25.00.
- ◆ If you don't have a credit card or access to a computer, call Joe Tarquinio ON or BEFORE August 8th at the MHP Office ([814-454-0891](tel:814-454-0891)) and he will assist you.
- ◆ Mail your gift directly to the MHP office at  
P.O. Box 10682  
Erie, PA 16514-0682  
and the donation will be processed in your name.
- ◆ Stop into our new office at 130 West 19th Street to drop off your gift.
- ◆ Scan the QR code to go directly to the MHP page to donate on Erie Gives Day.

