

Maria House Project

MAIN OFFICE: 1218 French Street, Suite 7 Erie, PA 16501

Phone: 814-454-0891

Fax: 814-454-0899

E-mail: mariahouseproject@verizon.net



House Happenings

Joe's Thoughts.....



Newsletter

November 2019

My mother was a very spiritual and religious person. She made sure that my three brothers and I attended all the functions at our church. More importantly, she taught us how to pray and the importance of worship. She was the catalyst who got me thinking about the priesthood and encouraged me to enter the seminary. During the six years that I spent in the seminary, God brought many holy people into my life and I learned the importance and power of prayer.

Recently, I was reminded of what I learned about prayer when I found out that I needed triple bypass surgery. As always, my family and friends were there for prayers and support (cards, visits, etc.). These things brought me peace and encouragement. However, a few other things happened that touched my soul and reminded me of the importance of community. On four different occasions prior to my surgery, I felt the meaning of community. The first took place at my camp during our Day of Reflection. After Mass, Msgr. Bob Smith, Deacons Joe Cicero and Bill Sproveri and all the residents laid their hands on me and prayed. Then the MHP's Board after a meeting and a group of Cursillistas before a Bible Study again prayed over me. During these occasions, something happened to me that is hard to describe but is analogous to electric (Grace) going through my body. It was the same feeling I always had when Father Pete would hold my hands and pray. All I know is I felt that I was in Our Lord's hands and accepting of anything that would happen.

There were two other things that happened that touched my soul. I received a devotional book titled "A Look at Life from a Deer Stand" signed by all the residents of MHP. I also received a very large handmade card signed by the women "lifers" at the State Correctional Institution in Cambridge Springs which I visit every month. I'm sure a number of people would not think that alcoholics, drug addicts or those incarcerated would be sensitive to the needs of others. Well, I certainly know that their notes expressing their concern and compassion brought tears to my eyes. I'm beginning to understand the meaning of the phrase "Communion of Saints".

On September 28, I was humbled and honored to receive the *Monsignor Wilfrid J. Nash Principles of Christian Conduct Award* at the Gannon University & Villa Maria College Distinguished Alumni Dinner. I was blessed to share this special evening with my family, the other Distinguished Alumni Honorees and their families, and the Gannon and Villa communities. I credit my family for their support and Father Pete for the development of my philosophy to serve others.

Presently, my medical situation is stable and I am happy to say it has caused me to have a glimpse of Heaven. I guess Our Lord has more things He expects of me before He calls me to the Kingdom.

Joe Tarquinio - Executive Director



The Tarquinio Family

Gannon University's Homecoming and Family Weekend

Irv Gass

by Sandi Matts

Irv Gass has been part of the Maria House family for many years. He made several courageous attempts to maintain a life of sobriety as he worked through the MHP program. Unfortunately Irv lost his battle and passed away on September 12th at the young age of fifty.

As I think about this tremendous loss, I am reminded of a poem that I read at my Dad's funeral. In it, there is a line that reads: *An angel stood above him in the night, to strike his chains away and set him free.* As I reflect on these words I find peace in knowing that Irv is no longer in battle, the chains of addiction have been cut free and he no longer feels the separation from God who loves him so very much.

Addiction brings with it a stigma, a life of guilt and shame, and often an inability to love oneself. I wish that Irv could have seen himself as others saw him; perhaps we would be looking at a different outcome. Irv was always very involved in Bible Study and Life in the Spirit when he was living at the Lodge. Just about everyone that met him there, loved him. He had a charisma about him that just drew you in. He had this innate ability to know just what it was you needed to hear in the moment. He was always very encouraging and made it his job to pump you up, kind of like God's cheerleader.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians he tells us to never let ourselves drift away from the hope promised by the Good News. Irv had an authentic relationship with God and he lived the Good News as he shared God's love with everyone he met. His battle with addiction was in this lifetime and has ended with a journey of hope in God's promise of new life.

In 1 Corinthians 13:13 we read: It is love alone that lasts. So Irv, my friend, may all that you have loved in your life grant you eternal truth, love and peace.



John Krahnke, Sandi Matts, Irv Gass
Volunteer Appreciation Night
at the Lodge in 2018

From Your Deacon ~ The backgrounds of the residents are varied, but they share the common desire to be free of addiction and accept the Lord as their Savior and compass.

Our annual *Day of Reflection* was held at Joe T's camp in Ripley, NY, on August 22nd. Deacon Bill and Pat Sproveri spoke on the power of prayer while I addressed God's call to forgive one another and ourselves, which included a Forgiveness Ceremony. The closing Mass was celebrated by Msgr. Bob Smith, who anointed several attendees struggling with health issues.

Msgr. John Swoger is a blessing to the MHP community, often celebrating Masses at the Lodge. In August we concluded our *Leisure in the Spirit* Retreat at the Hope House in Union City, where we heard current/former residents, along with volunteers, tell of their hardships and of the Holy Spirit's power to mend. Included was a Healing Mass, where many felt the peace-filled touch of the Prayer Team and the Spirit.

Our weekly Bible Study at St. Andrew's in Erie has been blessed by the attendance of Saint Mark's Seminarians Luke Dagher and Jacob Gindhart. What an interactive event! Here, young men in formation for the priesthood hear firsthand the struggles and successes of the residents/volunteers.



Deacon Joe Cicero

Cursillo participation by the residents remains vibrant. Three men completed Men's #250 on October 20th, each giving witness to the power of the Spirit to change lives. Their 4th Day journeys now rest on the 3-legged platform of faith (Piety), hope (Study), and love (Action).

A Memorial Mass was held at the Lodge on October 24th to commemorate the life of Irv Gass, a former resident. Irv died in September and the many who knew and loved him gathered to celebrate his contributions to their lives and their quest for sobriety. Over 75 were in attendance and Deacon Bill Sproveri, a longtime mentor to Irv, offered a powerful homily celebrating their friendship.

To God be given the glory and honor, as our men continue to witness to the attainment of His Kingdom on earth.

Deacon Joe Cicero - Chaplain

Lately, I think that all of us in the greater Erie area can sense a spirit of renaissance as evidenced by the various exciting initiatives and collaborations that have recently been launched by local government and private organizations to transform and uplift the community. That spirit and energy was exemplified in the record breaking results of the 2019 Erie Gives Day, an annual giving opportunity initiated by The Erie Community Foundation in 2011. We thank them and their community partners Erie Insurance, Wabtec, E.E. Austin & Son, ErieBank, Knox Law, Little Caesar's/Dickey's BBQ, McInnes Rolled Rings and Northwest Bank. To say that we were astonished by your generosity to Maria House Project during the Erie Gives Drive on August 13th is an understatement! As a result of your contributions, we ranked #8 out of 391 non-profit agencies in terms of the amount donated to us (\$102,701.47) and #6 in the number of donors (358)! Those are incredible numbers for such a tiny yet powerful program like MHP! Of course all of our power comes from Our Lord through you as you share your blessings with us. These results are a reflection of the exceptional quality of our supporters, like you, who make up the Maria House community! *God always remembers those who remember the less fortunate and who care "for" them rather than simply care "about" them. Our deepest thanks for caring "for" our men!*



Bob Boeh



**Bob Boeh,
Mike Batchelor (The Erie Community
Foundation), Joe Tarquinio**
Erie Gives 2019 Check Presentation

The first Father Pete's Cash Bingo Event was held on September 14th in Corry at the Moose Lodge. This fundraiser was held in lieu of our golf tournament and coordinated by MHP volunteer Marty Radock, Board Member Ed DiMattio and their committee. Players had an exciting evening enjoying various games and winning the numerous valuable cash prizes, as well as bidding on the large selection of beautifully donated baskets. As a result, MHP appreciated over \$5,000 in profits! The committee hopes to have another Bingo Event in early 2020 in the City of Erie as well as a second one in Corry. We'll keep you posted on future Bingo games! Sincere thanks to all of our sponsors who generously donated funds for cash prizes and to all of those who had fun playing while supporting MHP!

The MHP Board of Directors recently participated in a presentation by the Catholic Foundation of Northwest Pennsylvania regarding the establishment of a MHP Endowment Fund. As a result, we will be finalizing the details so that the mission of Maria House Project can be continued well into the future. Upon Father Pete's death in 2013, the former members of the St. Thomas More Club, founded by Father Pete at Gannon College, established a "Designated Endowment" called the "Saint Thomas More Club Fr. Pete Endowment". MHP is the beneficiary of the interest proceeds of that Endowment. The addition of an "Affiliated Agencies Endowment" will be a specific Maria House Project Endowment that differs from the Thomas More Club Endowment in that it provides potential access to the principal in an emergency situation. Perhaps you might like to remember Maria House Project in your estate planning when establishment has been finalized. We will keep you abreast of the details in future newsletters.

Finally, our annual Phone-A-Thon, one of our two major fundraisers, will take place on Thursday, November 7th from 6:00 to 8:00 pm. We ask for your prayers and financial support of Maria House Project. If we are unable to make contact with you on the 7th, an envelope has been included with this newsletter for your convenience. As you know, our program continues only because of your generous support and prayers. Thanks for continuing to walk this journey with us!

God Bless,

Bob Boeh - Board President

A Gift from God

by Sandi Matts



When asked about his recent marriage to Diane Nipper, Will said, "Diane is a gift from God and a gift of sobriety for me. Together our faith is stronger." These beautiful words give you an insight into the heart of Will Bergkamp. His heart is filled with the love of God and he lives his life as a servant, sharing daily God's goodness, truth and light.

Will and Diane first met at an AA function at Cooks Forest in 2013 and have been together ever since. They were married on September 14th and together as a couple they are a great inspiration. Diane, who works as a Registered Nurse and Will who is the Lodge Manager at Maria House offer hope to so many who battle with addiction.

When I asked Will how he came to Maria House, he said, "Now there is an interesting story." Will first met Father Pete back in 1990. Father talked with him about the program, but Will wasn't ready. Father gave him a card and asked him to give a call when he was. So, Will stuck the card in his wallet and went on with life.

Will continued with his addictive lifestyle until 2003 at which time he moved into a halfway house (in New York). He remained there until he reached one year in sobriety. When it was time for him to move forward and find a job, Will remembered the card in his wallet. He looked at it and said, "Maybe I should give him a call." So he did. He asked Father if there were any job openings at Maria House. Father asked him how long he had been sober, and Will proudly responded, "One Year." Father said, "Call me in another year."

So for the next year, Will worked hard at his sobriety. He became very active in AA and in Catholic Charities and a year later he gave Father Pete a call. The rest is history. In October Will celebrates fourteen years with Maria House.

I chuckled when Will shared this story. That was so much like Father Pete. His answers were always a few simple words but carried with them great challenges.

I asked Will what working at Maria House means to him and he said, "I love working here and it humbles me to know that I am helping to keep Father Pete's mission alive. It keeps me involved in God's work and it keeps me aware of where I came from."

Will is currently aware of another challenge. On October 15th he underwent surgery for stage two prostate cancer. When asked how he feels about that, he said, "I am not fearful. God got me through open heart surgery in 2017 and this is another event where I have a chance to turn it over. It's another opportunity for me to strengthen my faith. If I make it through, I know God has something more for me to do."

Please join us in praying for Will and Diane as they journey forward. We pray for a successful surgery and that their lives together will always be blessed with love, laughter, happiness.



Sandi Matts

Tim Flynn was raised north of Pittsburgh by wonderful parents who were very involved with their church. He had an idyllic childhood, but unfortunately his father passed away when he was 8 years old. His mom had to raise him by herself and eventually after the insurance money was gone, Tim's family ended up living in the housing project.

When Tim went to high school he was exposed to alcohol and drugs. As Tim started using marijuana and mind-altering chemicals, his school performance rapidly went from A's and B's to D's and F's.

After graduating in 1975, Tim landed a job at a metal finishing plant as a steelworker. He then got involved with serious drinking, going from bar to bar with fellow steelworkers which gradually progressed to blackout drinking. His work performance declined. Eventually, during one of his blackouts he was arrested and ended up in jail. While he was in jail, Father Peterson came to see him. He convinced Tim to come to Maria House Project. Tim thought that Father Pete was a kindly old priest who was a bit naïve and really didn't know much about the real world, but he took Father's offer. It was not until years later that he realized how wise Father Pete was.

After he successfully completed the Orientation program at the Diocesan Lodge, he transferred at a halfway house for two months. He later moved to his own apartment in Erie and spent the next 12 years sober. He worked at a plastics place and then went to school at EIT for electronics. He then worked at Spectrum Control, Bush Industries, and Bliley Electric until the end of the decade.

Then things took a turn for the worse. First, his family situation came apart, then he got laid off and found it impossible to get a job. Consequently, the next ten years became a blur. He took all of his confidence, training and years of sobriety and rolled it up in a ball and threw it in the garbage. He started living in motels and when he could not afford it ended up homeless. He was scared, humiliated and lonely.

In 2014, he was injured on a job and could not work and had no place to go or ability to pay rent. He remembered his time at Maria House Project. He knew that Father Pete had passed away so he spoke with Joe Tarquinio who accepted him at the Diocesan Lodge again.

He started to attend AA meetings again and renewed his relationship with God. Something started slowly coming back for him: it was his sense of purpose in life and his self-respect. Once again life had more meaning. Tim had gone full circle from where he started over 20 years ago. He does not look at his experiences as a liability but an asset to helping others.

On Thanksgiving Day 2019, Tim will celebrate five years of uninterrupted sobriety. He is grateful to the Maria House program and staff for taking a chance on a broken man. Tim said one of the great joys of being part of Maria House is the opportunity to serve those who are suffering from the effects of substance and alcohol abuse. He can relate to these men who went through the same meat grinder as he did.

Tim stated that when he was a young man he thought of service as something one did for their country, in the military or some public agency. Serving God seemed nothing more than a polite phrase used by those without knowledge of the real world that the rest of us live in. Being a little older, life has shown him just how mistaken he was in his thinking. Tim feels that the world doesn't get much more real than the men who come to Maria House, looking to change their lives.

MHP would like to **congratulate Tim** for receiving the Susan P. Esper Person of the Year Award from the Mental Health Association of Northwest PA at Erie County's 16th Annual Recovery Celebration on September 17, 2019.



Tim Flynn - Susan Esper Person of the Year Award Winner

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



**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7
6:00PM TO 8:00PM**

All funds benefit and support the Maria House Project ministry serving men suffering from the effects of drug and alcohol abuse, gambling, incarceration, homelessness, and/or mental and emotional illness

2019 PHONE-A-THON

*"The future will be no more important than today, not in its work
or ministry or prayer.*

No moment is more important or valuable than the present moment."

Msgr. James Peterson