

Brother John T. Hart (Brother Capistran) 1923 – 2015



At around 8:10 Wednesday morning, our brother, John Hart (Capistran) passed away. On October 20, 2015, John was admitted to Baptist Hospital East with severe pains in his abdomen. The doctors removed a good amount of fluid from John. He was diagnosed with inoperable cancer. The doctor, in the presence of Peter Campbell, told John that surgery was out of the question. The doctor did not recommend chemo, but rather palliative care. John accepted the news peacefully. He was gifted in life with a talent the Gallup Strengths Finder calls *command*. People with *command* are usually very well grounded, know what they want and are able to let others know what they want. And they get it! Upon hearing the diagnosis, John knew what he wanted. He told Peter Campbell, "I am not going back to Ryken House. You all won't be able to take care of me. I want to go to Nazareth Home." John spent the last five days of his life at Nazareth Home.

Every year we send an appeal letter to our alumni asking them to support of our retired Brothers. The letter I was asked to write in 2014 featured John. I only met John in 2002 during his visit to Ryken House, so I asked him to give me some background so I could write the letter. At the time I didn't realize that John was providing us with a review of his life. He wrote,

*"My life for the past seventy years has been pretty much that of a gypsy,
living in various locations on three continents as a Xaverian Brother."*

Our self-proclaimed *gypsy* responded "to the call of God to live a life of love in faith and trust as a disciple of Jesus in the Congregation of Saint Francis Xavier." (FP) Multi-talented, John taught elementary school at Saint Teresa's in Brooklyn where his natural *command* evoked the attention of the sixty or so students he had in class, at the same time instilling in them the discipline they would

need for life. Many of his former students sent their reminiscences of John with their donations. I sent their notes to John. He enjoyed them!

John was a school Brother who loved his call as a teacher, Athletic Director, counselor and treasurer. Sanguine in disposition, John's zeal was a constant as was his humility. It appears that John truly listened to God in his personal prayer as well as God's voice expressed in the life of the Congregation. John shared that while stationed at St. Xavier, he felt the call to go to Africa. And he did. From 1955-1959 John ministered in both Uganda and Kenya. For John, Africa was not just a personal project, but rather a real call to the mission of the Congregation. While still at Saint X, he mobilized his students. He educated them to the needs of Africa and had them buy seeds that could be planted in Africa thus giving life to the African people. That was a powerful connection.

Upon return from Africa, John's call took him back to the familiar ministries at St. John's, Shrewsbury, Malden and Xaverian Brothers, Westwood. Again John would feel the call to the periphery and volunteered for mission work at Saint Joseph's Indian School in South Dakota where he ran a home for neglected children. John would then return to Massachusetts and spend the next ten years at Saint John's Prep (1976-1986)

In his notes to me, John wrote, " Now, there comes a time, perhaps more than once in one's life, that you know it's time to move on. But most often the question is where and why?" John sensed a need to deepen his response to God in solitude and prayer and was granted a sabbatical year that he spent living as a Trappist monk at the Abbey of Our Lady and St. Samson on Caldey Island, England. (1987-1988)

*Stand ready to answer God when God asks you
if you are available for Him to become more present in your life
and through you to the world.*

Upon return to the States, John's passion for mission would lead him to Rochester, NY where he spent two years in charge of a Catholic Worker House ministering to the homeless. John would spend one more year at Xaverian Brothers, Westwood before going to England where he served as General Treasurer and later as Director of the house in Twickenham.

*The humble man takes whatever there is in the world that helps him
to find God and leaves all the rest aside. Humility consists in being
precisely the person you actually are before God.*

- Thomas Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation.

John's life, I believe, exemplifies the above words of Merton. John knew he was not perfect. He knew he needed prayer and contemplation. He developed these spiritual practices throughout his life. During my last two years in Louisville, I participated in the faith sharing group at Ryken House. I remember as if it were just last night, John's talking about his love of God and how he experienced God's love in his life.

The Brothers John lived with at Ryken House paid him the greatest tribute in saying, "John shows us what it means to be our brother." Indeed he did. He was their friend, their personal attendant, nurse and confidant.

The Universal Church is about to celebrate the feasts of All Saints and All Souls. We do not need to have a postulator to present John's cause for sainthood. John, like so many of our Brothers, was a saint among us. Let us pray that John now experiences the peace of Christ and through Christ the love of God.

May his soul and the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace. Amen

Brother Ed Driscoll
10-28-2015

Brother John F. O'Brien, CFX (Brother Brice)
1926 – 2015



Brother John was born on August 2, 1926 and passed away on November 6, 2015. John was diagnosed with Merkel Cell Carcinoma, a cancer of the skin that occurs mostly in the elderly and spreads very quickly to other part of the body. John's cancer took him in a little over two weeks.

John was born in Worcester, Massachusetts. Responding to his initial call to religious life, John entered the Xaverian Brothers' Novitiate upon graduating from Sacred Heart Academy in 1944. His initial formation included university studies in history and humanities at Catholic University where he earned his BA in 1950 and his Masters in 1958.

God desires to manifest His love to the peoples of the world in these times.

Fundamental Principles

These words from our Fundamental Principles characterize John's relationship with all whom he met--confreres, students, colleagues on the faculty. John was a very magnanimous individual. Last year Pope Francis shared with a group of students from Jesuit schools an exhortation on magnanimity. Being magnanimous means having a big heart and greatness of mind. Being magnanimous means having great ideals and will to do great things that God asks of us individually. John had a big heart and greatness of mind. He was a life-long learner. In his life, John always sought God's will be it during his first mission at Flaget High School in Louisville, Cardinal Hayes in the Bronx or in the schools of his beloved New England: Malden, Xaverian Brothers High School, the Prep and Saint John's, Shrewsbury. John loved teaching and was very effective with students. He brought his big heart and mind to the classroom.

As a life-long learner, it is no surprise that John would re-create himself for ministry by earning a degree in Library Science that prepared him to serve at Saint Peter's College, New Jersey and in the Diocese of Monterey, California as archivist and then as vice chancellor.

If I may refer to an older parlance, John was a good community man.

Cultivate a sincere friendship and a warm affection for your brothers for it is the manifestation of honest

fraternal concern and love for each other that you and they will show you are sons of Ryken and disciples of Jesus.

Fundamental Principles

I had the privilege of witnessing John's "doing what it takes to make community happen" both in the community at Venice as well as at Ryken House. He was always interested in and supportive of his Brothers. John had a great sense humor that allowed him to be able to give and take. The repartee between John Hart and John O'Brien were always predictable and funny. At Ryken House John Hart would bait John about something John O'Brien had said or in most cases proclaimed. Once trapped in his own words by John Hart, John O'Brien would just laugh.

Day by day you will need to renew your response.

Fundamental Principles

John projected a basic happiness and joy for the life he chose in 1944. It is quite evident that John renewed his call through personal prayer, community life, and ministry to others. John also "discovered that God's ways are not his ways, God's thoughts are not his thoughts." (FP) I know it was painful for him to move to Ryken House when I asked him to do so. These words were so very true in John's final illness. In the end, I am sure that John received the special grace that we all hope for...

... to surrender yourself trustingly into the arms of your Father who knows you, understands you and loves you.

May John and all our faithful departed experience the peace of Christ. I have this image of John Hart and John O'Brien bantering in front of the Lord and Jesus just smiling as most of us did while they were with us. May he rest in peace.

In Christ,

Brother Edward Driscoll, C.F.X.

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