



Serving up the Gospel at home and abroad

By Lou Baldwin

Even if St. Francis of Assisi never really did say, “Preach the Gospel always, if necessary use words,” it isn’t a bad philosophy. If you want an example of how that is done effectively, check out Tim Masterson, a longtime bartender at Joclyn’s in Media.

He’s done lots of other things too, but this is a job he truly loves and it doesn’t interfere with his true vocation — trying to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ through action, not words. In his spare time he visits some of the poorest sections of the globe, putting into action to the best of his ability the corporal works of mercy.

Originally from Glenolden and a public school graduate with further college education, he now lives in Prospect Park and worships at Blessed Virgin Mary Church, Darby. In recent years he has visited Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Peru three times, and Laos and Costa Rica once.

For charitable distribution he depends on fundraising; the actual travel and living expenses come out of his own pocket. His next fundraiser will be on his home turf at Joclyn’s, on Sept. 27.

“He is really doing a lot of good and I hope people will support him,” said Father Joseph Corley, pastor of Blessed Virgin Mary. “He is a man who is putting his faith into action. He does all kinds of work for the parish, for example delivering items for the St. Vincent de Paul Society. He is unbelievably generous and inspires others to be the same.”

Masterson really started on his outreach to other countries after a 2006 visit to Southeast Asia exposed him to the needs.

One of a family of six, his work took on special significance after the death of his older brother Jim, from a fall in 2008. After that he established the James J. Masterson Foundation which funnels funds he raises to various charitable efforts.

“My brother was a caring person, a guy that was always helping somebody,” Masterson said. “He was a good guy, he taught me how to be a good Catholic. He was a role model; we were like twins.”

Just like twins, they fought as kids. “Of course we did,” he said. “We fought like crazy, we are Irish Catholics. I can’t tell you how often he kicked my butt, but we never held a grudge.”



Tim Masterson (left at rear) visits an orphanage in Puerto Maldonado, southeastern Peru in the Amazon jungle.

The funds he raises are mostly through family, friends, fundraisers at Joclyn’s and wherever else he can. He’s not above salvaging beverage cans or anything else that can be sold for scrap to help the poorest of the poor.

He’s bought about 80 water purification kits and distributed many of them to schools and hospital or other charities in Peru because polluted water is one

of the major causes of disease in poor countries. One site that stuck in his mind is a little orphanage run by a priest in rural Peru. It’s in a former brothel and the boys he cares for are children of prostitutes.

He also tries to help Smile Train, a charity through which doctors treat third-world children with cleft palate. The big need is food assistance, because the doctors can’t operate on children who are at risk because of severe malnourishment.

He’d like to visit Haiti next. As a guy who is always thinking of something different, he wants to help provide a bit of employment in Haiti by facilitating the start of a sandal factory, making very practical “Ho Chi Minh sandals” out of old tires, which were the footwear of choice in wartime Vietnam. He’s also tried to assist veterans here at home through Veterans Comfort House.

Not everything he does works the way he hoped but he keeps trying.

Faith plays a big part in what he does, and prayer is a constant with him. He still has the crucifixes from the funerals of his father and brother and when he prays.

“They remind me of where they are and where I want to go,” Masterson said.

His most constant devotion is to the Sacred Heart. This is so important he buys scads of the little Sacred Heart felt badges enclosed in plastic and gives them to others, maybe somebody he meets on the street, maybe a troubled soul he encounters at the bar.

In the end, “helping people isn’t about ego, it’s about promoting Christ,” he said. “When I help them I don’t ask if they are Catholic or not and I don’t hit people on the head with the Bible, I just do what I have to do.”

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Talks promote sainthood cause for patron of addiction recovery

The priest who works on the cause for sainthood of Matt Talbot, a Catholic model for people recovering from addiction, visited the Philadelphia area in early August.

The Philadelphia units of the Calix Society, a support group for Catholics in recovery, sponsored the visit of Father Brian Lawless from Ireland at a Mass and talk Aug. 5 at St. Gabriel Church in the Grays Ferry section of Philadelphia.

The previous day he spoke at St. Luke the Evangelist Church in Glenside.

At Malvern Retreat House on Aug. 7, the priest celebrated Mass and spoke at a dinner that followed.

Donations at the events supported Father Lawless' apostolate of spreading the word about addiction recovery and the cause for Matt Talbot's canonization. Prayer intentions were also collected and sent to Dublin, Ireland and placed near the tomb of Talbot, who has been declared "venerable" by the church, the first step toward possible sainthood.

High costs force closure of West Philadelphia church

Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church in West Philadelphia closed permanently as a Catholic place of worship Aug. 1, due primarily to its high cost of upkeep.

The church was built in 1887 and

had been the home of Our Lady of the Rosary Parish in the neighborhood around its location at 63rd and Callowhill Streets. That parish was merged with the former Our Lady of Victory Parish in 2005 and renamed Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.

The arrangement lasted until January 2013 when the parish merged with St. Cyprian Parish and became a worship site for occasional liturgies. At that time the parish became responsible for maintaining Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.

In a statement from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia released Aug. 3, St. Cyprian reported it spent \$35,000 in the past year to keep up with "the deteriorated condition of the building" and projected the costs "to rise prohibitively over the course of time."

The costs were compounded by St. Cyprian's "lack of parish funding to maintain the OLBS church building," according to the statement.

The ongoing expenditures "would have forced staffing cuts at St. Cyprian Parish and jeopardized the stability of vital ministerial programs such as outreach to the poor."

While Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament at the time of its merger served fewer than 296 worshipers for typical Sunday Masses (based on the 2011 "October count" census of Mass-goers) in its large, costly church, St. Cyprian

Parish hosted 690 for Sunday Masses last year. But its parishioners also worship in a large church building built in 1915, which also must be maintained.

The St. Cyprian pastoral and finance councils, together with the pastor, Msgr. Federico Britto, requested that the archdiocese close Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. The archdiocesan Council of Priests and Archbishop Chaput reviewed the proposal to close the church and the archbishop made the final decision last month.

The archdiocese's statement did not indicate when or whether Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church would be sold. When it merged with St. Cyprian, the buildings, assets and debts of OLBS transferred to St. Cyprian, so the parish leaders and pastor would decide on its future in a way that would benefit "continued parish viability and sustainability" of St. Cyprian's.

Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament would be a beautiful church for any religious congregation, but also an expensive one to maintain.

A buyer could use it for a nonreligious purpose as long as it was not a "sordid" usage, according to the official decree issued by the archdiocese at the time of closure.

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