

## From “Father” to “Dad”

### Persian Gulf 1990

“General Quarters, General Quarters, all hands man your battle stations. This is not a drill.” I thought to myself, I’m only 41 years old. I’m too young to die.

Less than a week after Saddam Hussein ordered his forces to invade Kuwait on August 2, 1990, our battleship, USS WISCONSIN (BB-64), left Norfolk and began her first deployment across the Atlantic in more than 33 years. WISCONSIN, under the command of Captain Jerry Blesch, made the 8,500-mile transit to the Persian Gulf at 25 knots, arriving on station, ready for combat, just 16 days after departure.

Fortunately, our ship was not attacked at 0200 that night by the Iraqis as we took up station in the Persian Gulf. Because our hull was protected by 12.1” of armor, we were not afraid of Exocet anti-ship missiles like the ones the Iraqis fired at the USS STARK (FFG-31) on May 7, 1999, killing 37 sailors aboard. However, the silkworm missiles that Iraq acquired from China posed a far greater threat due to their unusually large 11,000-pound warheads.



Anyone who has ever served in a combat zone has had to ponder the possibility of being killed or wounded. What I was unaware of the night “General Quarters” sounded was the presence of a far greater threat that was silently attacking me from within.

It was around a month after we arrived in the Gulf that I felt warm and discovered that I had a 99.9-degree temperature. When the fever did not go down after two days, I reported to sick bay where an X-ray revealed an irregularity on my left lung. I was prescribed an antibiotic and was told to take it easy for a week or two.

Three weeks later my temperature only continued to rise and I found myself losing weight and developing night sweats. When our ship’s senior dental officer, Commander Jeff Turner, recommended that I get checked out on the hospital ship also operating in the Gulf, I arranged to be flown to the USNS COMFORT (T-AH-20) for a consult.

After undergoing a CT scan that provided a far better picture of what was going on inside me, I was medevaced from the Persian Gulf via Riyadh and the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany to the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) in Bethesda, Maryland. The day I arrived in Bethesda had to have been one of the most depressing days of my life. Because it was the weekend and I had to wait until Monday before having a biopsy to determine the exact nature and extent of what doctors thought was a fast-growing cancer, I had no idea if I was going to live or die. All day Saturday I was alone and depressed in my hospital room while outside it was cold and rainy. I was able to call my Mom to let her know that I was medevaced; that the doctors thought I had cancer; and that a biopsy would be performed early in the week to assess my condition. Mom was living at that time in our

Naval Base Norfolk row house, next door to the home of my Commanding Officer, Jerry Blesch, and his wife, Karen, whom she loved dearly. Mom was never happier since my Dad died over ten years earlier than she was living there befriended by the base Catholic chaplain, Father Pat Fryer, and so many kind and supportive Navy families.

Around seven o'clock that Saturday evening, the door to my hospital room burst open, and in walked my friend Major Dan Keenan and other members of his helicopter crew. Dan, after having served on active duty where he flew CH-53Es based in New River, North Carolina when we met in 1980, was now a civilian airline pilot while still flying heavy-lift helicopters in the Marine Corps Reserve based at Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. When Dan heard that I was hospitalized, he filed a flight plan that routed him to Bethesda to "practice medevac procedures." When he came to my bedside, he brought a basket filled with wine, fruit, candy, and condoms. After examining the contents of the basket, I told Dan I had to get better otherwise who would keep him out of trouble.

When Dan returned to his helicopter he did something that ordinarily only takes place in the movies. Knowing where my room was in the hospital, he took off and hovered within sight of my window, offered me a crisp Marine Corps salute, and flew back to Willow Grove Air Station. After his visit and unforgettable farewell, there was no way I could remain sad and lonely.

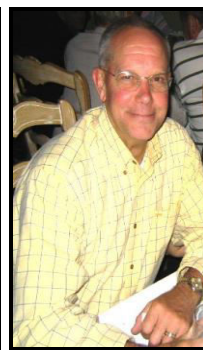
Dan was only one of hundreds of family members and friends who visited, called, or sent cards during my hospitalization. After a biopsy and laparotomy confirmed I was suffering from stage 1-B Hodgkin's Lymphoma, I underwent two months of radiation therapy at the National Institutes of Health while living with my close friend, Chaplain Pete Pilarski, the NNMC Command Chaplain. Unfortunately, the treatments failed to halt the growth of the lymphatic cancer. The only other viable alternative was to undergo six months of chemotherapy that would either save or kill me. It was another former active duty Marine, FBI Special Agent Jeff Holmes, who would carry me home following my chemo treatments and lay me in my bed. Because Jeff felt that I never stopped being his chaplain, he gave meaning to the expression, "Once a Marine, always a Marine."



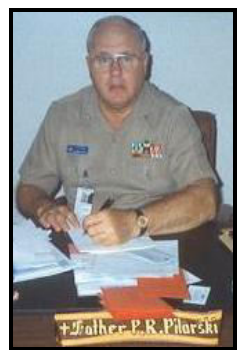
Mom with Jerry and Karen Blesch



Dan Keenan on right



Jeff Holmes



Pete Pilarski

While I was undergoing chemo treatments I detached USS WISCONSIN (BB-64) that was slated for decommissioning and reported to Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, just a ten-minute walk away from the townhouse I had purchased in Arlington during a previous tour of duty in the Chief of Chaplains Office. I was happy to be working again with Captain Don Krabbe, the Chaplain of the Marine Corps, with whom I served in the Sixth Fleet; as well as for the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Carl E. Mundy, Jr., with whom I served from late 1981 to early 1982 when he commanded the 36th Marine Amphibious Unit.

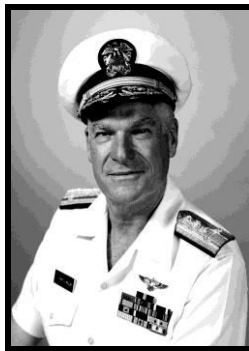
Admiral Kelso with whom I served in the Sixth Fleet from 1985 to 1986 was also the Chief of Naval Operations at that time. He and his wife, Landess, took me into their quarters at the Washington Navy Yard when my mom, who had been looking after me, had to return to Pennsylvania to look after her mother who had become sick. I was also hosted in Bethesda by Chaplain Pete Pilarski; in Annapolis by Dora Lord with whom I worked at the Naval Academy; in Centreville, Virginia by Don and Dore

Krabbe, as well as in St. Michaels, Maryland by retired Vice Admiral Ed Waller and his wife Marty whom I kept in touch with since my Naval Academy days when Ed was the Superintendent.

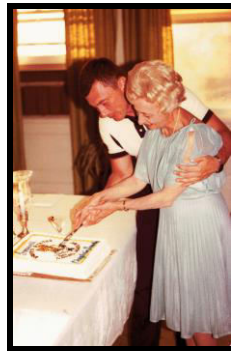
Even though I was very weak and had lost so much weight that I could have been cast in the role of a concentration camp prisoner, I continued to go to work for five to six hours every day. One day General Mundy called me down to his office to inquire how I was getting along. He knew that without the assistance of hand rails, I never could have made it to my office on the third floor particularly when the elevator was out of service. We chatted about old times when we deployed together for a NATO winter exercise north of the Arctic Circle along the Soviet border in Norway. When I was about to get up from the chair in his office, we both noticed that my shoestring became untied. Without hesitating a moment, he bent down on one knee and tied my shoe that I could not do owing to the effects of the chemotherapy on the fingers of my right hand. By chance, as he was helping me up, I caught sight of a casket being drawn by horses en route to a burial service at Arlington National Cemetery just outside his window. As my gaze shifted from the casket to the Commandant, he looked me square in the eyes and said, "Gene, you're going to beat this cancer. God has more work in store for you and the Corps needs you." Feeling almost like an apostle who just had his feet washed by Jesus, I returned to my office determined that I was not going to go down without a fight.



Admiral Kelso & General Mundy



Vice Admiral Waller



With Dora Lord



Arlington National Cemetery

After my last chemo treatment in September of 1991, I developed pneumonia and felt all my systems closing down. I weighed less than 130 pounds and looked like "death warmed over." Family members and friends stopped by during the week to see me, many with the belief that I might only have a few days left to live.

### Looking Back in Time

As I believed my death was imminent, I could not help but reflect upon my life experiences. I thought that week about how fortunate I was to have grown up with a loving mother and father, brother and sister. One important lesson I gleaned from years of pastoral counseling is that many adult problems are rooted in our home experiences. I was grateful that destructive issues like abuse, alcoholism, and infidelity were all foreign to my upbringing.



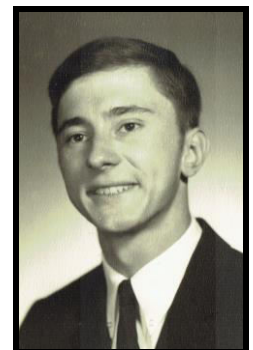
With cousin Karen



First Holy Communion



Tapta holding Patty's son Michael



BMHS Graduation

My paternal grandmother whom we called “Tapta” lived in the adjoining duplex. She left her hometown of Nowy Sącz at the age of 16 and before she was 20 she met and married my grandfather, Valenty Gomułka, who emigrated from Krosno and disembarked at Ellis Island on March 25, 1905. While my paternal grandfather died shortly before I was born on October 17, 1948, it was my grandmother who programmed my tongue and my brain for language learning by conversing with me only in Polish.

My father worked as a rigger for the Bethlehem Steel Corporation in Johnstown, Pennsylvania where both he and my mom were born after their parents emigrated from Poland around the beginning of the twentieth century. My mom married my dad two years after he lost his first wife who died before giving birth to their third child. My sister Patty was only six and my brother Dick was four when our dad married my mom. Even though my sister Patty was 11 years older and my brother Dick was 9 years older than me, I felt as close to them as children who have the same biological father and mother.

In addition to my parents, brother and sister, and two grandmothers, I also grew up with five aunts and uncles and eight cousins who all lived in the Johnstown area. My mom’s best friend was her older sister, Jenny, who was also my godmother.



Mom and Dad in 1973



My immediate family in 1971



Mom and Jenny

## Pursuing a Vocation

While my father did not become a butcher like his father who co-owned and operated a Polish meat and grocery store, he made it clear he did not want me or my brother to work in the steel mills or mines that employed most of the workforce in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. When my brother graduated from high school and enlisted in the Navy when I was 10 years old, I thought that someday I too might want to serve in the Navy. Before I pursued that idea, however, I found myself inspired by a young priest, Father Bernard Przybocki, who was assigned to Saint Casimir Church where our family worshipped. I was ready to enroll in a high school seminary in Michigan where Father Bernard had studied when my brother, home on leave from the military, convinced my parents to send me to a local high school on the premise that I was too young to know what I wanted to do with my life.

Several years later I learned how many innocent boys who attended high school seminaries were groomed and preyed upon by homosexual priest faculty members during their period of psychosexual development. A number who were ultimately ordained (some of whom I know personally) went on to abuse teenage boys as they were sexually abused as teenagers. With the knowledge that the Catholic minor seminary system was a “hot house” in a sense for growing predator priests, I came to realize how fortunate I was that my brother convinced my parents to send me to Bishop McCort (BMHS) – a co-ed Catholic high school just 3 miles from our home.

It was during my senior year of high school that I took Marilyn Siska on a date to see the James Bond film, *Thunderball*, with Sean Connery. Marilyn was a junior with whom I played trumpet in the band. When I picked her up at her home during Christmas break, I gave her a pendant and chain as a

Christmas present. Twenty years later when her husband, Walt McClelland, told her he heard I was in the military and fighting cancer, she wrote me a letter; told me she still had the pendant I had given her; and prayed that I would get better. Her letter, along with letters, cards, phone calls, and visits from so many relatives and friends encouraged me to fight and to live.

Children sometimes want to know what their parents were like when they were their age. Some might ask, "What were you like in high school? What were your interests? Did you have any secret crushes?"

Even though I took Rita Leslie to the Junior and Senior Class Proms and went with Marilyn Siska to see *Thunderball*, I probably would have had more girlfriends had my self-esteem been higher. I think I would have had the courage to ask Maureen Berry or Linda Aust out on a date if had the self-confidence I gained years later while serving with the Marines. Unfortunately, like some guys, I mistakenly thought most girls in high school were only interested in jocks just like some girls even today think guys are only interested in cheerleaders. How much my misguided wisdom and low self-esteem might have psychologically influenced my decision to study for the priesthood I will never know.

As much as I liked girls and could see myself being a husband and a father, I continued throughout my high school years to have an interest in the priesthood. When the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese announced it was offering scholarships to young men who might someday be ordained priests, I took and passed a qualifying exam and was offered a seventy-five percent scholarship to Saint Francis College in Loretto, Pennsylvania located only 25 miles from my home. In 2001 the college was approved to change to become a university by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and was renamed Saint Francis University.

When I began my college studies in September of 1966 while living off-campus in Saint John Vianney Hall, a fraternity-type house for potential future priests, I truly believed that Jesus Christ was calling me to be a priest. While there were a few young men in the house whom I thought might be there to avoid being drafted and sent to Vietnam, I felt my motives were sincere and I found myself very happy. Although I was not excited about having to major in philosophy, I did enjoy taking Spanish courses as a college minor.

During my junior year of college, I was able to bring to completion a science project I undertook during my senior year of high school. After having come in third place in chemistry at the local science fair for developing an ionic propulsion rocket, my physics teacher asked me to enter the fair again only with a physics-based project. Having built and launched many Estes model rockets with my friend Dave Pentrack, I decided to build and launch a real rocket. Fortunately, I was able to secure the plans for an Alpha One rocket designed by the staff of the U.S. Army Artillery and Missile School in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. I obtained the necessary materials to build the 4½ foot rocket that weighed 9.42 pounds without fuel and 18.06 pounds with fuel. The most important part of the rocket was the nozzle with its converging and diverging angles that was fabricated by the Bethlehem Steel Corporation where my father was employed. It was that same steel company that would later make my chalice from brass that would be coated in nickel to look like stainless steel.

Even though I was able to replicate the Army's rocket in time for the science fair, I was not able to secure permission from the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) to launch it owing to the threat it posed to aircraft. Consequently, without evidence to show that the rocket actually worked, I failed to win the competition. Again, it was three years later that my college physics professor helped me secure permission to launch the rocket. It was launched from an abandoned strip mine and aimed to land in the middle of a nearby state park. Based on the location where it was recovered in Prince Gallitzin State Park, it appeared to have achieved its projected cutoff velocity of seven hundred miles per hour reaching an altitude in the area of 15,000 feet (approximately 3 miles).



Launching my Alpha One Rocket during my Junior Year of College

It was during my summers at Camp Cathedral, a camp for boys and girls operated by the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese, and at Upward Bound, a federal government-sponsored program for academically gifted high school students from low-income families, that I met some young women whom I came to like very much. Because we as college seminarians were not supposed to date co-eds on campus lest it conflict with our future commitment to celibacy, our summers were the only time we had a chance to socialize with women. Based on my feelings for three different women with whom I worked during five different summers, I believe I would have seriously dated these young women if priests were given the option of marrying.

### **A False Accusation**

The closest I ever came to leaving the seminary instead of pursuing my vocation to the priesthood occurred in my sophomore year of college. One day as I was walking to class, I was joined by my Greek professor, Father Pius Croce, TOR. We became friends owing to our common interest in both ancient and modern foreign languages. Pius took me by surprise when he said, "There's a rumor going around that you are having sex with a co-ed." I responded, "Really? Would you mind telling me who it is that I'm supposed to be screwing?" He said, "I was told her name is Ellen B-----n. Do you know her?" I said, "Ellen and I are in a Spanish play together, *El Baile*" (*The Dance*). *El Baile* was a two-hour play in Spanish with only four characters, two men and two women.

The only contact I ever had with Ellen was in the auditorium where we were rehearsing for the play. I told Pius that while I thought Ellen was a nice "Catholic" girl, I could never have any sensual thoughts about her let alone become sexually involved with her. I asked Pius to please track down the source of the defamatory rumor which, fortunately, he successfully did. He reported that an elderly Franciscan brother observed us dancing on stage and, when we disappeared behind the curtain, he assumed that we went backstage to make out "as all college kids do." Pius had the brother apologize both to me and to all the priests and brothers in the monastery, most of whom were aware of the rumor. I was so mad at being falsely accused that I told Pius I questioned whether I wanted to work the rest of my life with clergy who would bring false testimony against me. Pius reminded me that as a priest I was to model my life after Jesus Christ who suffered even more serious false accusations. I accepted his spiritual advice and continued my studies toward the priesthood without realizing how 36 years later a similar false accusation, about planning to get married in the Naval Amphibious Base Coronado Chapel on May 15, 2004, would result in my taking a leave of absence and later marrying.

### **The Celibacy Requirement**

One event, in particular, I recalled while I thought I was dying was a confessional experience with a priest in the college chapel. I confessed to having fantasized about making love with a woman who was in one of my college classes. In response, the priest counseled me to try to get to know her and possibly befriend her as a person instead of fantasizing about her as an object. When I told him I would like to do that but was not supposed to date because I was a seminarian, the priest was lost for

words. After a pregnant pause, he said, "All I can advise you to do is to try to control your sexual urges. Now for your penance say...."

During my four years as a seminarian in college and my four years as a theological student leading up to my ordination in 1974, I never had a lecture or class in which celibacy was honestly discussed. Because I believed I had a vocation from Christ to be a priest, I felt the so-called "charism" of celibacy would allow me to be happy and fulfilled in life even if I were not married with children. From the day I entered the seminary at the age of 17 until I promised celibacy at the age of 24, I was focused on becoming a priest and serving God and his people and gave little thought to personal needs for intimacy and love.

What the priest did not point out to me in the confessional, nor did any seminary spiritual director or professor, was that studies show that at any given time no more than 50 percent of priests practice celibacy.<sup>1</sup> The percentage is particularly high among clergy in Africa where the majority of priests are sexually active and countless priests have also fathered children. Studies that document how difficult it is for most priests, and even many bishops, to practice celibacy are generally not discussed by Catholic clergy or laity, let alone in Catholic seminaries.<sup>2</sup> Even though Church officials are keenly aware of the problem, few would admit to it as did Cardinal Jose Sanchez who served as Secretary for the Dicastery for the Clergy from 1991 to 1996. When he was interviewed on BBC television in 1993 and asked for his opinion on the studies that claimed that, at any one time, 45 to 50 percent of Catholic clergy are not practicing celibacy, his response was, "I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of those figures."<sup>3</sup>

### **Theological Studies in Rome**

During my senior year in college, my Bishop, James Hogan, offered to send me to Rome for my theological studies. After spending four years at St. Francis University which is only 25 miles from my home, I thought studying abroad would not only be a broadening experience but also a very exciting adventure. However, just before graduating from college, my father had a heart attack and I informed the bishop I could not go to Rome for theology as we discussed because I wanted to stay close to home where I could help my mother care for my father. Ten months later, when the bishop learned that my father's condition stabilized and I was acing all of my courses at the local major seminary, he asked if I would still be interested in studying in Rome. My father insisted that I accept the offer which I then did. Unfortunately, my bishop was told by the rector of the North American College that if I went to Rome, the Gregorian University would require that I repeat 1st Theology. Unwilling to do that, I told my bishop and parents I would stay at the local seminary. It was a month later that my bishop contacted me to say the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome (a.k.a. the "Angelicum") said they would be honored to accept all of my credits and admit me into 2nd Theology. Both my parents and I were delighted with this news. Four years later, when I completed my Licentiate the year after I was ordained, I believed I received a far better education at the "Ange" at which Pope John Paul II also attended than had I gone to the "Greg."

It is extremely rare for a seminarian to go to Rome in his second or third year of theology. When I was a young boy with the middle name of "Thomas," I chose Thomas Aquinas as my patron saint. Every year I would go to confession and receive Holy Communion on his feast day while also reading his biography. If you believe in the "Communion of Saints" as Christians profess in the Nicene Creed, you might be led to believe that my deep devotion to Thomas Aquinas dating back to my childhood had something to do with being sent to Rome where Thomas himself studied.

While I enjoyed the friendship of some women with whom I worked during the summers of my years in college, those types of working relationships ceased when I left the United States to study in Rome while residing at the Pontifical North American College (NAC), Vatican City State, from 1971 to 1975. I made friends not only with fellow students from different countries, but I also enjoyed the friendship of some priests, Swiss Guards, and residents of Rome.



My priest, student and Swiss Guard friends in Rome

Upon completion of second theology, after one year in Rome, my parents visited me for two weeks. We toured Rome, Florence, Assisi, Venice, and Luzern. While my father's heart condition limited him from walking at times, I was so happy that he and my mom were able to visit Europe for the first time in their lives. In the course of their visit, they discovered that I had acquired a Lambretta 150 that I rode back and forth to school every day. I was fortunate to have survived four minor accidents over four years, one that occurred the day before my parents' arrival. Even though traffic in Rome, like many major cities, can be hard to maneuver, the bike allowed me to maintain contact with new friends from many different countries living throughout the city.

When my parents returned to the United States, I flew to Great Britain where Monsignor John Strykowski, a close friend who worked in the Vatican Secretariat of State, arranged for me to work in a Polish parish in Leicester, approximately two hours northwest of London. The pastor, Monsignor Alexander Murat, immigrated to Great Britain after surviving five years in the concentration camp at Dachau. While my primary reason for working in Leicester was to improve my Polish, I ended up learning a lot of other lessons in the process. One lesson I learned that affects me to this day involves covering up evil deeds.

Many of the Poles in our Leicester parish fled to Great Britain at the beginning of World War II. Some of them worked for the Royal Air Force (RAF) and were deeply hurt when Prime Minister Winston Churchill prevented them from marching in the official [British Victory Parade in June 1946](#). Churchill did not want to anger Joseph Stalin whom the Polish Government in Exile blamed for the Katyn Massacre involving the mass executions of nearly 22,000 Polish military officers and intelligentsia prisoners of war carried out by the Soviet Union in April and May 1940. Even though the British and the Americans knew that the Germans were not responsible for the massacre, the lie was perpetuated for 50 years until 1990 when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev admitted that Stalin ordered the massacre. My animus toward church leaders and media executives and reporters who cover up clerical sexual abuse stems in part from the pain I sensed on the part of the Polish expatriates whose sufferings were covered up by the American and British governments and media.

When the time came for me to leave Leicester and return to Rome, I was very grateful not only for the Polish I had learned but also for the inspiration provided by my concentration camp survivor host. With just one year remaining before I would be asked to promise celibacy, I found it interesting that before I left, Monsignor Murat arranged for me to go out to the movies one evening with a very attractive parishioner who was around my age. He never did say why he arranged the encounter and I never asked.

It was during my second year in Rome that I met Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland, who introduced me to the future pope, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła. In addition to being invited to participate in Pope John Paul II's installation Mass on October 22, 1978, and celebrating Mass with him on various occasions in his private chapel, I also assisted him in baptizing the daughter of two close friends, Carol and Hans Roggen, who resided in Vatican City where Hans was a Wochtmeister in the Pontifical Swiss Guard.



Cardinal Wyszyński invited me to visit him in Warsaw in May of 1973. On the occasion of that visit, I regret the Polish government refused my request to meet with my second cousin, Władisław Gomułka, who ruled Poland from 1956 to 1970. Even though I never had the pleasure of meeting Władisław who died in 1982, I did return to Poland in 1994 when I was able to stay with his son, Ryszard, and his daughters, Ewa and Hania.



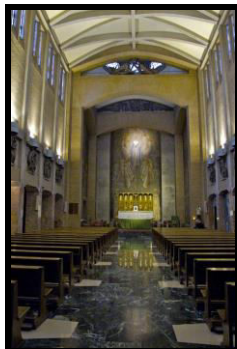
Władisław Gomułka With Stefan Wyszyński John Paul II & Wyszyński Cousins Hania, Ewa, Lucyna & Ryszard

Władisław Gomułka and Stefan Wyszyński were both nationalists who wanted the very best for their fellow Poles. Even though Wyszyński, the leader of the Catholic Church in Poland, and Gomułka, the *de facto* Polish head of state, sometimes found themselves at odds over church-state relations, they were both imprisoned by Stalin who probably would have had them executed had he not died in 1953. Almost immediately after Gomułka came to power in 1956, Wyszyński was released from prison and Gomułka allowed religious instruction to be offered in public schools. Unfortunately, they had a serious falling out in 1966 on the 1000th anniversary of Christianity in Poland. In response to a controversial letter the Polish bishops sent to the German bishops on the occasion of the Millennium, Gomułka sought retribution by rejecting Pope Paul VI's request to visit the country. Following this confrontation, the two nationalists never publicly reconciled before Gomułka fell from power in 1970. Aware of this history, I whispered to Wyszyński in Polish as we were being photographed in Rome in 1973, "It can now be said that Gomułka and Wyszyński are friends."

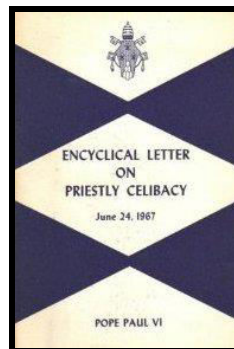
It was only a few weeks after my May 1973 visit to Poland that I was ordained a deacon in the North American College chapel in Vatican City State. Before my ordination, I had to meet with the rector of the seminary, Bishop James Hickey, and articulate the reasons the Church requires celibacy as a prerequisite for deacons who will later be ordained priests. Like the other 40 deacons from my class who met privately with the rector, I addressed the Christological, ecclesiastical, and eschatological reasons behind celibacy, all of which were articulated by Pope Paul VI in his 1967 Encyclical Letter *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*.<sup>4</sup>



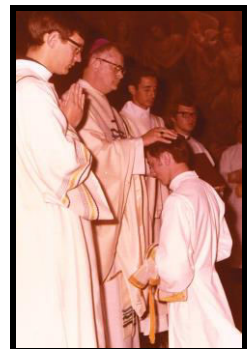
On far left performing at the Angelicum



NAC Chapel



Celibacy Encyclical



Diaconate Ordination

The Christological reason is that because Christ “remained throughout his own earthly life in a state of perfect virginity,” a priest can more fully imitate Christ by remaining celibate.<sup>5</sup> The ecclesiological reason is that without being involved in an “affective relationship” with another person, it is possible for a priest to be more available to serve the needs of his flock.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the eschatological reason is that by forgoing certain “superficial pleasures” that can come with married life, a celibate priest can be a sign of the “Kingdom of God” that lies beyond what is visible to us here and now on this earth.<sup>7</sup>

While I embraced these reasons in support of a celibate priesthood, it was years later when I was living alone that I came to question not one, but all three of these arguments for celibacy. I questioned the Christological argument because even though Christ himself did not marry or have children, he did not live alone as many diocesan priests do today, nor did he require celibacy of his apostles, including Peter whose mother-in-law he healed (Mark 1:29-31). While the ecclesiological argument is correct in saying that a celibate priest can be more available to his parishioners than a clergyman with a wife and children, the fact is that some married Protestant clergy with families are more available and dedicated than some celibate priests. Finally, I found the eschatological argument the weakest in so far as even though there are certain “pleasures” involved in married life, there are also many challenges and responsibilities that can make the life of a celibate priest far less demanding and stressful than caring for a spouse and children.

One of my Ukrainian friends, Andrij Onuferko, with whom I studied in Rome, decided not to be ordained a deacon because he could not accept celibacy. In so far as he was an Eastern Rite Catholic whose parents immigrated to the United States from Ukraine, the Roman Catholic Church, in keeping with the Papal Decree, *Ea Semper*, of June 14, 1907, which forbid the marriage of Eastern Rite Priests in North America, presented him with two options: either accept celibacy to serve as a priest in Pennsylvania where his family settled; or return to his parent’s homeland, marry, be ordained and risk being arrested or killed by the Communist government in power that outlawed the Ukrainian Catholic Church. Because neither of these options appealed to him, he left the seminary and moved to Belgium where he married, raised a family, was ordained a deacon, and worked for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in transmitting broadcasts to the Ukraine that was under Communist control until 1991. When Andrij visited Ukraine after the fall of Communism, he was ordained a priest and later immigrated with his family to Canada where the Canadian Roman Catholic bishops had no problem allowing married Eastern Rite priests to minister alongside celibate Roman Catholic priests.

When Ukrainian young men were not permitted to be married priests in the US, it had the same unintended consequence as happened in Roman Catholic Churches of attracting an inordinate number of homosexual candidates, many of who went on in time to abuse mainly teenage boys as documented in [Rev. Dr. Paul Sullins' 2018 Clergy Sex Abuse report](#). The Ukrainian Catholic Church has had to deal with costly sex abuse lawsuits in places where clerical celibacy was unjustly imposed upon its clergy. Many Eastern rite bishops, priests, and laity viewed this imposition of celibacy as a violation of the [1596 Union of Brest-Litovsk](#) which granted Ukrainian Catholics the right to maintain their Eastern rites and customs including a married clergy.

### **Our Lady of Victory Church (OLV)**

Following my ordination to the diaconate in May of 1973, I returned to the United States and served as a deacon at Our Lady of Victory Church (OLV) in State College, Pennsylvania, the same parish to which I would be assigned two years later following the completion of my Licentiate of Sacred Theology (S.T.L.) degree in Rome. State College is home to the Pennsylvania State University and Our Lady of Victory was the largest parish in the diocese at that time with over 2,000 families.

One of the two young associate priests in the parish in 1973 was later named a Monsignor. In 2010, after being ordained for some 40 years, he left the priesthood to marry. What many U.S. Catholics do not realize is that, unlike priests in Switzerland, Germany, and other countries that leave

and receive retirement benefits based on the amount of money that was deposited into a retirement fund over time, priests in the U.S. who leave are often not awarded one penny in retirement benefits. Because priest salaries are so low, the amount of money an ex-priest can collect from Social Security is very small. While many people might find this practice unjust, members of the hierarchy, particularly those with a homosexual orientation who have a hard time understanding why a priest would want to marry, view this practice as a deterrent to having priests leave.

After many positive pastoral experiences in the summer of 1973, I returned to Rome eager to be ordained a priest within a year. What I remember most about my year as a deacon was when my friend Monsignor John Strykowski invited me and another deacon to travel with him to Jerusalem for Holy Week and Easter. A deacon could not ask for a better present in anticipation of his upcoming ordination.

On July 13, 1974, I was ordained a priest in the Co-Cathedral of Saint John Gaulbert in my hometown along with two other deacons. I celebrated my first Mass the following day in my home parish, St. Casimir Church. After working for two months at Sacred Heart Church in Altoona, Pennsylvania, I returned to Rome to complete an S.T.L. that would qualify me to teach theology in a college, seminary, or university.



Priesthood Ordination



First Mass



Our Lady of Victory Church

It was during that final year in Rome as a graduate student that I was invited to serve as a contract priest with the United States Sixth Fleet. My weekend work aboard the flagship USS LITTLE ROCK (CG-4) and ashore with military families in the port of Gaeta planted the seeds of my future naval career. One of the Navy families I befriended and kept in touch with over the years was the Stevens Family. Rather than staying on board the ship on Saturday nights, Tom, Sharon, and their three young girls invited me to stay in their home. Tom Stevens, a Lieutenant Commander at the time, went on to be promoted to Rear Admiral and served as Commander Naval Security Group Command. Cryptologists like Tom Stevens like to point out how their predecessors broke the Japanese code and helped win the Battle of Midway that marked the turning point of World War II in the Pacific.

Following the completion of my Licentiate in Sacred Theology (S.T.L.), I returned to the diocese and was assigned again to Our Lady of Victory Church. In addition to my parish duties as a parochial vicar, I was also invited to serve on the faculty at St. Francis Seminary where I taught two courses in liturgy to thirty-first and second-year theological students, more than half of whom were older than I was at the time. Because I was grateful to the diocese for partially funding my college and theological education, I worked *pro bono* as the Director of Respect Life Activities, the Secretary of the Priests' Senate, and the Executive Secretary of the Diocesan Liturgical Commission.

The first time I came to realize that celibacy may be more difficult than I was led to believe during my period of priestly formation was when I attended a retreat for the priests of my diocese two years after I was ordained. During a walk with a priest on the scenic grounds of a former seminary, I can

remember the priest saying, "I just have one piece of advice for you as a young priest. If you're going to fool around, make sure it's with someone outside of your parish."

During the five years that I served as an associate pastor at OLV, I was never tempted once "to fool around" for a number of reasons. One, I was living with a pastor, Monsignor Patrick V. Fleming, who was not only a very dedicated and inspiring priest but also a mentor and a close friend. Additionally, I enjoyed the love and support of several families like the Kulpes, Klebans, Pellicciottas, Felices, Bartolomeas, Kluchers, and others whose love and friendship I will cherish to the day I die. When a young priest friend left the priesthood after living in a rectory with a pastor who was either golfing or drunk, I came to recognize at that time how fortunate I was to be at OLV and how very difficult it is to observe celibacy without love and support from brother priests and parishioners.



With Pat, George & Hans

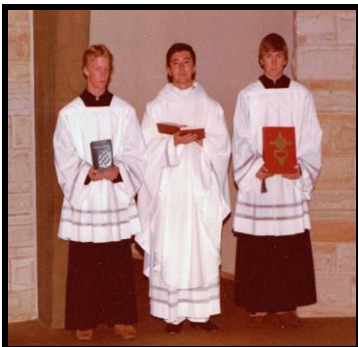


With Peg & Tony Felice



With OLV friends and Mary Shallow

One of my assigned duties was the training and scheduling of altar boys. When I reported as a priest in 1975, there were approximately 80 servers. By the time I left almost five years later, that number increased to over 170. In appreciation for the boys' service, I took them on camping trips, park excursions, and even overnight bus trips to tour Washington, DC. While my college classmates were marrying and having children, I compensated for my lack of a spouse and children by mentoring the altar boys like a "father" in keeping with the title I was afforded. I deeply regret that both priests and young people today, in light of the protocols put in place by the 2002 Dallas *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, cannot have the healthy mentoring interaction I had as a young priest. Unfortunately, the fact that both young associate priests with whom I served (one for three years and one for two of my five years) were later accused and removed from ministry for sexually abusing teenage boys.



With Kerry Small & Jeff Kulp



Overnight field trip to Washington, DC



Former altar boys visit me at USNA

In the course of my five years at OLV from 1975 to 1980, I developed a broad-based parish respect life program that included helping pregnant women in distress; visiting elderly people in nursing homes; ministering to sick and dying people who were hospitalized or homebound; as well as celebrating Mass monthly at a nursing home and with prisoners incarcerated in a nearby state correctional institution. Because the program proved to be very successful and received attention in *Our Sunday Visitor*, a national Catholic publication, I was asked by the bishop to serve as the

diocesan pro-life director. The success of our respect life program was later demonstrated by an invitation I received to speak at a National Catholic Pro-Life Convention at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City.

While serving as the pro-life director, I created a Respect Life Committee composed of prominent local Catholic laypeople and even some non-Catholics who represented different areas of expertise. Members of the committee included lawyers, doctors, TV and radio personalities, university professors, and well-known people like Penn State Coach Joe Paterno. The effectiveness of the committee taught me that gifted, respected, and dedicated Catholic laypeople, often only called upon to help raise money, can make a big difference in the life of the Church and impact the local community if only they are given a chance.

Even though some people may be inclined to judge others not for what they have done, but rather for what they may have failed to do, I will always remember Joe for the help he offered me in my parish youth ministry; for how he dealt with his son David who was in a coma after a serious trampoline accident; and for his strong support of our diocesan respect life program.

As the number of altar boys in the parish increased significantly during my five-year assignment, there were times when Joe loaned me his van to transport several young people to various activities. He appreciated the fact that his three sons and two daughters received not only a good religious education but that the church also sponsored many youth activities.

When Joe's oldest son, David, was seriously injured and flown to the Geisinger Medical Center, I anointed him in the presence of his parents and siblings. Following the anointing, Joe said to me near the elevator, "Father, I never asked God to help me win a football game, but I am asking God to let David live and recover. I sure hope and pray God hears our prayers." Two days later David came out of the coma and made a superb recovery. When Joe and Sue later learned I drove to Danville to anoint David instead of driving to Johnstown to celebrate my birthday with my parents, the Paternos arranged a birthday party the following year at their home complete with my favorite (banana) cake.

The third way in which I will remember Joe Paterno will be for the help he provided while serving as a member of our diocesan Respect Life Committee. His greatest contribution was the making of a radio and TV public service announcement in which he said, "Every human life needs love and deserves respect: the unborn, the elderly, the mentally and physically handicapped, the sick, and the dying. I believe human life is sacred, and I invite you to respect life."

It was during my fourth year in State College that I requested and received permission to join the Naval Reserve. I was commissioned following a Memorial Day Mass by one of our OLV parishioners, Navy Reserve Commander, Julian Pinkos, whom I befriended along with his wife, Bernadette.

Just three months before I left to attend Naval Chaplains School in Newport, Rhode Island, my father died on April 9, 1978. He was only 67 years old. One of the fondest memories I have of him was how he would rise very early in the morning, while my mom, brother, sister, and I were still asleep, and fire up the coal furnace in the winter so the house would be warm when we awoke. While I was deeply saddened by his death, particularly at a relatively young age, I was also very thankful that he not only loved me very much, but he also gave meaning to the quotation, "The greatest gift a father can give his children is to love their mother."



With Coach Joe Paterno    Baptizing Jim Bartolomea    Commissioning    Promotion with Leo & Rita Roberts

Following my return from two months of Chaplains School, I requested and received permission from Bishop James Hogan to serve on active duty for three years following the completion of my five-year assignment in State College. Before leaving the diocese, I was promoted during a Memorial Day Mass at OLV by my friend, Lieutenant Colonel Dick Bartolomea, who was the Marine Officer Instructor (MOI) at the Penn State ROTC Unit. It was Dick who recommended that, of the nine different duty stations I was offered, I request orders to serve with deploying Marines based in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

### **Second Marine Division**

When I left Pennsylvania and drove to North Carolina to begin my tour of duty with the Second Marine Division, I had no idea that my experience would prove so positive that it would lead me in time to request an indefinite extension to serve on active duty beyond my initial three-year commitment. Assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines (2/8) that was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Tony Zinni, I thoroughly enjoyed ministry with Marines and their families. After six months of training at Camp Lejeune, NC, and in the desert at Twenty-Nine Palms, CA, we deployed for six months to the Mediterranean Sea in 1981 where, in addition to my chaplain responsibilities, I was also able to serve as an Italian and Spanish interpreter for foreign officer briefs and port calls.

During a port call to Naples, I caught a train and traveled to Rome with my chaplain's assistant, Lance Corporal Bob Chappell. We stayed in the Vatican with my close friends, Carol and Hans Roggen, whose wedding I celebrated in Chicago and whose daughter, Kathleen, was baptized by Pope John Paul II. Having been invited to the pope's installation Mass in 1978 and to assist him in Kathleen's baptism in 1980, I was hoping that I might be able to visit briefly with him during this impromptu visit. When the pope's secretary informed me that he could squeeze me in between two appointments, I told Bob I wanted to introduce him to an "old friend" before we returned to the ship. When we were waiting in a room in the Apostolic Palace and the pope walked in accompanied by his secretary, Bob was shocked. The encounter was very warm and the pope, whose own father was a lieutenant in the Polish army, was very interested in talking with me about my chaplaincy. One of the biggest regrets of my life is that when the pope's secretary said the pope wanted to know if I would like to have dinner with him, I told him that I had to be back aboard my ship that evening but would be back in May for another port call. Unfortunately, we never returned to Italy in May owing to a crisis in Lebanon. Further, the week we were scheduled to be docked in Naples was the same week the pope was shot in St. Peter's Square by Mehmet Ali Agca.



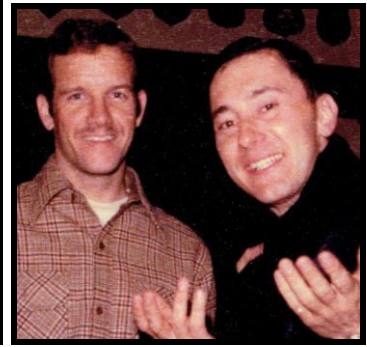
Ken McCabe & Tony Zinni



Roggen Baptism



Introducing Bob Chappell to JP II



With Doug Jacobsen

During that deployment, I wrote a letter home saying how hard I thought it would be if any of the Marines I had gotten to know were killed in combat. What I failed to consider was the fact that service men and women not only die in combat but many are also killed in the course of training exercises. One of my three closest friends in the battalion was our medical officer, Lieutenant Doug Jacobsen. Doug and I took pride in the fact that we participated in every phase of training undertaken by the Marines of our battalion. The night before we deployed from Camp Lejeune to the Med, Doug and his wife Peggy had me over to their home for dinner with their infant son Mikey. While ashore in Garrucha for an exercise with the Spanish Marines, Doug boarded a helicopter after our commanding officer disembarked, only later to crash and die with the pilot. Owing to a series of events the night before that precluded me from participating in the training, it very well could have been me instead of Doug who died.

As I escorted Doug's body to Fresno, California for burial, I thought about our last night together on liberty in Malaga before embarking on the exercise. Knowing that we would be living in the field for a week eating C-rats, Doug and I went out to dinner at the best restaurant we could find. Having eaten heartily, we decided to walk back to the ship that was about two miles away. In the course of our walk, Doug talked a lot about his love for his wife and son. When I met Peggy in Fresno before the funeral, I recounted what Doug shared with me our last night on liberty. I also wrote a letter for Mikey about his Dad that he could read when he was older. That experience, early on in my military career, taught me how people in the military can form very deep friendships in relatively short periods of time. One can live next door to a neighbor in the civilian community for twenty years and not know him or her better than a person in the military may get to know someone in a matter of a few days, weeks, or months.

Following my one year with 2/8 commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Tony Zinni, I was reassigned to the 36th Marine Amphibious Unit (36th MAU) under the command of Colonel Carl E. Mundy, Jr. Both Zinni and Mundy in time achieved four-star rank with Tony commanding U.S. Central Command and Carl completing his career as the 30th Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps. Although I had no intention of serving more than three years on active duty, my experiences in 2/8 and with the 36th MAU moved me to request an indefinite extension from my bishop. I was also influenced to stay longer by the quality of ministry I witnessed at Camp Lejeune by three Catholic chaplains in particular: Father James Kelly, Monsignor John McNamara, and Father Pete Pilarski. It was Monsignor McNamara who, upon becoming the Deputy Chief of Chaplains, secured an appointment for me to serve at the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA) following the completion of my Marine Corps tour. It was during my two-year tour in Annapolis that my bishop granted my request for an indefinite extension that neither of us realized would result in a twenty-four-year military career.

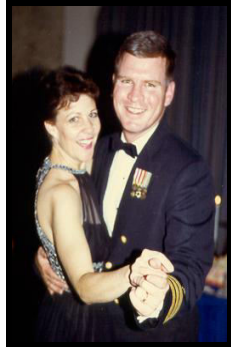
### **United States Naval Academy (USNA)**

Just as I enjoyed serving and deploying with Marines, so too did I like working with and befriending many talented midshipmen, staff, and supportive members of the Naval Academy chapel community. The Academy Superintendent during the first year of my tour was Vice Admiral Edward Waller III who was a legend in his own Fixed Wing Patrol Squadron (VP) community. The most inspiring chaplain with whom I served at the Academy was Captain Larry Ellis, the senior Protestant

Chaplain with whom I would work years later when he became the Chaplain of the U.S. Marine Corps. Although I enjoyed encountering former midshipmen from my academy days at various commands throughout my career, it broke my heart when Greg Karpick, a former midshipman whose daughter I baptized, died of an aneurysm at the age of 31 shortly after serving as a Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) instructor at the University of Pennsylvania.



With Sue McGill



Jan & Larry Ellis



With Ann Atwell



With Greg Karpick



Mom flying Space-A

Annapolis was only a little over an hour away from Dover Air Force Base in Delaware where one could easily catch "Space-A" flights to Air Bases in Ramstein or Frankfurt, Germany. During Christmas break in 1983, I flew my mom on a large Air Force C-5 Galaxy to Germany so that we could be in Paris for Christmas and London for New Year's. While we were in Paris a few days before Christmas, mom said she missed being in State College where we often shared Christmas Eve dinner with George and Betty Kleban and their family. So, instead of staying in Paris and going on to London, we drove back to Germany and were lucky to catch a return flight on a C-141 that brought us back just in time to be with the Klebans for Christmas Eve. Years later we caught another Space-A flight and visited Maria Roggen and the Bilgerigs in Switzerland, and Hartwig Obermüller in Munich.



Mom and Maria Roggen



Mom with Urs Bilgerig & Mom



Mom toasting Hartwig Obermüller

## United States Sixth Fleet

It was after my two-year tour at the Naval Academy that I received orders to report in July of 1984 to Commander United States Sixth Fleet (COMSIXTHFLT). Having worked years earlier for the Sixth Fleet as a contract priest, it was nice to return to Gaeta which is only a short two-hour drive south of Rome. Similar to my previous two tours where I enjoyed excellent working relations with my commanding officers, so too was it a real pleasure working my first year for Vice Admiral Edwin Martin, and my second year for Vice Admiral Frank Kelso II. When VADM Martin was a commander assigned to Attack Squadron Thirty-Four, his A4 Skyhawk was shot down southeast of Hanoi on July 9, 1967, and he was a prisoner of war (POW) for five years and eight months. VADM Kelso detached the Sixth Fleet in 1985 and went on to serve as the Chief of Naval Operations from 1990 to 1994.





Admiral Kelso award presentation VADM Ed Martin Krabbes & Roggens at Vatican Jim and Sandy Apple

There were three chaplains (Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic) assigned to COMSIXTHFLT. Captain Don Krabbe, a Missouri Synod Lutheran, was the Fleet Chaplain. Commander Jim Apple, a Rabbi, and I were Assistant Fleet Chaplains. We enjoyed a very close working relationship and, along with Don's wife Dore, and Jim's wife Sandy, we became friends for life.

My two-year Sixth Fleet tour exemplified the Navy slogan, "It's not a job, it's an adventure." Several terrorist incidents occurred during our watch (e.g., TWA Flight 847 hijacking, Achille Lauro hijacking) which led to two attacks on Libya. Fortunately, as a result of our measured and proportional responses, there was a significant drop in terrorist activities "once the smoke cleared."

I was glad that my mom, my sister Patty and her husband Mike, and our family friend Joan, were able to visit me during this tour. We traveled together from Gaeta to Rome, Florence, Venice, and Luzern. It was a very enjoyable visit that marked Patty and Mike's 25th wedding anniversary.



Family dining on Gaeta Villa Patio View from my Patio and Bedroom "Rowdy" Line & Staff Corps Officers

Unfortunately, it's not always easy to keep in close touch with so many wonderful people you meet in the military such as Karla and Mike Todd, Marjorie LeTourneau, Dore Krabbe, and so many others whom I befriended while serving on the Sixth Fleet Staff.

### Chief of Chaplains Office

After having spent over 21 of my 24 months in the Sixth Fleet riding over 50 ships for 5-7 days each, I was asked by the Navy Chief of Chaplains, RADM John McNamara, to forego my orders to Post Graduate School at UC Berkeley to work on his staff. While my job title was Head, Ecclesiastical Relations and Recruitment Branch, my primary responsibility involved the recruitment of Roman Catholic (RC) priests and seminarians.

In the course of my three-year tour, there were 71 active duty RC accessions, 33 RC reserve accessions, and 52 RC chaplain candidate accessions. When many of the priests who were recruited into the Navy Reserve and seminarians who became chaplain candidates later came on active duty, the total number of RC chaplains who served on active duty that were recruited during my recruiting

tour exceeded 100. While there were 271 RC Navy chaplains on active duty when I left the Chief of Chaplains Office in 1989, that number decreased dramatically to less than 40 in 2023.

In the process of recruiting Catholic priests and seminarians, I developed recruiting materials in which I was able to utilize both my writing and photographic skills. Instead of using very costly models for the recruiting brochures, I used real chaplains engaged in ministry with sea service personnel.



With RADM John McNamara



Two effective recruiting brochures produced

During this recruiting tour, I was able to combine business with pleasure by visiting friends who lived near seminaries or dioceses that I visited. It was also during this tour that friends from Arlington where I was living helped me learn how to ski in West Virginia and Vermont. In time I was able to ski with other friends in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.



Morgan – Espinal – Byrne



Gail and Brian



Bilgerigs in St. Moritz

## USS WISCONSIN (BB-64)

My reward for a very successful recruiting tour of duty was to be given orders as Command Chaplain aboard the battleship USS WISCONSIN (BB-64). I could not have been assigned to a better ship which I compared to a luxury sports car. When WISCONSIN was launched on December 7, 1943, it carried a crew of over 134 officers and 2,400 enlisted. When the ship was recommissioned in 1988 without many of the anti-aircraft (AA) guns it employed during World War II, the size of the crew was reduced to 65 officers and 1,501 enlisted. Deploying with almost half the number of crew members resulted in less cramped living, working, and sleeping quarters, as well as much shorter chow lines on the mess decks.

The Protestant chaplain who worked with me, Lieutenant Timothy Rott, was raised Catholic and was enrolled at one point in a high school seminary. It was during his college years that he met his wife, Georgette, who was Presbyterian. Because he still felt a calling to ministry that he could not pursue as a Catholic if he were married, he became a Presbyterian minister. Not only was he a very gifted and dedicated chaplain, but his wife was also very effective in helping military spouses in the Norfolk, Virginia area during the Gulf War.



Deckplate Ministry



Religious Ministry Team



Holy Helo Visits

## Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps

While I was undergoing chemotherapy at the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) in Bethesda, I detached WISCONSIN and reported in June 1991 to Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps located in the Navy Annex building on Columbia Pike in Arlington, just three blocks from my condo that I purchased in 1986. I was glad to be working again for General Mundy under whom I served in 1981-82 when we participated in Cold Weather Training at Camp Ripley in Minnesota and deployed to Norway for a NATO exercise north of the Arctic Circle along the Soviet border. I was also happy to be working as the Deputy Chaplain of the Marine Corps to Chaplain Don Krabbe with whom I served in the Sixth Fleet from 1984 to 1986. Don and I both contracted lymphoma from drinking contaminated water while stationed at Camp Lejeune. While Don's lymphoma was arrested and he lived to retire in 1991, he had a recurrence which claimed his life in 1998 at the young age of 63.

After three operations, two months of radiation therapy, and six months of chemotherapy, as I reflected upon my life before the time I was medevacked off USS WISCONSIN, I couldn't think of a better upbringing; better educational opportunities; a better parish assignment following my ordination; a better military career path; or better friends. I thought, *Even if I die at the age of 41, I can't say that I led a boring life.* While I believed myself to have been a good chaplain, a good priest, a good son, brother, and friend, I had but one regret.

I thought about the morning I returned to work at Camp Lejeune and was greeted by my Marine chaplain's assistant, Lance Corporal Bob Chappell. After sitting at my desk Bob walked in and asked, "Did you go out last night?" I said, "Yes." He smiled and asked, "Who were you with?" When I told him I had dinner with a nurse, he said: "You should do that more often." When I asked him why he would say that, he said, "You just seem very happy today and are in a very good mood." I then asked, "Are you saying that I'm often moody or unhappy?" He said, "No. You're a good chaplain, but isn't it written somewhere in the bible, "And God saw that it was not good for man to be alone"?"

As I thought my days and hours were numbered, my only regret was that I felt I might have been a better chaplain, a better priest, and a better person if I were married with a family of my own. Those were my last thoughts before I fell asleep not knowing if I would wake up the next day.

When I woke up the next morning and felt hunger - something I didn't feel in a long time - I cautiously wondered if I might be getting better. Even though I was battling pneumonia for a week and my systems were shutting down, General Mundy said I was going to win this battle, and, thanks be to God, it turned out he was right!

It took about four months before I was able to walk up a step without holding on to something or someone. Even though I was beginning to gain back the 40 pounds I had lost, it seemed that I had aged about 20 years from the time I was medevacked from the Gulf.

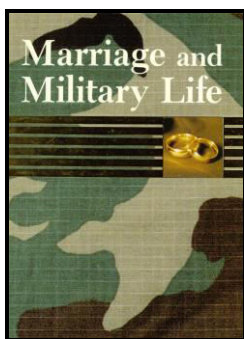
By the time I reached the mid-point of my three-year Marine Corps tour, I was working full days and was slowly gaining back the weight I had lost. My job as Deputy Chaplain of the Marine Corps was also proving very interesting. In addition to developing devotional materials that featured a "Prayer at Sunset" photograph I took while recruiting, I authored a marriage preparation and enrichment relationship inventory, 100,000 copies of which were published by the Marine Corps and the Navy. I also wrote several articles published in military journals, magazines, and newspapers aimed at promoting strong marriages and reducing high military divorce rates. These writings were preceded by over fifteen years of pastoral counseling in which I derived a great deal of satisfaction in helping married and dating couples deepen and strengthen their relationships. I couldn't help but be motivated to work in this field particularly after a couple asked me to be the godfather of their child they feel may not have been conceived had I not helped them resolve certain marital problems.

My most notable accomplishment as Deputy Chaplain of the Marine was my co-authoring of the Core Values of "Honor, Courage, and Commitment." The Chaplain of the Marine Corps, Captain Larry Ellis, convinced the Commandant, General Mundy, that many of the values the Marine Corps upheld were no longer supported by contemporary culture. Because the Commandant agreed with Chaplain Ellis' assessment, he commissioned his Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Lieutenant General Matthew Cooper, to work with our office and "get an ethics and moral values effort going."

When Chaplain Ellis tasked me to identify specific values that might be presented to the Commandant for his approval, I researched the matter extensively; consulted with several senior Marine Corps officers and enlisted; and came up with a list of three values: "courage, honor, and excellence." LtGen Cooper likewise came up with a list of five values that he too submitted to the Commandant. When Gen Mundy reviewed our input, he chose "courage" which we both recommended; "honor" which appeared in my list; and "commitment" which LtGen Cooper proposed. Because I felt "commitment," analogous to "fidelity," was very much in keeping with the Marine Corps motto "*Semper Fidelis*," I thought it was a far better value than "excellence." Consequently, I could not have been happier with the Commandant's choice of values.



"Prayer at Sunset"



Relationship Inventory



Core Values of the United States Naval Service



The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Frank Kelso II, who at the time was the acting Secretary of the Navy, liked the Core Values adopted by the Marine Corps so much that he ordered the Navy's Values of "Integrity, Professionalism, and Tradition" be replaced in 1992 with "Honor, Courage, and Commitment." Because the Marine Corps and the Navy are both part of the Department of the Navy, there is now one set of Core Values for the entire U.S. Naval Service.

### **Department of Defense (DoD) Homosexual Exclusion Policy**

The most controversial issue that I addressed in my 24 years of active duty service was the DoD homosexual exclusion policy. When asked initially what I thought of the policy, I opined it was outdated and needed to be changed. However, when I was asked to critique a position paper opposing the policy from a U.S. Army Officer studying at the Army War College, I changed my opinion when I discovered that the policy was behaviorally based and had nothing to do with a person's

sexual orientation. The position paper I wrote in support of the policy was distributed by the Commandant, General Mundy, to every Marine Corps General Officer. It was quoted in *The New York Times*; published by the U.S. Naval Institute Press in *Proceedings*; and reprinted in the February 1993 edition of *First Things*. When it was clear that my research and conclusions were supported by members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I was asked to speak at the National Defense University; address the Guild of Catholic Lawyers of New York; and, testify before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel. Toward the end of my Congressional testimony, I said, "The consequences that can occur as a result of changing the current DoD policy, three of which I specifically addressed, cannot only affect the lives of military personnel but can also impact military readiness."

When I reread what I wrote and said 30 years ago about allowing members of the LGBTQ community to serve in the military, I cannot say, "I was wrong." If the mainstream media with the cooperation of military commanders covered up sexual abuse and homosexual misconduct at their commands decades ago, much of those same crimes are being covered up today. Those cover-ups are no different than what Catholic Church leaders have also been doing for decades which in over 80 percent of the cases involve the abuse of young men and teenage boys.

As the Deputy Chaplain of the Marine Corps, in addition to serving on the Inspector General (IG) Team, the Suicide Prevention Committee, and the Conscientious Objector Board, I was also responsible for monitoring disciplinary cases involving Roman Catholic (RC) Chaplains. During my three-year tour, five Catholic Chaplains, 10 percent of the RC chaplains serving with Marines, committed Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) offenses; four involved homosexual behavior, and one involved pedophilia. Three of the five RC Chaplains were incarcerated, one having received a 10-year sentence for pedophilia. Two others received other than honorable (OTH) discharges. While I was aware of sexual abuse problems involving a full 10 percent of the Catholic chaplains I was supervising, I had no idea at the time how extensive the abuse problem was throughout the entire Catholic Church.

One reason that my involvement in these abuse cases affected me deeply had to do with my mentoring experiences with the altar boys at Our Lady of Victory. Because I became close to many of these boys who today are grown and have children of their own, I found it quite abhorrent that other priests would take sexual advantage of boys or young men. Aware of all the sordid details of these cases, I did my best to deal with both the victims and the perpetrators of the abuse in a professional manner. Unfortunately, this was not always the case with several Catholic bishops who often covered up the wrongdoing and moved abusive priests to other parishes.

## **Naval Amphibious Base Coronado**

When I completed my Headquarters Marine Corps tour in 1994 with orders to Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, I invited my mom to give up her home in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and move with me to California. She loved living in Coronado where, unlike Johnstown, the average low temperature is 57 degrees and the average high is 71 degrees. She enjoyed making new friends including Pat Moody, Lito & Rosa Arias, Bill & Evelyn Bartkus, Rich & Debbie Haas, and Spence & Madeleine Creider who lived in Rancho Bernardo and whose son (Phil) was also a Catholic Navy Chaplain.

Unfortunately, after only one year, mom was diagnosed with Myelodysplastic Syndrome and given one year to live. She died peacefully at home on July 25, 1996, and is buried next to my father in Johnstown. I have very fond memories of my upbringing and of the trips we took together particularly to Europe on military aircraft. In addition to our last two years together in beautiful Coronado, and the two years she spent living in our row house at the Norfolk Naval Base, I was also very fortunate that she was able to visit and spend time with me at almost all of my duty stations.



Mom with Arias Family & Wayne Haddad Spence, Madeleine & Phil Creider Jim Kelly and Miles Barrett

Following my Mom's death I went to Alaska with my friend, Chaplain Miles Barrett, to visit our friend, Father Jim Kelley. Jim retired as a Navy Chaplain with the rank of Captain at the age of 62 and, instead of returning to his diocese of Fall River, Massachusetts, he received permission to work for the Archdiocese of Anchorage where he was responsible for over 15 mission parishes that were spread out over an area of some 2,000 square miles. The cost of maintaining, insuring, and fueling the two planes that he named "St. Peter" and "St. Paul" was very expensive, particularly when he tried to visit his mission communities in the Bristol Bay and Aleutian regions of Western Alaska every two weeks. Because the Archdiocese was not able to cover all of his expenses, I helped raise funds among military chapels to support his ministry. Very few people knew that he used his military retirement pay to cover more than half the expenses of the Holy Rosary Mission.

In the course of the week Miles and I spent with Jim, we attempted to fly every day to at least two or three communities. Even though Jim was 18 years older than Miles and I, we marveled at how he could operate in such cold, windy conditions that made us want to run for shelter. When Miles and I bid farewell to Jim and were waiting to board our flight back to Seattle and San Diego, I told Miles, "I don't think Jim will live to retire but will 'die with his boots on.' You can't fly in the conditions we experienced this past week and not have an accident."

On Palm Sunday, April 8, 2002, Father Jim Kelly crashed into Tuklung Mountain, seven miles southwest of Manokotak. Having been a missionary priest based in Dillingham for over ten years, he died at the age of 73 doing the two things he loved the most: ministering and flying. He was the most inspiring and dedicated priest I have ever known.

One of the most exciting aspects of my Coronado tour was conceiving and helping to design a new chapel. The chapel I inherited was a converted World War II barracks that had a cracked foundation and a serious overcrowding problem. Although the chapel was in dire need of repair, attendance was excellent every Sunday at the two Catholic Masses and one Protestant Worship Service. Members of these worshipping communities were more than willing to address their facility problem at a time when Military Construction (MILCON) funds were not available for chapel construction. Because the command was able to use no more than \$300,000 in minor construction funds for local building projects, the Commanding Officer, Captain Ed Kelly, felt that it would be impossible to build a new chapel for that small amount. When I countered by suggesting that we use Seabee labor and complement the \$300K with free will contributions for decorative items like stained glass windows, he asked how much money I thought we would have to raise for these items. I opined that the items would probably cost about \$100,000. Unlike a civilian church that can take out a loan and pay it back over several years, I would personally be responsible for paying for all items once the chapel was completed. I was confident that with a fundraising committee comprised of Ed & Rosemary Gotthelf, Rich & Debbie Haas, Pat Moody, Jim & Sue MacGuire, and others, we could raise the necessary amount. Despite opposition from the Chief of Chaplains Office that viewed this project as a threat to future MILCON chapel funding, the CO strongly endorsed the undertaking and we proceeded accordingly.



Rosemary & Ed Gotthelf



Old "Chapel from the Sea"



Debbie & Rich Haas – move Gene!

When chaplains in the Chief of Chaplains Office falsely accused me of mixing appropriated and non-appropriated funds to complete the project, I requested help from a friend, Vice Admiral Phil Quast, who brought the matter to the attention of the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Mike Boorda. Because the CNO himself saw our undertaking as an ingenious approach to chapel construction at a time when MILCON funds were not available, he called the Chief of Chaplains and told him either to produce evidence that we were mixing appropriated and non-appropriated funds or to apologize. While the Chief of Chaplains ended up apologizing, I deeply regret that Admiral Boorda took his life one week later. I first met Admiral Boorda in 1988 when he was a Battle Group Commander operating in the Sixth Fleet. I also delivered the benediction at his CNO change-of-command ceremony when Admiral Frank Kelso II retired in 1994.



With (Seabee) RADM Thomas Dames



Admiral Boorda



Mom with Stevens', Quasts, & Donovans

The Chapel was dedicated on February 23, 1997, complete with stained glass windows, custom-designed doors with beveled glass, Spanish marble, Italian floor tiles, a handcrafted altar with matching pulpit and chairs, a state-of-the-art audio-visual system, and an ecumenical baptismal font designed for both infant and adult immersion baptism. One of its truly unique features is a life-size replica of the Ark of the Covenant mentioned in both the Bible and the Qur'an that serves as a Blessed Sacrament Tabernacle for Roman Catholics.



Exterior of "Chapel from the Sea"



Ark of the Covenant Tabernacle



Interior of "Chapel from the Sea"

When the bills for all the decorative items were tabulated, they did not total \$100,000 but rather \$200,000. I truly believe it was a miracle we were able to raise that exact amount and I did not have to

withdraw any money from my savings account to pay for any of these items. However, had I known it was going to cost that much, I probably never would have attempted the project. While I was proud of our new beautiful chapel when I completed my three-year tour of duty, I was even more proud of the congregations that grew more robust during that time.

### Naval Air Station Sigonella

Four months after the chapel dedication I completed my tour and reported to Naval Air Station Sigonella which needed an Italian-speaking Command Chaplain with the rank of Captain. It was here in Sicily that I met my future wife, Leila Havadtoy, who was in the process of getting out of the Navy after serving on active duty for four years.

As a result of the fact that people in the military move every 2-3 years, it is very common to make friends and enjoy their company only to move on with your respective lives once you receive orders to another duty station. While some people might keep in touch with a Christmas card or an occasional email, most service members find it impossible to stay in touch with all the people they befriended at one place or another. Once Leila was out of the Navy I thought she, like other single men and women I met over the years in the military, would before long meet someone, fall in love, get married, and have a family.

Before Leila left Sicily I wanted to make sure that she would have a nice ceremony to mark the completion of her combined seven years of active duty and reserve service. Consequently, I arranged for her to receive her end-of-tour award at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, only one hour from her parent's home in Milford, Connecticut. The Academy Command Chaplain who was a close friend, Captain Bill Dillon, put together a very moving ceremony present at which a large number of chaplains in training from the Naval Chaplains School in Newport, Rhode Island. Leila's parents were deeply appreciative of the courtesies they were extended at the ceremony and wrote saying they would be happy to welcome me as a guest in their home if I ever had the occasion to be in New England.

Following Leila's departure I made four one-week trips with members of Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit (EODMU) 8 to Bosnia. It was there that I enjoyed interaction not only with military personnel from various North American Treaty Organization (NATO) nations but also with a Russian Orthodox chaplain and troops from Russia. Never since my student days in Rome did I have a chance to use my Polish, Italian, Spanish, French, and German within the course of a week.



Bosnia 1998



Sarajevo 1999



Family reunion in Warsaw



It was halfway through my tour in Sicily that my sister Patty, my brother Dick, and his wife Rose Marie visited me in Europe. We met in Poland where we stayed with our cousin Ryszard and his family in Warsaw. Ryszard told us many interesting stories about his father, Władisław, before, during, and after he was the head of state in Poland from 1956 to 1970. Our two-week get-together ended in Rome where I arranged for my family to meet Pope John Paul II following his morning Mass we attended in his private chapel.

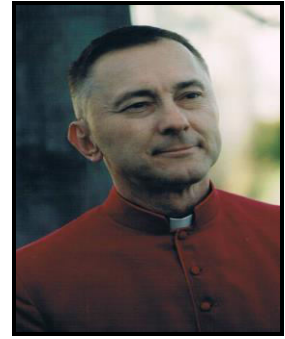




Dick and Rose Marie with Pope John Paul II



Rose Marie and Patty with Holy Father



Monsignor Gene

Toward the end of my tour, I received word from Edwin O'Brien, the Archbishop for the Military Services, U.S.A., that I was named a "Prelate of Honor to His Holiness" - a position commonly identified with the title "Monsignor." While I did not seek this honor, I saw it as a sign of confidence in my ministerial and leadership abilities.

A few months before my tour of duty was up in Sicily, I attended a Chaplains' Conference in Rota, Spain where the Chief of Chaplains, Rear Admiral Byron Holderby, requested help in identifying clergy, particularly women and priests, who would be interested in becoming Navy Chaplains. When I emailed Leila in Connecticut and asked if she would like me to include her name in a list of prospective chaplains, she said to do it as, after almost a year of searching, she was still unable to locate a Church that she was interested in pastoring. When I submitted her name along with a list of Catholic priests whom I recruited years earlier into the Chaplain Candidate Program when they were seminarians, the Chief of Chaplains wrote back and thanked me with the assurance that his staff would contact all of the clergy members whose names I submitted.

### Marine Forces Pacific

In April of 1999, I reported as Force Chaplain to Marine Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC) based at Camp H. M. Smith in Hawaii. It was at the beginning of this tour that the Secretary of the Navy, Richard Danzig, presented me with the Navy League of the United States Alfred Thayer Mahan Award "for literary achievement and inspirational leadership." My previous CO at NAS Sigonella, Captain Arnie Nelson, submitted my nomination for this award for co-authoring the Marine Corps and Navy Core Values; for authoring marriage preparation and enrichment publications for dating and married naval personnel; as well as for several articles I had published in *Proceedings* and other magazines and journals.

Insofar as the government quarters I anticipated moving into were being renovated, I was forced to look off base for housing which proved to be a blessing in disguise. The condominium I ended up renting in Kaneohe was not only much nicer than the government quarters I would have been offered, but I also had a "billion-dollar view" of the bay, ocean, and mountains from my lanai.



SECNAV Award Presentation



Billion dollar view from my lanai



Trip & Jan McKinney

My three-year tour at MARFORPAC can best be summarized by a quote from *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." The best part of the tour involved my supervisory work with some 150 chaplains assigned to Marine Corps commands that covered an operational area over two-thirds of the earth's surface. My travels as far east as Marine Corps Air Station Yuma in Arizona, and as far west of Hawaii as the Horn of Africa. In addition to meeting with all the chaplains annually, I deployed with our command staff to the Democratic Republic of Korea (DROC) for annual war games; to Kenya for a Peace Conference involving eleven African nations; to Laos with a Joint Task Force (JTF) from U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) in search of remains of personnel killed in action (KIA) during the Vietnam War; and to Bahrain and Kuwait before the March 20, 2003 invasion of Iraq. Because all of my prior operational Marine Corps and Navy tours involved deployments to Europe, the Caribbean, and Southwest Asia, I now enjoyed spending more time in places like Okinawa, mainland Japan, Kenya, Thailand, and Korea.

When I was not deployed I was able to celebrate Mass on Sundays at Camp H.M. Smith for a small group of active duty and retired military families. The support I received from Bob and Carole Woodruff, Trip, and Jan McKinney, and other members of this chapel community helped me cope with some of the many challenges I experienced during this tour of duty. It was Trip McKinney who recommended I purchase an investment property in a place I might enjoy living following my retirement. I immediately contacted Rich and Debbie Haas in Coronado who soon found me a condominium on F Avenue that I didn't see until three years after acquiring and renting it.



With LtGen Fulford, Jr.

LtGen Frank Libutti

BGen Bob Magnus

BGen Dave Brahms

Shortly after my arrival, Lieutenant General Carlton Fulford, Jr., the MARFORPAC Commander with whom I flew to Wake Island in the Pacific, was replaced by Lieutenant General Frank Libutti. What made the first two years of my tour of duty so fulfilling was working for LtGen Libutti and his Deputy Commander, Brigadier General Robert Magnus. Both of these officers were exceptional leaders who were deeply respected by all the officers and enlisted in our command.

"The worst of times" while stationed in Hawaii involved a conflict with senior officers within the U.S. Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT) chain of command and the Navy Chief of Chaplains, as well as my relationship with my Roman Catholic Endorsing agent, Archbishop Edwin O'Brien. My conflict with senior officers within CINCPACFLT and the Navy Chief of Chaplains involved my defense of two female chaplains. The first female chaplain was the victim of abuse, harassment, and reprisals at Navy CREDO Hawaii where she worked before reporting to Marine Corps Base Kaneohe Bay. The second female chaplain, assigned to Navy Region Hawaii, was a victim of discrimination, reprisals, and a denial of a request for Admiral's Mast.

In the process of defending these female chaplains, I suffered reprisals from senior Navy officers in Hawaii and the Chief of Chaplains in Washington whose careers were jeopardized for covering up the injustices these women experienced. The reprisals I experienced led the two female chaplains I was defending to file formal complaints with the Naval Inspector General and the Department of

Defense (DoD) Inspector General. Unfortunately, because all three of us were naïve to believe the Navy and DoD investigations would be impartial and would not bow to rank, we were all disappointed with the outcome of the long and drawn-out ordeal.

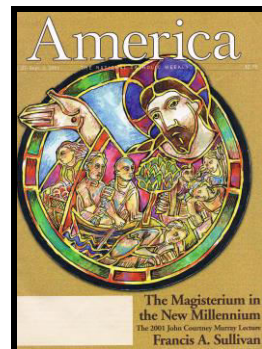
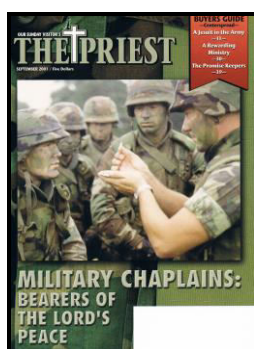
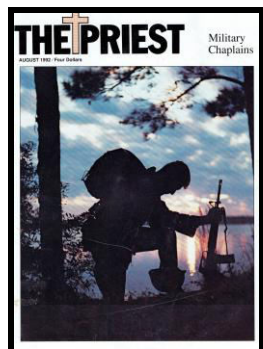
My almost three-year involvement in the investigation of these cases taught me that many people in positions of authority do not want to address serious problems like rape, sex abuse, discrimination, and drug abuse because their revelation, carried out under their watch, could harm their careers. While some authority figures are successful initially in covering up problems that could threaten their promotions or lead to their firing, it may not be until years later that the misbehavior and their cover-ups become known.

David Brahms, an attorney friend of mine who was the former Judge Advocate General of the Marine Corps, reviewed the case files and concluded that the Secretary of Defense was not going to sacrifice the careers of several high-ranking naval officers as a result of their cover-ups of injustices suffered by three chaplains. As was the case with Paula Coughlin and the 1991 Tailhook scandal, unless a member of Congress or the media were to become involved and unearth the cover-ups, David felt our cases were “dead in the water.”

The first female chaplain I defended left the Navy with no benefits but was able to be helped later by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Because of the documented psychological harm she endured while serving on active duty, the VA awarded her compensation of \$3000 a month for life. While some people might find this to be a generous amount, it is far less than the amount of money that is being given in retirement to the person who abused her and the senior officers who reprimanded her for reporting the abuse. Unfortunately, Navy IG covered up the case involving the second female chaplain who was the victim of discrimination, reprisals, and the denial of a request for Admiral’s Mast. Her only compensation was to receive orders to a European command in the Mediterranean where she escaped the discrimination and reprisals she was forced to endure for two years at Navy Region Hawaii.

### **Sexual Abuse and the Archdiocese for the Military Services**

In addition to my conflict with line and Chaplain Corps flag officers whose reprisals were carried out with impunity, I also experienced a conflict with Archbishop O’Brien. When he nominated me to be named a Prelate of Honor, I took this nomination as a vote of confidence and a sign that more leadership on my part was expected within the Catholic Church. It was not too long after I was made a Prelate of Honor that O’Brien asked me to write an article for *The Priest* magazine that might encourage more priests to become military chaplains. I had already published one nine years earlier in the August 1992 edition of *The Priest* entitled, “Military Chaplaincy: A unique and challenging model of priestly ministry” with my copyrighted “Prayer at Sunset” photo on the cover. The article I wrote for O’Brien in the September 2001 edition of *The Priest* with a photograph of me on the cover distributing communion in the field to Marines was entitled, “A Rewarding and Challenging Ministry.”



Shortly after submitting this article for publication, I decided to write another article entitled “Home Alone’ in the Priesthood”<sup>8</sup> calling bishops and laity to be more supportive of priests as more and more of them find themselves living alone in rectories often inhabited in the past by two or three priests. To illustrate the potential for health and disciplinary problems that can derive from living alone, I made mention of the disproportionate number of Catholic Navy chaplains that were imprisoned or discharged from the military as a result pedophilia and homosexual behavior when I served as the Deputy Chaplain of the Marine Corps.

Several people who wrote letters to the editor in response to this article that appeared in the August 27, 2001 edition of *America* magazine seemed to appreciate my point about not expecting one aging priest to be able to provide the same level of service as was provided in the past by more and often younger priests. These responses contrasted with that of Archbishop O’Brien who forwarded and endorsed a letter from Paterson Diocese Monsignor Patrick Brown that criticized my article for disparaging the reputation of military chaplains. Interestingly, Monsignor Brown was arrested ten years later by the FBI and sentenced to prison for income tax evasion after stealing money from parishioners for personal use.

One Catholic chaplain called me after reading my *America* article and joked, “I know one monsignor who will never be made a bishop.” He predicted that, even though O’Brien was not selected to succeed Cardinal John O’Connor in 2000 as the Archbishop of New York, he would still see my reporting of chaplain misconduct as a threat to his chances of being made a cardinal in another archdiocese. His prediction came true five months later in January 2002 when O’Brien’s attorney, a retired Navy Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps officer, approached me at the annual Catholic Navy Chaplains retreat in West Palm Beach, Florida, and inquired when I might be retiring. Following that encounter, I asked myself, “What was so bad about my reference to five abuse cases in the Marine Corps that made up only about 11 percent of the Archdiocese for the Military Services?”

The answer to that question was provided that same month by the *Spotlight Team of The Boston Globe* when it published a series of stories about sexually abusive Catholic priests whose actions were often covered up by church officials. When my article was published less than five months before the scandal broke in Boston, little did I realize the true extent of the sex abuse problem I referenced. Instead of backing down in my reporting of abuse after receiving the letter from Monsignor Brown and being approached by O’Brien’s lawyer, I felt motivated by the *Spotlight Team* to be even more aggressive in exposing clerical abuse and the Church’s homosexual culture.

Consequently, in a report to O’Brien dated May 6, 2002, I addressed three cases, in particular, worth mentioning.

The first case involved a man I worked with at a previous duty station whom I recommended to study for the priesthood upon retiring after 20 years of naval service. When I heard that he left the seminary after being tired of “getting hit on” by gay seminarians, I felt really bad knowing that he easily could have stayed in the military and retired with 75 percent of his base pay instead of having to look for employment. When I brought this to O’Brien’s attention, he neither inquired what seminary the retired veteran attended nor if he would be interested in studying at another seminary. Because I always suspected O’Brien himself was gay, I was not surprised he did nothing to support a heterosexual candidate.

The second case involved two female Protestant chaplains whose sexual harassment, reprisals, discrimination, and denial of Admiral’s Mast I alleged were covered up by their supervisor, Monsignor Joe Estabrook, the Catholic Pacific Fleet Chaplain.

The third case involved Chaplain John “Matt” Lee, a priest under Estabrook’s supervision whom I recruited years earlier when he was a seminarian. Lee came to most of the priest gatherings at my home and often talked about having me over to his apartment to see the great view he had of Diamond Head. When an invitation never materialized after almost two years, I asked another

chaplain if he was ever at Lee's home and why he never invited me over even for a cup of coffee. The chaplain stunned me when he said that Lee probably didn't invite me over because he didn't want me to meet his "live-in boyfriend."

I concluded my May 6, 2002 report to O'Brien by writing, "A person, particularly a leader, must take pride in the institution in which he serves. When a Catholic chaplain does not return hospitality because he does not want me to meet his live-in boyfriend... when I mentor a Chief Petty Officer who enters the seminary only to leave a year later because he is tired of getting 'hit on' by gay seminarians; or when brother priests do not demonstrate Christ's attitude regarding equal rights and justice for women, how can I feel pride in serving with such Catholic chaplains?" I hoped that such a report would have elicited some sort of response, but none was forthcoming. It was not long after sending that letter that my three-year tour in Hawaii came to a close.

### **Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC)**

In June 2002 I reported to Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC) located an hour north of Los Angeles. My duties there involved working with Seabees at Port Hueneme and with Naval Aviators at Point Mugu. The commanding officers to whom I reported: Captain Paul Grossgold, the CO of NBVC; and Captain Jim Cowell, the CO of the Thirty-First Seabee Readiness Group; were both superb leaders.



Jim Cowell



With Paul Grossgold



The Zielinskis



The Lubaczewskis

One of the benefits of moving every 2-3 years in the military is the opportunity of meeting new people and making new friends. I was very fortunate to befriend Michael and Joanna Zielinski and their children (Alice and Chris) who live near the base in Camarillo. Both Michael and Joanna were born in Poland like Eric and Adrianna Lubaczewski whom I would meet in 2006 when we lived in Connecticut. Both very intelligent young couples whose bilingual children are fluent in Polish exemplify the "American Dream" in that they immigrated to this country; worked very hard; and have achieved prosperity and success in their respective fields.

It was around six months into my NBVC tour, after not having received a letter, email, or phone from O'Brien in response to my May report, that I wrote him on 7 October 2002 saying, "I have confided in my family, friends and some Catholic chaplains that your lack of support has affected my faith."

Shortly after O'Brien received this letter he invited me to meet with him at his office in Washington, DC. When I arrived, I was under the impression that he finally wanted to talk about the problems I had been addressing. I was wrong. Instead of wanting to talk about the chaplain with the 'live-in boyfriend' or the propositioning of heterosexually oriented seminarians, O'Brien indicated he was "concerned" that I was "losing my priest friends" and that I might benefit from a psychological evaluation. When it was evident he did not wish to discuss the matters I had raised, I told him that while I felt quite sane, I

had nothing to fear in seeing a psych. Furthermore, I no longer considered either Monsignor Estabrook or Father Lee to be my “friends.”

Immediately upon returning to Ventura I emailed Father Tom Doyle in Germany who advised me not to undergo a psych evaluation which he saw as something O’Brien wanted to use to discredit me. If I was known for having addressed the sexual abuse problem among Catholic military chaplains, Tom was revered for having co-authored a sex abuse report while working at the Vatican Embassy and for having testified as an expert witness at several clerical abuse trials in the US and several countries.

In response to Tom’s advice, I sent an email asking O’Brien to put into writing his reasons for requesting that I undergo the evaluation. No such justification was ever forthcoming and it was clear that I “called his bluff.”

I was scandalized by the failure of O’Brien to address important issues that I believed were being covered up less their revelation harm his chances of being appointed to a more prominent archdiocesan see. The “final straw” that influenced my decision ultimately to request a leave of absence from the priesthood came when O’Brien reported in an 18 February 2004 “Chaplains Update” that “As to our Archdiocese, two such cases have come forward where active-duty priest chaplains have been found guilty of engaging in immoral acts with minors.” Having been involved in five sex abuse cases in the Marine Corps (three of which involved minors) in just over two years, I could not fathom how O’Brien could report there were only two abuse cases involving minors in all branches of the Armed Services throughout the entire history of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, U.S.A. It was a few years later I learned that there were not two; not five; but hundreds of minors and young adults who were abused by over 100 Catholic military chaplains during the 52-year period of the John Jay report published in June 2004.

After serving in the military for over 24 years and dedicating almost 40 years of my life to the Catholic Church, I lost pride in the priesthood as a result of the failure of church leaders to correct the sexual abuse of minors, seminarians, and young adults. Also, from my perspective, the Chaplain Corps and senior line officers involved in covering up female sex abuse, harassment, discrimination, and reprisals were no better than the many bishops who covered up abuse perpetrated by mainly homosexual predator priests under their supervision. I concluded it was time to retire from the military and request a leave of absence from the priesthood.

### **Retreat in Washington, D.C.**

After informing the detailer of my wish to retire after two years on station at Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC), I had to decide what I was going to do once I retired. I was working on a book, *The Survival Guide for Marriage in the Military*, which I hoped to publish shortly after I retired. To help me further discern what I might do, I flew to Washington, DC where I went on a retreat directed by Monsignor Paul Lenz, an old priest friend who taught me in college. In the course of the retreat, I confessed I was scandalized by how O’Brien and other church leaders were handling sexual abuse cases and that living alone was never easy for me. My plan, I said, was to request a leave of absence from the priesthood following my retirement and even consider the possibility of one day getting married if I was not too old for someone to marry.

When Paul asked me if there was someone I had in mind to marry, I told him there were different women I met in my life whom I would have liked to have married were it not for celibacy. While almost all of these women were happily married, I told him there was one chaplain friend, Leila Havadtoy, who was still single. Although we found ourselves usually stationed thousands of miles apart, I told him we always managed to keep in touch via email over the years. I told him that if I ever married her or another woman, I probably would want to get married in the “Chapel from the Sea” that I helped design and build in Coronado, California.

In the course of the retreat, I also told Paul I was ashamed of the way Archbishop O'Brien underreported the extent of the abuse of young men by Catholic Chaplains to the John Jay study commissioned by the National Review Board. Not only did O'Brien want me to leave the chaplaincy after my *America* article referenced the five abuse cases in which I was involved, but he also withdrew the ecclesiastical endorsement of my friend, Dominican Father Tom Doyle, who had been advocating for victims and testifying at abuse trials after U.S. bishops ignored the advice he had given them to address the abuse problem as early as 1985.

I told Paul the abuse problem was just as bad in our home diocese of Altoona-Johnstown Pennsylvania where our own Ordinary, Bishop Joseph Adamec, reprised against Monsignor Phil Saylor whose truthful testimony at an abuse trial contradicted the testimony given by the retired bishop. When the diocese lost the case that cost them over \$2 million, Monsignor Saylor was later transferred from a prestigious parish and issued a precept of silence under threat of suspension and excommunication if he were to write or talk about the abuse trial. Years later it would be revealed that the expense of the abuse scandal cost the diocese \$21, 491,052 between July 1, 1999, and December 1, 2018. A 2016 Report of a Pennsylvania Grand Jury also later revealed how the diocese –under the guidance of bishops Joseph Adamec and James Hogan – allegedly protected at least 50 religious leaders accused of abuse.

When Archbishop O'Brien complained to Bishop Adamec about me following the publication of my *America* article and after receiving my communications about a sexually active homosexual chaplain in Hawaii, Adamec sent me an email and asked if I might be interested in returning to the diocese as he needed a priest to serve as a chaplain at the Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution. I shared Adamec's email with Paul in the course of the retreat and argued that O'Brien was not going to get rid of me like he did Father Tom Doyle, and Adamec was not going to send me into isolation as he did Monsignor Saylor. My closing words to Paul as I left his home were, "I will not remain in the priesthood only to leave the military and be silenced and shipped off to some damn prison."

When I spoke with another priest friend about what I had been going through, he opined that Bishop Adamec in truth did not want me to work in a prison. He felt that Adamec was sending me a message: "One whistleblower like Saylor in the diocese is enough. I don't want another one. Find something else to do with your life."

As I would later come to discover, two months after my retreat Paul ran into Archbishop O'Brien at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington and betrayed my confidence by telling him I was contemplating taking a leave of absence from the priesthood and was entertaining thoughts of marrying. Paul also must have told him what I said about the Coronado Chapel and my friend, Chaplain Leila Havadtoy. It was only a year earlier that Catholic chaplain Father James Mennis, immediately following his 30-year retirement, married a Navy nurse in the Quantico base chapel where he had been serving. Determined to thwart similar weddings by other Catholic chaplains; looking for an excuse to get rid of me after my *America* article; and now armed with the name of the chaplain whom Paul said I might marry; O'Brien learned where Leila was stationed and contacted the Catholic chaplain who happened to be Leila's supervisor and whose office was next to hers at Headquarters and Service Battalion.

At a meeting with chaplains and the office staff, Leila's supervisor asked everyone to let him know early when they might be contemplating taking leave to avoid too many people being gone at the same time. When he asked Leila if she had any future leave plans, she told him she planned on requesting two weeks of leave in May.

It could not have been more than a week after this encounter between Leila and her priest supervisor that I received a call from O'Brien who said he learned through "reliable sources" I was planning on leaving the priesthood to marry. I told him I would be happy to discuss any plans I might have for the future if he would tell me why he lied to the National Review Board about the extent of the

abuse problem among Catholic chaplains in the military. Infuriated by my response, he said that I was suspended from carrying on priestly functions in the military. Because I had already just formally celebrated my retirement ceremony and had less than a week to serve before commencing terminal leave, the suspension had little effect on my military career. Still, it made me feel both angry and sad.

### **Retirement: A New Beginning**

In the course of my cross-country trip, I stopped in Fayetteville, Tennessee where I stayed overnight with retired Admiral Frank Kelso and his wife Landess. It was an honor working for Frank when he was the Sixth Fleet Commander and anyone who worked for him was not surprised that he was selected to be the Chief of Naval Operations. I shared with Frank and Landess that I was scandalized by O'Brien whom I perceived as a homosexual prelate who was covering up the sexual predation of other homosexual clergy; that celibacy in not having a wife and children had never been easy for me; and that I was contemplating taking a leave of absence from the priesthood and one day possibly marrying. Frank – a very devout Methodist – later sent me a letter in which he wrote: "Gene, I have always found you to be a very God-loving person and I think it's quite understandable that you would like to enjoy life on earth with a wife and children. Jesus never told his disciples they were not allowed to marry and enjoy the blessings of family life."

When I completed my cross-country drive and contacted Bishop Adamec in early April, he told me that Archbishop O'Brien had informed him of his decision to revoke my ecclesiastical endorsement based on credible evidence that I planned on marrying a Navy Chaplain by the name of Leila Havadtoy on May 15 in the Coronado Chapel. I told him if he or O'Brien had the good sense of contacting the chapel, they would discover that I never made plans to marry Leila Havadtoy or anyone there in May, June, or anytime soon. I told him further that I was disappointed that O'Brien could not come up with a better reason for getting rid of me than he did Tom Doyle. Because I knew both O'Brien and Adamec would not miss priests like Tom and myself who exposed the sexual predation and homosexual behavior that they covered up, I told Adamec I wished to be granted a leave of absence from the priesthood.

At the time I spoke with Adamec, I had no idea how O'Brien came up with the May 15 wedding date in Coronado. It was only later when I met with Leila that we could only surmise that her supervisory Catholic Chaplain, having been informed that she planned on requesting two weeks of leave in May, assumed that a "Coronado" entry on her desk calendar for 15 May was her wedding date. The truth, however, was that Leila was planning on requesting leave to return to Connecticut for her parents' 50th wedding anniversary on May 1, 2004, and she was scheduled to perform the marriage of a "Sandra Coronado" on May 15, 2004, in her own Marine Corps Base Quantico Chapel, some 3,000 miles away from Coronado, CA.

If O'Brien had revoked my endorsement before I submitted my retirement papers, I could have sued him for revoking my endorsement without cause. However, because I had already submitted my retirement papers, I was told it was best that I not fight it. I'm pretty sure that Tom Doyle who likewise had his endorsement pulled came to the same conclusion, especially after he was able to save his retirement with a six-month endorsement from the Orthodox Church.

After what O'Brien did to Tom Doyle in attempting to have him lose his retirement, Leila felt O'Brien might try to have her watched carefully by her priest supervisor who might want to make up for providing false information about us getting married in Coronado on May 15, 2004. If I were to visit and stay at her house, she feared her supervisory chaplain might attempt to accuse her of carrying on an affair with a Catholic priest.

Looking back on that conversation, I now understand where Leila was coming from. I couldn't help but have a flashback to my college days when I was falsely accused of carrying on an affair with a co-ed by a Franciscan brother with a dirty mind. I also recalled when an anonymous writer sent a letter to the editor of *Proceedings* accusing me of preying on Naval Academy Midshipmen to prevent the



publication of a manuscript I submitted about the Depart of Defense (DoD) homosexual exclusion policy. Even though the libelous letter was not signed, I was able to deduce who the writer was based on his phraseology and the motive he would have had to prevent the publication of my work. His attempt to “stop the presses” failed and he died a few years later of AIDS.

I told Adamec if I ever decided to marry, it would only be after I received a dispensation from my vows from the Church which ordinarily took a year to be processed. However, when I consulted a canon lawyer friend and told him what was happening in my life, he said he doubted I would be granted a dispensation anytime soon as the Church would not want to expose in writing the abuse O'Brien had been covering up. It was also at this time that Leila after her supervisor went through her office and kept asking about her leave plans, that we feared O'Brien might try to get her written up on some trumped-up charges as he did with Tom Doyle in Germany.

## **Marriage and Family Life**

After Leila discussed the situation with her father, who like her grandfather was also an ordained minister in the Hungarian Reformed Church, she said O'Brien could not have her accused of conduct unbecoming an officer if we were legally married. Consequently, when Leila took leave and invited me to go home with her to celebrate her parents' 50th wedding anniversary, her father offered to witness our marriage in their home on their anniversary, May 1, 2004. Hardly anyone knew about this as we later scheduled a public wedding at Yale University four months later.

It was only years later that I learned that Leila's parents had been worried that she might never get married and they would never have grandchildren, especially after she turned down a marriage proposal from a civilian contractor a little over a year before we married. While Leila and I were concerned about the threat that O'Brien posed to Leila's career even after her supervisor fed him false information about a May 15 wedding in Coronado, neither of us realized that we probably never would have had children had we waited for a dispensation that probably never would have been granted.

Just as some couples may rush into marriage if they discover they are going to have a baby, I think we never would have married when we did if Leila's parents were not so enthusiastic about us getting married on their 50th anniversary. When my sister and her grown children received invitations to the August ceremony, they, along with most of my relatives and friends, were surprised that I was marrying someone with whom I had not spent much time even though we first met seven years earlier when Leila was getting out of the Navy at that time.

When Bishop Adamec learned that I was getting married in August, he wrote and said I lied about waiting until I was dispensed before I married. I told him that both Leila and I felt threatened by O'Brien who attempted to have Tom Doyle lose his retirement benefits. I also told him I learned that I had less than a 50 percent chance of receiving a dispensation, especially in light of the abuse cover-ups and underreporting that church leaders would not want to be documented in the narrative portion of my petition. Adamec could not disagree with my assessment of the dispensation.

On Saturday, August 7, 2004, Leila's father officiated at our wedding in the presence of over 100 family members and friends in the Yale Divinity School Chapel followed by a reception at the Quinnipiac Club in New Haven. The day after the wedding we drove to Quebec for our honeymoon. Before the year was over, we also honeymooned in Italy in the cities of Rome, Florence, Sienna, Verona, and Venice.



Yale University



2/8 Officers and Wives



Quebec City



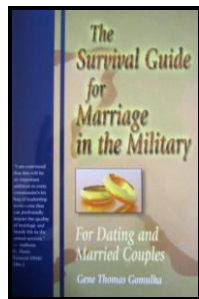
Rome

We lived in Woodbridge, Virginia the first 17 months of our marriage while Leila worked at Marine Corps Base Quantico. I started a publishing company, PlainTec, and produced *The Survival Guide for Marriage in the Military*, as well as a *Marriage and Military Life* relationship inventory for military couples similar to FOCCUS and Prepare/Enrich.

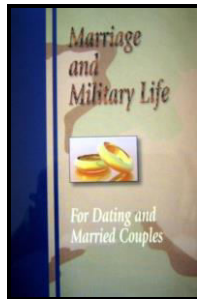
The first year I sold about 10,000 copies of my works. Book sales increased particularly after Dear Abby endorsed *The Survival Guide* in her weekly column. She wrote that it "is very well done, easy to read and jargon-free, and although it was written for military couples whose marriages can be subject to extreme stresses, it can provide food for thought to civilian couples as well."<sup>9</sup>

The success of the book also resulted in a weekly relationship column on military.com as well as invitations to speak at various military family conferences. Most speaking engagements were held at Marine Corps and Army commands.

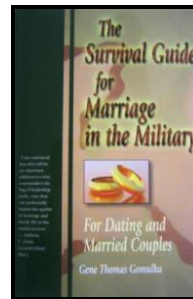
When it was clear the book was well received and was helping thousands of military couples, I wrote and published a second edition that included additional advice that stemmed from communications with readers who wrote letters in response to my weekly column.



2004 1st Edition



2004 Inventory



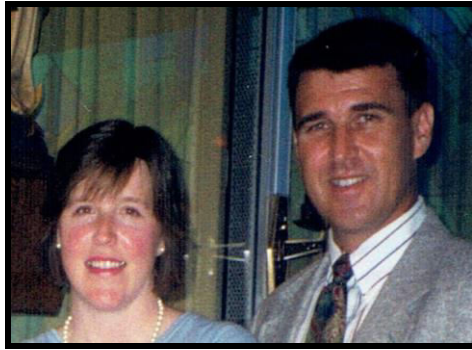
2007 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

The twins were conceived around Valentine's Day, about a year after we were legally married. During Leila's second trimester, we went on a short Caribbean cruise and visited friends (Diana & Phil Peterson, Paula & Jimmy Paulk, Jan & Larry Ellis, Lisa & Dan Keenan, Terri & Mark Triana, and Terry & Bob Sanders) who live in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

During Leila's third trimester, Lisa (Zinni) Hoess and her husband Michael generously hosted a baby shower at their home for us in Northern Virginia. Leila's parents were present along with close friends like Jean and Dan Brannon, Julie, Bill, and Michelle Bartolomea, and others.



Paula and Jimmy Paulk



Diana and Phil Peterson



Lisa and Michael Hoess

When Leila was eight months pregnant, her doctor at Bethesda informed us on Friday, October 14, 2005, that the twins were compacted and needed to be delivered on Monday morning. Not realizing that twins are often born a month early owing to constricted growth, we originally thought they might be born in early November. When Leila informed the doctor that Monday, October 17, was my birthday, I was delighted to point out that I could not ask for better birthday presents. Sasha was born at 9:26 a.m. followed three minutes later at 9:29 a.m. by Luke. Sasha takes pride in being Luke's "older sister," while Luke has no problem being the "baby of the family."



## Naval Submarine Base New London

It was not long after the birth of the twins that we moved from Woodbridge, Virginia to Groton, Connecticut where Leila was assigned to a command that supported some 20 submarines homeported at Naval Submarine Base New London. Leila's parents lived only an hour away in Milford, Connecticut. We enjoyed visiting them as much as they enjoyed playing with their grandchildren.

It was three years after our marriage that Matt Lee, the priest with the "live-in boyfriend" in Hawaii, was arrested in 2007 and charged with aggravated assault, fraternization, forcible and consensual sodomy, conduct unbecoming an officer, and failure to inform sex partners he was HIV positive. When the media contacted Archbishop O'Brien and asked him if he knew about Lee's behavioral problems, he lied by leading reporters to believe he did not know that Lee was sexually active when he said, "When the Archdiocese for the Military Services became aware through Chaplain Lee that there was an accusation against him of immoral behavior with military personnel, we, along with the Archdiocese of Washington, removed his faculties immediately."<sup>10</sup> The real truth, however, is that O'Brien knew as early as 2002 of Lee's immoral behavior and did nothing.

After serving a two-year sentence, Lee was released only to be arrested again in 2014 on child pornography and teenage solicitation charges. Lee is currently incarcerated in the Petersburg, Virginia Federal Penitentiary and is not due to be released until 2040 when he will be 75 years old. Had

O'Brien gotten back to me when I wrote him in 2002 about the chaplain with the "live-in boyfriend," Lee might have gotten help and not be imprisoned today, and several young Naval Academy midshipmen in Annapolis and young Marines in Quantico might not have been subjected to Lee's predatory behavior. While Lee is rotting behind bars, O'Brien, having been promoted and named a Cardinal, is now living "the good life" in Rome.

Following Lee's arrest in 2007, when it was clear I was right in reporting him to O'Brien, a priest friend mentioned that the possibility of my getting a dispensation from my vows of celibacy and getting our marriage validated in the Catholic Church was higher now that we were happily married with children, I made an appointment with the local ordinary, Bishop Michael Cote, of the Diocese of Norwich. Mike was one year behind me at the North American College in Rome. When I explained my situation to Mike, he assured me that he could help with my laicization and marriage validation requests. However, when I met with a nun who worked on his Tribunal who was supposed to help process the paperwork, it became clear that they wanted me to lie about my real reasons for requesting a leave of absence and marrying outside the Church. The nun did not want to talk about the false accusation about getting married in the Coronado chapel; my reports about abuse cover-ups; etc. I got the sense she was hoping I would say that I was pressured by my parents to become a priest or that I never felt really happy as a priest. When I told her my decision to become a priest was my own and that I could not remember one day that I was not happy being a priest, she said she would get back to me which she never did.

When I spoke with Tom Doyle about my failed attempt at getting laicized and getting our marriage validated, he laughed and said that Cote would never submit a laicization request to Rome documenting what O'Brien did to us both. He pointed out that Cote, like Tim Dolan and Blase Cupich, followed him at the Nunciature in D.C. where Cote, like Dolan and Cupich, covered up the sex abuse reports that Tom had addressed in his 1985 abuse report before he was terminated. Just as Tom saved me in 2002 when O'Brien attempted to get me to submit to a psychological evaluation that he later wrote about in an article entitled, "Cardinals Behaving Badly," so too did he save me from wasting my time on a laicization process that would either never be approved or would have covered up the real reasons that led me to take a leave of absence from the priesthood and marrying. Tom helped me realize that church officials do not want to be presented with documentation about O'Brien's failure to address sex abuse any more than they want the media to expose how much sex abuse Pope Francis himself covered up in Buenos Aires before his papal election.

During Leila's three-year tour of duty in Groton, I realized I could not work as a publisher and author while at the same time caring for infant twins. Because Leila and I grew up in homes where our moms took care of us while our fathers were away at work throughout the day, we did not want to place Luke and Sasha in a childcare center more than once or twice a week. Even though I was not excited about changing the twins' diapers and performing other household tasks, I came in time to realize that they would become more independent as they grew and a day would come when I would feel sad that they could get along well without my help.

## **Coronado**

In January of 2009, we left Connecticut and moved to San Diego, California where Leila had orders to the Naval Medical Center near historic Balboa Park. We moved into a condominium in Coronado I purchased in 1999 as an investment property. Had Trip and Jan McKinney in Hawaii not recommended I buy a house and had Rich and Debbie Haas not found the condo on F Avenue, we could never afford to own a home in Coronado today. We lived in that condo until December of 2013 when my real estate agent friend, Eugene Kocherga, found us a larger free-standing home a few blocks away on H Avenue that we were able to purchase for the same amount that we received from selling our condo on F Avenue.

Almost every summer after we moved to Coronado I tried to fly the family back to the East Coast. Because I never got to know my grandfathers who died before or after I was just born, and because

my parents, the twins' grandparents on my side were deceased, I wanted them to spend time with Leila's parents before they died. While visiting with them in Connecticut, we also always tried to visit my relatives and friends in Johnstown and State College.



Twin's Grandparents



Lucy & Pietro Pellicciotta



Johnstown relatives

Around 9 months after we moved to California, we enrolled the twins in an excellent preschool program at Graham Memorial Presbyterian Church. I would ride back and forth to school with them every day on our bikes. Leila and I were proud when their preschool teachers said both twins were extremely bright and got along very well with their classmates.

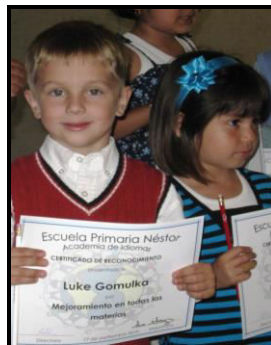
Because Leila and I grew up in homes where we were exposed to foreign languages at a young age, we decided that Sasha and Luke could benefit greatly from learning Spanish, particularly between the ages of four and seven. When they started kindergarten two months before they turned five, we enrolled them in the Nestor Language Academy, a charter school where classes between kindergarten and second grade are taught exclusively in Spanish. The school is located about 15 minutes south of Coronado, less than 5 miles from the Mexican border. I worked hard with the twins in going over their lessons and doing their homework. When they completed kindergarten, Sasha scored the highest in reading comprehension, and Luke scored the second highest among all 125 kindergarten students in their school.



Biking to Preschool



Sasha's Award



Luke's award



French speaking day camp

One week after the twins completed kindergarten I flew with them to Quebec City where they were enrolled in a five-week (9:00 AM to 4:00 PM) French-speaking day camp. Because there was no formal language learning associated with the program, I prepared French lessons during the day that they completed in the evenings. By the time we left Quebec, the twins mastered many of the subjects in French that they learned in kindergarten in Spanish (e.g., days of the week, months of the year, telling time, counting from 1 to 100, etc.).

We were very impressed with the academic progress the twins made at Nestor where they were writing full paragraphs in Spanish.

However, we decided to move them for the second semester of First Grade to Coronado Village Elementary after they felt socially and physically isolated from their Nestor classmates, the majority of whom were from Spanish-speaking families who lived along the border with Mexico.

Over the years we met several wonderful parents whose children have attended the same schools as Sasha and Luke.



Kristie with Micah



Lynda



Judy with Troy



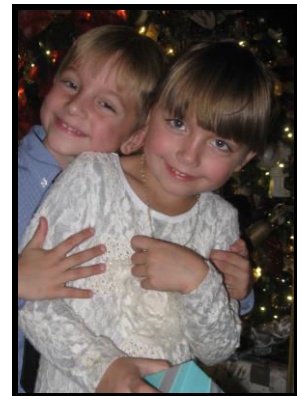
Eugene



Karen

One of the important lessons I learned about fatherhood is that children can learn so much more if their parents help them with their homework and read books to them in the evening or at bedtime. Unfortunately, many parents do not have as much time to spend with their children as I have as a stay-at-home dad. This is one of the real advantages of having children later in life, particularly when one parent is already retired.

Living on the West Coast two three hours south of Hollywood, we were invited to a free screen test to determine if Luke and Sasha might have some acting or modeling potential. In time they were enrolled in the John Robert Powers acting and modeling school and later offered a contract by the BMG Model and Talent Agency with offices in Los Angeles (LA), Chicago, New York, and Miami. Although Luke was contracted to model children's sports attire at a photo shoot in Malibu, the long drive between LA and San Diego made it unfeasible to pursue this potential career.

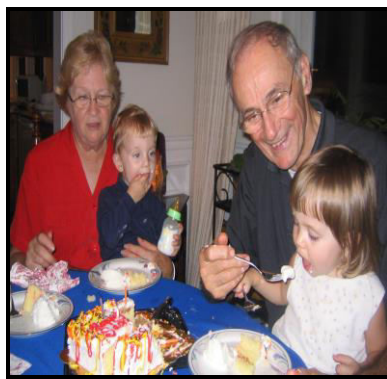


Our BMG Models

While we are very fortunate to live on scenic, safe Coronado Island with a renowned school system across the bay from San Diego, one disadvantage is living so far away from family and friends. Fortunately, the twins have received many presents over the years from relatives, godparents, and friends that have helped compensate for living so far away. Christmas and their birthday are exciting times for Sasha and Luke when they open their presents and are reminded how much they are loved and how blessed are to have so many wonderful relatives and friends who share in our family's love.



Godmother Debbie Halye



Betty and George Kleban



Joan Ludwig



Gail and Charlie Kulp

## Episcopal Church Job Offer

In 2012 Reverend Edward Harrison, the pastor of Christ Episcopal Church Coronado, heard stories of my ministry as the Command Chaplain at the Naval Amphibious Base Coronado Chapel from 1994 to 1997. When he contacted me, I offered to give him a tour of the base chapel I conceived; helped to design; and miraculously paid off in one year. Later, after meeting at his home with members of his congregation, he asked if I would be interested in being his associate pastor. I told him I would speak with my wife; pray over the matter; and get back to him with my decision. Leila felt that the Episcopal Church theologically was closer than most denominations to the Catholic Church and that I could handle the responsibility now that the twins were no longer in Nestor, but enrolled in second grade at Coronado Elementary just two blocks from our home.

In researching the matter, I discovered that according to data collected by the Episcopal Church in 1992, around 350 former Catholic priests were serving as Episcopal priests. While I found many common beliefs between the two faith groups, I encountered a major obstacle when I was told the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese was a lesbian. I told Ed that I could not accept his kind offer because I could never teach my children that homosexual relationships were as natural and moral as the life-giving marriage between a man and a woman. Ed appreciated my honesty; thanked me for considering his offer; and noted that there were members of his congregation who also questioned the Episcopal Church's approval of those who were involved in homosexual relationships. My decision not to join the Episcopal Church owing to its teachings on homosexuality would later prove to be ironic owing to Pope Francis' 2015 appointment of homosexual Bishop Robert McElroy to the Diocese of San Diego, and McElroy's later 2025 installation as the Cardinal Archbishop of Washington.

## Dispensation Request

When Jorge Bergoglio was elected pope in March 2013, he promised a crackdown on cover-ups and a *zero-tolerance* approach to abuse itself. When some priest friends of mine believed Pope Francis was serious about disciplining those who committed and/or covered up abuse, they encouraged me to request a dispensation from my vows of celibacy to be a married priest like several former Episcopal priests who were permitted to remain married and still become Catholic priests. I approached recently installed Bishop McElroy in 2016 with the request based on encouragement from a former spiritual director, Monsignor John Strykowski, who felt McElroy would welcome me as a married priest into his diocese. McElroy tasked Monsignor Steven Callahan, the Judicial Vicar, with preparing my petition that only Pope Francis could approve. Unlike my petition to Bishop Cote in Norwich in which I asked to be laicized so that our marriage could be recognized by the Catholic Church, I was now asking to remain a priest and function like many former Episcopal priests as a married Catholic priest. I also asked that Pope Francis laicize Cardinal O'Brien not only for underreporting and covering up sexual abuse, but also for reprising against me when I confronted him

for covering up Chaplain Lee's predatory behavior in Hawaii that allowed Lee to go on and abuse Midshipmen in Annapolis and Marines in Quantico.

Around June 2017, eighteen months after Callahan sent me a dispensation questionnaire which I completed with input from former parishioners and priest friends, I received a phone call from Callahan informing me that the pope turned down my request to be a married Catholic priest, but that he would be happy to accept a request to be laicized. I told Callahan that people request annulments because they wish to remarry in the Catholic Church. If they can show grounds for why their previous marriage was invalid, then they are granted an annulment. I pointed out that there are no valid grounds for laicizing me when I never would have taken a leave of absence and married had it not been for the reprisal I suffered for exposing abuse and cover-ups in the Archdiocese for the Military Services. I told him I was not going to lie and say that I left the Church when, in fact, it was Church leaders like O'Brien and Adamec who unjustly forced me out. When I asked Callahan for a copy of the Pope's decision, he said he could not provide it. I responded by saying that there were no grounds for the Church to laicize me, and I certainly had no reason now to ask to be laicized insofar as I would not want to marry and raise my children in a Church governed by officials like Pope Francis and Bishop McElroy who tolerate abuse and those who cover it up. I recapitulated what I said to Callahan in an August 28, 2018 letter to McElroy which I posted online at [www.gomulka.net/McElroy.pdf](http://www.gomulka.net/McElroy.pdf).

My evaluation of Francis and McElroy later proved to be "spot on" when McElroy was shown to have covered up for San Diego predator priest, Father Jacob Bertrand. After Rachel Mastrogiacomo reported in 2014 being ritually raped by Bertrand at her home in Minnesota, McElroy did not remove Bertrand from ministry until August of 2016, five months after Mastrogiacomo filed criminal charges in Minnesota against Bertrand. It was also in July 2016 that renowned psychotherapist Richard Sipe had McElroy legally served evidence for Pope Francis showing how then-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick sexually harassed or abused some 12 seminarians and young priests. Pope Francis buried this report and later made McElroy a cardinal as a reward for covering up the pope's cover-up of the allegations against McCarrick, none of which were mentioned in the whitewashed 2020 McCarrick Report.

My experiences with Cote in Norwich and McElroy in San Diego taught me some important lessons that most Catholics have never learned about how "canceled whistleblower priests" are treated. If I was given an order in the military, "Kill those prisoners," and I refused to obey it, I could appeal the unlawful order and not suffer any consequences provided those in the chain of command above my commanding officer (CO) were moral and honorable commanders. However, like a Wehrmacht officer who was ordered to shoot Jews, I would be wasting my time in appealing my case to someone no better than my corrupt CO. This, unfortunately, is what is happening today when a priest or even bishops like Arecibo Bishop Fernández Torres and Tyler Bishop Joseph Strickland are relieved of their pastoral duties without cause.

Before suspending a cleric who refuses to compromise his morals by keeping silent about abuse, cover-ups, homosexual misconduct, or other forms of corruption, he often is offered an assignment that he is expected to turn down which will result in a charge of disobedience. This happened to a Buffalo seminarian who reported sexual predation and clerical homosexual misconduct. The whistleblower was sent to work during the summer in a parish where he was told he would have to live in the empty convent which lacked electricity, furniture, and food.

I have learned that whistleblower seminarians and priests who are unjustly silenced and transferred to very undesirable assignments cannot expect much long-term support from the Catholic laity and media. Some members of the laity may voice support upon hearing of a priest's unjust treatment, but after that initial reaction, the priest is basically on his own. Even when priests like Richmond Father Mark White and Washington Father Michael Briese retain canon lawyers to appeal their unjust treatment, they can expect the pope and the Vatican to support their corrupt bishops just like Adolf Hitler or Heinrich Himmler supported SS Officers who ordered German soldiers to execute Jews. Chicago Father Paul Kalchik had a similar experience when he appealed being unjustly removed from his parish by Cardinal Cupich for allowing his parishioners to properly dispose of a



rainbow banner that was hung in the church sanctuary by a previous gay pastor who died naked in his rectory bedroom connected to a sex machine. Fathers White, Briese, and Kalchik have yet to be restored to ministry by their closeted homosexual Ordinaries.

### **Sad but Necessary Divorce**

It was not long after we arrived in California that Leila began seeing a civilian doctor to treat her for a condition that she said Navy doctors were not able to resolve. Unfortunately, Leila became addicted to the prescription medications she had been given which led her in time to become an alcoholic. For years I tried to get Leila help especially after she was arrested twice on nine charges of domestic violence and child abuse. Between 2009 when she first started seeing her civilian physician and June of 2017 when the twins and I had to have her removed from our home, the police were called to render assistance no fewer than 18 times. Following a professional intervention, Leila refused to enter into inpatient care to arrest her addictions and she filed for divorce. The divorce was completely finalized in November of 2018 at which time I was awarded sole legal and physical custody of the twins along with the house and all of my financial assets. Leila lives in Connecticut near her sister after her father died in 2019 and her mother passed away in 2023. The Court ruled that Leila could not have any physical contact with the twins unless she met certain rehabilitation conditions. Because she refused to seek professional help, it was only when the twins turned 18 on October 17, 2023 that Leila was able to see them. The twins and I pray that one day she will arrest her addictions.

Following the divorce, a priest friend encouraged me to request to return to ministry now that I cannot be accused of living in an invalid marriage. While I know cases where this has happened, I told him that a closeted gay Ordinary like McElroy would not want an outspoken straight priest like myself to serve in his diocese, any more than I would want to work for him. If I had no problem approving of people who engaged in homosexual relations, then I would have accepted the offer to serve as the associate pastor of the Episcopal Church in Coronado years ago.

In our much more peaceful home, it was enjoyable for the twins and me to make new friends and reconnect with many relatives and friends who visited our scenic resort town.



Mary Lee Madigan



Tom Powell & Luke



Sandy & Calvin



David & Cora with Górale

I was told by a canonist with a doctorate in Canon Law that because I was never married in the Church and was never laicized, I am still canonically speaking a priest. He also said that Pope Francis ruled that while priests will not be named monsignors until they now reach the age of 60, those who were already afforded the honorary title are allowed to keep it. He said, "If bishops like Michael Bransfield and cardinals like Roger Mahoney can still use their ecclesiastical titles after it was clearly shown they either engaged in or covered up abuse, then, until you are laicized or request laicization, you are still canonically 'the Rev. Monsignor Gene Gomulka'."

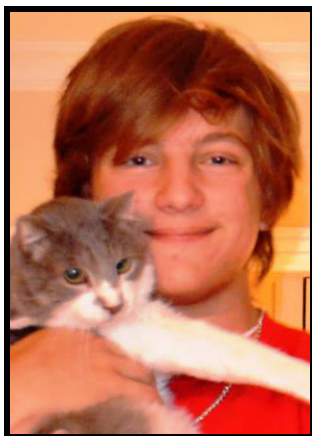
Even though that might be the case, under the current Church leadership that refuses to discipline prelates who engage in or cover up abuse, or those who reprise against whistleblowers like myself, Bishop Strickland, Archbishop Viganò, Tom Doyle, Mark White, Paul Kalchik, Jim Altman, Wieslaw

Walawender, and others, I would be ashamed to use the titles “Monsignor” or “Father” lest it appears that I respect and would be willing to obey corrupt superiors like Cardinal McElroy and Pope Francis. Just as I would have deserted the Wehrmacht during World War II rather than carry out orders I found unlawful and immoral, or stay and allow myself to be unjustly punished by being sent to the Eastern Front or shot, so too can I not be submissive to prelates today who cover up abuse and fail to confront those who support practices (abortion, homosexual behavior, etc.) that I firmly believe to be against the teachings of Christ and His Church.

I will point out, however, that there are still people to whom I ministered in my life who still insist on calling me “Monsignor” or “Father.” They believe that even though I am now a single Dad, I am more of a priest than Cardinal O’Brien and the late Bishop Adamec who coerced me into leaving after I confronted them for covering up and underreporting abuse. Interestingly, when Father Tom Doyle and I had our ecclesiastical endorsements revoked by then-Archbishop O’Brien, Tom returned from Germany to his home in the Washington, DC area where then-Cardinal McCarrick refused to grant him faculties. So you had one of the most respected priests who has spent his life helping abuse victims prohibited from celebrating the sacraments by one of the most notorious sexual predators in the Church hierarchy. Note too that none of McCarrick’s successors, Wuerl, Gregory, or McElroy, have lifted that restriction.

Much of my time in retirement is now spent writing, investigating, consulting, and counseling victims of clerical sexual abuse and those who suffered reprisals for reporting sexual predation and homosexual misconduct involving bishops, priests, and seminarians. I believe I am doing more truly “priestly” work now than I did when I was involved in active ministry for thirty years. A day does not pass that I do not receive a phone call, email, or text message from a survivor of abuse or a victim of reprisals. Now that I am being contacted about my work by people far and wide, I almost feel like I did when I supervised over 150 chaplains from various faith groups serving Marines stationed or deployed over two-thirds of the earth between Yuma, Arizona, and the Horn of Africa. I could never undertake this work without the support and encouragement of talented, dedicated professionals (e.g., lawyers, journalists, editors, investigators, retired law enforcement friends and associates, etc.). I will continue writing articles and producing reports like “Addressing the Present-Day Culture of Sexual Predation and Cover-Ups in U.S. Seminaries.”

I took screenwriting classes online with the Academy of Art University in San Francisco using my Post-9/11 GI Bill and have yet to find a producer to fund the production of my script, [Den of Iniquity](#). Inspired by real-life events, *Den of Iniquity* is about a Marine Corps veteran who, unjustly dismissed from a Catholic Seminary after reporting being sexually assaulted, teams up with an attractive Jewish lawyer to uncover a trail of sex trafficking and murder that threatens a cardinal’s aspirations of becoming the first American pope.



Sasha and Luke graduated with numerous awards from Coronado High School in June 2023. Sasha is majoring in psychology at Drexel University in Philadelphia while living with friends in West

Deptford, NJ. Sasha's goal is to graduate, attend med school, and become a neurologist. Luke is majoring in finance/business at San Diego State University while living nearby with a dear friend of mine in El Cajon. His goal at this point is to become a financial advisor.

After the twins left Coronado, I rented our home and moved temporarily to Niagara Falls, New York, where a Polish friend/business partner, Wieslaw Walawender, and I have invested in residential, commercial, and industrial properties that we are developing.

In May 2024, I moved to State College, Pennsylvania where I lived from 1975 to 1980 and where I still have friends. State College is very accessible by car for Sasha and by plane for Luke. I'm living in a very comfortable, spacious, two bedroom, two bath apartment on one floor with Rascal who is designated my "emotional support cat."

I originally wrote this autobiography for the twins thinking that I might pass away before they would get to know me. Now that they are grown up, I will leave this for my grandchildren whom I may never meet – just as I never got to know my grandfathers – one who died just before I was born, and one who died shortly after I was born.

I enjoyed my life as a priest and, before Leila's addictive behavior, I also enjoyed being married. I continue to pray that Leila may one day arrest her addictions; be reconciled with the twins for all the harm she caused us; and live long enough to be a loving grandmother.

While I don't think I would have left the priesthood and married had it not been for O'Brien, Adamec, and the abuse crisis, I am extremely happy that my confrontation with them resulted ultimately in the birth of Luke and Sasha. I believe I was a dedicated and loving priest, but I also think that I was a good husband and continue to be a good father to Sasha and Luke. It may sound strange to some, but I took the fact that the twins just happened to be born on my birthday – and that they were even born at all when the doctors at Walter Reed said Leila might never conceive - as a "sign" that God was blessing me for my years of priestly ministry and my stance on sex abuse in the Catholic Church.



For over thirty years I was called "Father," a title I appreciated and was proud of particularly before learning the full extent of the clerical sexual predation of mainly teenage boys within the Catholic Church. Even after I was named a "Monsignor," I continued to use the title "Father." Despite my fondness for the title and the joy I experienced in being a priest, I believe that the titles of my past – "Father" – "Monsignor" – "Captain" – "Chaplain" – "Padre" - all pale in significance to "Dad."

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<sup>3</sup> Sipe, A.W. Richard. "To enable healing --'Sexual Trauma and the Church' conference." *National Catholic Reporter* (September 17, 1993).

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