

Boost-A-Month Club

September 2015

Glenmary Home Missioners

Missioners Meet Mission Needs at Racetracks

Mission can be defined in different ways. With this truth in mind, Glenmary Fathers Chet Artysiewicz and Don Tranel minister in two places that are not far from Glenmary Headquarters in Cincinnati, but in other ways are in a different world. They are two horse-racing tracks—Belterra Park in Cincinnati and Turfway Park in Florence, Ky.

“The tracks have a real feel of mission,” says Father Chet. And Father Don adds, “I really look forward to being with the people there.”

Not many people would consider racetracks to be likely locations for mission and ministry, but the two priests see the importance of bringing the Church to any place where there is a need. Both work in Glenmary administration in Cincinnati, but they have the hearts of missioners. In addition to their service as president and development director, they feel called to continue reaching out to people in spiritual or material need.

The opportunity at the racetracks began with a story and a question from Bishop Joseph Binzer, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. He related to them that Father Frank Niehaus, a deceased archdiocesan priest, had been a great lover of horse racing and the people affiliated with that sport. For this reason and more, he had launched a ministry to area racetracks after retiring—a ministry that flourished from the late 1990s until his death in 2013. When the bishop asked if they could help continue this ministry by celebrating Mass at the tracks, Father Chet and Father Don said they would do as much as their schedules allowed.

Cincinnati native Steve Hater and others had worked with Father Niehaus in his ministry, which the priest called “Backstretch Works of Mercy.” When Steve was a child, he was a member of Father Niehaus’ parish. He says his family became friends with their pastor because of his dynamic outreach to others. So when the priest decided after retirement to reach out to racetrack people, Steve was happy to help him.

He is also a former racehorse owner who continues to attend weekend liturgies at the tracks because he is drawn to the spirit of the community.

(Continued on reverse side.)

Many Ways to Serve

In this newsletter issue, I happen to be part of the story we are sharing. I’m very glad and humbled that we’ve had the chance to serve the people at two Greater Cincinnati racetracks.

But Father Don Tranel and I, along with senior member Father Bob Hare, are far from the first Glenmarians who have carried out ministries beyond their assignments when they’ve seen the need. For example, this is true of missioners with whom I have worked in administrative roles over the last four years—as well as our predecessors.

When Glenmarians work in these administrative positions, they do it with the understanding that missioners typically need to take their turns in areas such as leadership, vocations, formation and development so that fellow priests and brothers can stay in the mission fields and continue their vital work.

That doesn’t change the fact, though, that the foremost reason we *all* joined Glenmary was to be with and serve people in spiritual and material need in home mission areas. Working in other, supporting roles sometimes is just another means of ensuring the future of our mission efforts.

On the other hand, as Father Don says, we have the ongoing desire to “keep a foot” in pastoral ministry. And so we still find extra time and ways, with the guidance of the Spirit, to reach out to people needing our assistance.

Thank you again for being our co-missioners as we continue answering God’s call to home mission ministry.



Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Chet".

Father Chet Artysiewicz
President

➔ 'God Sent (These Priests) When We Needed Them'

In addition to celebrating Mass on Sunday at Turfway and Belterra, Father Niehaus and Backstretch Works of Mercy also met the material needs of workers at the racetracks, giving them clothing or food when they were in need.

And today's Backstretch group—managed by Steve and made up of longtime participants as well as new people he has recruited—continues these efforts. Another ongoing highlight of this ministry has been a Christmas party for hot-walkers, exercise riders and stall workers—as many as 200 individuals who toil long hours for low wages.

"The spirit at the racetracks can be traced in large part to Father Niehaus' work and the fact that so many people have benefited from this ministry," Steve says.

While some of the racetrack workers live at the tracks, the faith communities also include horse owners and trainers, public-address announcers, ushers, ticket-takers, veterinarians, and others—like Steve—who knew Father Niehaus.

"I've brought Glenmary students to help me set up for Mass," says Father Chet, "and they get a good picture of how 'church' doesn't have to happen in a church building."

Like many faith communities, the racetrack Catholics often share coffee and doughnuts after Mass, which contributes to the sense of belonging for people who have come from many different places.

Unlike more typical Glenmary missions, both racetracks are in areas that are heavily Catholic. But even

so, because of the nature of the work they do, it would be difficult if not impossible for many in the racetrack communities to attend weekend liturgies and receive the sacraments—if not for Father Chet's and Father Don's willingness to bring Mass to these locations. That's especially true of those who live there.

Glenmary senior member Father Bob Hare and other area priests have also been valuable contributors as willing substitutes, periodically saying Mass when Father Chet and Father Don have been unable to attend.

Father Don says he enjoys the open pavilions where they worship, often within sight of horses and riders performing their morning workouts. He has come to realize that those who attend see their access to Mass and the sacraments as a privilege and not a convenience.

"I love going," he says.

"They have a real sense of community and a sense of family. They look forward to coming to Mass and seem to enjoy each other's company. I like being able to keep a foot in pastoral ministry, so I'm very glad to be part of it."

Steve recalls that in Father Niehaus' ministry, "He did what Jesus asked all of us to do." And he is grateful to Father Chet and Father Don—as well as Father Bob and the other area priests—for helping that ministry continue.

"They've been godsend," Steve says. "What they have done has enabled us to stay together. I don't know if this falls into the description of mission work, but God sent them when we needed them."



Father Don Tranel celebrates Mass with members of the racetrack faith community at Belterra Park's pavilion in Cincinnati.

BAM

Spotlight

➔ This month the **BAM Spotlight** is on you and all BAM members as a thank-you for your ongoing support of Glenmary's home mission ministry. "As we look to the future, we will continue counting on the faithful, generous and dependable 'BAM-ers' who help keep our missions and ministries up and running," says Father Don Tranel, director of development.

Are you willing to step into the Spotlight? Periodically, letters are sent to BAM members asking them to share how they first became involved with Glenmary and why they continue to support Glenmary's mission. If you would like to share your own Glenmary connection, please contact Dale Hanson at 513-881-7491 or dhanson@glenmary.org.