



Providing The Way



Attitude of Gratitude

"I'm Jules, and I'm an alcoholic." How I choked on those words when I first said them back in the 70's while attending my first Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) meeting! And only after completing a 10-day "drying out" session. That first meeting was held at the former St. Luke's Hospital (now called Covenant) in Saginaw, Michigan.

But for a time, it was to be my first and last A.A. meeting, for I was not convinced I could be an alcoholic. I just had a drinking "problem," and all I needed to do was "cut down," cut out the "hard stuff," and just drink a little wine now and then. St. Paul's words that "a little wine is good for the stomach" became my motto. Little did I realize that my insane thinking and denial were sure signs of alcoholism. But I continued in insane thinking and denial for almost 10 more years before finally admitting, as the First Step in A.A. declares, that "I was powerless over alcohol and that my life had become unmanageable."

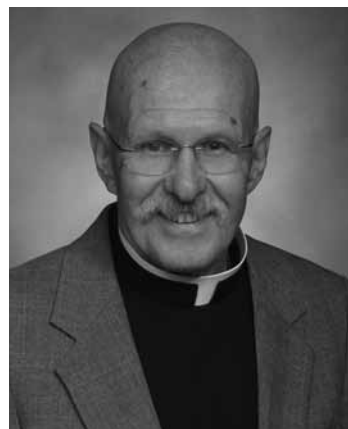
During those intervening years between that failed attempt at sobriety and entering Guest House, I tried everything the Big Book of A.A. describes, and went through practically every phase it talks about: changing my choice of drinks (but never quitting entirely), the blackouts, a geographical cure. A year's leave of absence—all I needed was to get away from the stress of priestly ministry—made me realize later, of course, that you take yourself and your disease with you. You just find different people to drink with and to enable you more. "Poor Father, he needs to unwind and enjoy life a little more." After coming back to active

ministry and being assigned a parish which I didn't want, I just had more excuses to continue my downward spiral of active alcoholism.

I drank because the weather was dreary and gloomy. Anyone who has ever spent a winter in Michigan knows what I am talking about. But then I drank when the weather turned nice to celebrate the return of the sun and blue sky.

"I just need a little drink to get through that parish council meeting..." etc., etc. Before long, I drank not only because I wanted to, but because I needed to. Drinking became my way of life, an all-consuming pre-occupation to the point where I started believing, like so many alcoholics in the final stages of the disease: "I'll die if I can't get another drink, but I WILL DIE if I take another drink!"

It was not always this way, of course. I was born in the small town of Alpena, Michigan, on the shores of Lake Huron, the last of seven children. By the time of my birth, three siblings had died, so I was raised with three older brothers. Like so many parents at that time, mine suffered through the Depression but I never remember being really poor. There was always plenty of food—my mother was a wonderful cook and baker. I can still recall the smell of fresh baked rolls and pies drifting from the oven in the kitchen which, for me, was the most important room in the house. Of course, there was always alcohol around. I remember my mother telling my Father



Father Julius Spleet

and oldest brother: "If you're going to drink, drink at home." Naturally, I presumed she meant it for me also. So I took her advice willingly – and often!

But, it was not until my senior year in high school, just two weeks before graduation, that I experienced my first bout of heavy drinking. It was at our senior "skip day" which ended with a party at one of my classmate's family's cottage. Being somewhat shy and quiet, I was flattered that I was invited to be part of the "in crowd." Once the drinking started, I felt that magic feeling of being "one of the guys," that I could drink anybody "under the table," which is what I proceeded to do. I believe it was because of that experience that I linked alcohol as a solution of my shyness and difficulty in making friends. Alcohol became my liquid of courage and escape from my self-hatred and poor self-image.

The following Fall, I entered the seminary. For those years leading up to ordination, my drinking was "interrupted," although I managed to make up for it during vacation



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breaks, away from the prying eyes of the seminary rector and faculty. But, even during the occasional days off, I always hung with the others who looked for a restaurant that served liquor, making sure of having enough mints to cover up the smell of alcohol when we reported back to the rector.

After ordination in 1962, I managed to cut down on my drinking and vowed to be the best possible priest. In the fervor of those first couple of years, I was determined to save the world and hoped to be another "Going My Way" priest. I wanted to be another Bing Crosby, with hundreds of people flocking to my door, bringing their wounds, sins and failings so that "Father" could fix them, and put them back together again. The trouble was, "Father" wasn't paying attention to his own problems, one in particular called alcohol.

Soon the "honeymoon" wore off, and the reality set in, that I was not God's gift to the Church and the world. Eventually, my drinking increased and the signs of the disease of alcoholism started to appear—the denial, the lies, the secret hiding places for my supply, the missed appointments due to hangovers—the vicious cycle. I begged God for help. If He would just get me to cut down, or get me to feel better. Of course, a little Valium along the way would help too, along with God's help (that insane thinking of an alcoholic!).

The turning point came during the waning months of 1984 when a relationship, if one could call it that, turned ugly. It was my "bottom," for I knew I couldn't get any lower. I will never forget those last words my drinking "Friend" and I spoke to each other: "Jules, the next time we see each other will be in Hell," and I responded from the depths of my misery, "We ARE in Hell!" I meant it in every fiber of my being.

Shortly after that, a true friend drove me to Guest House in Lake Orion, Michigan. I was too sick to fight any longer, and not long after, I finally admitted that I was an alcoholic. That first month was no cake walk! Even though I admitted to being an alcoholic, it took me longer to ACCEPT it. I, the priest who once thought I was going to save the world (the Messiah Complex), had to accept that I was powerless over a liquid in a bottle! But gradually with God's help and His grace working through the loving hands of the staff in that beautiful mansion (The William E. Scripps mansion), I came to believe that there is life after alcohol. Since then, I have managed to continue my life of sobriety. I cannot put into proper words the emotions I feel when I return to what I call my "second womb" where I had my rebirth to new life. I felt so fortunate to live only a couple hours drive from that sacred sanctuary called Guest House. Yes, I choose to call it sacred, because it was there that I fell in love once again with life and our God, Who sustains our life.

It was there that I felt loved and accepted by a respectful and caring staff, from the Director Ed Higgins (retired), to the counselors and all of the household staff. It was there that I was affirmed as a person who has a disease, called alcoholism, and not condemned as a drunk deserving the wrath of God. It was there that I no longer felt alone, but discovered that I walked with my fellow alcoholics along the road of recovery, experiencing true friendship and love. I no longer needed to seek it in sleazy bars and "happy hours" (why do they call it "happy?"). No longer having to wake from a hangover, worrying where and when I can get that first drink to settle me down, etc., etc. One of the joys of living a sober life, now that I am a "senior priest" (i.e. —retired), is having the time and freedom to choose those priestly ministries that I find so fulfilling. Being a member of A.A. helps me to reach out in a special way to other recovering and, especially, suffering alcoholics. I try to do this by occasionally directing A.A. retreats, giving open talks and just plain shar-

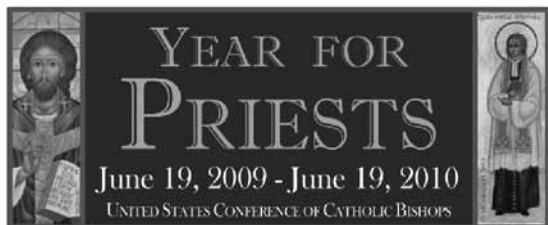
ing the A.A. way of life and its principles with those who want to improve their spiritual lives. For, as we know, the spiritual element of A.A. is absolutely necessary if one is to find serenity and peace. Being a priest, who is also a recovering alcoholic, can be a great witness to others who are looking to those who can remind them that the disease of alcoholism makes no distinction of person or vocations. For we are all in the same boat, and we all need the help of one another and, above all, the help of God.

One area of my life that I treasure is my prison ministry. Over the past few years, I have become more and more convinced that a great percentage of inmates are incarcerated because of substance abuse, which led them to commit their crime. So many times I hear the sad stories of lives ruined or destroyed because of alcohol or drugs. I try to bring to them not only the redeeming message of Christ, but also the spiritual principles of the A.A. way of life. I try to bring them hope that there is still time, and it is never too late to begin a new life free of addictive behavior. In a strange way, this ministry has helped me to stay sober, for I sincerely believe that, in St. Paul's words: "There but for the grace of God, go I." When I celebrate Mass with the inmates, hear their stories, or give the saving grace of Sacramental absolution in Confession, I remind myself—I could very well be one of those men behind bars!

I am eternally grateful to all who have reached out to me over the years and who continue to help me live a sober and fulfilling life. To those faithful benefactors of Guest House, without whom there would be no sacred refuge for the suffering alcoholics who come there to be restored to their ministry of serving God's people, be assured the "graduates" of Guest House gratefully remember you in our Masses and prayers.

Guest House Celebrates the “Year for Priests”

Expert Interviews, Public Service Announcements and More



June 19, 2009 through June 19, 2010 is the time frame that Pope Benedict has designated as the *Year for Priests*.

Benedict wrote that the purpose is to highlight “the importance of the priest’s role and mission in the Church and in contemporary society.”

Because so much of the work that Guest House does is for priests, we have wholeheartedly embraced the Pope's call. In fact, about 80% of Guest House resident clients each year are priests.

Throughout the year, Guest House has done a number of things to highlight not only the Year for Priests, but also our important work for the Church. These include:

- **PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS** – Pre-recorded 30 and 60-second radio PSA's in MP3 format have been created and are available.
- **A NEW, EXPANDED WEBSITE** – (www.guesthouse.org) offers helpful information about Guest House’s history, treatment programs for men and women, educational services, special events, and giving opportunities.
- **YOU TUBE VIDEO** – an 8½-minute informational video can be accessed via the Guest House website.
- **INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES** – Experts have been made available to discuss our Holy Father’s call to priests to grow in holiness, as well as the pressures facing today’s priests, and the ways that Guest House steps in to overcome addictions and preserve and strengthen priestly vocations.
- Special event fund raisers, and related printed materials, that specifically noted and/or highlighted this special year, including the annual Detroit Bishop's Dinner and the Portland Bishop's Mass and Reception (see following articles).

Bishop’s Mass & Reception in Portland, Maine

Re-connecting with friends there!

On Friday, October 2, the Most Rev. Richard J. Malone, Bishop of Portland, hosted our Annual Bishop’s Mass & Reception there to benefit our patient care programs. Currently, Guest House counts 30 Maine clergy and men and women religious among its living alumni.

The event, attended by nearly 100 friends and benefactors, took place at the historic Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul in Lewiston and was celebrated by Bishop Malone. Following the

Mass was a reception, a gourmet dinner prepared by culinary students at The Green Ladle in Portland, a silent auction and brief program. The Reception took place at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Lewiston.

Attendees at this year’s benefit also enjoyed the musical strains of Portland area singer/ songwriter Cassi Gray whose style melds jazz, Latin, and folk influences.

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Memorials

When sending in your memorial gift, please print all information. Please also include street addresses so that we can be sure to be accurate when notifying next of kin or friends of the deceased. For Special Memorial gifts of \$500 or more, you can have permanent plaque recognition at our treatment center for your departed relative or friend, while providing a major gift to our work. Call our Development Department at 1-800-626-6910 for more information. Thank you and God bless you for your kindness! Memorials listed are from 7/24/09 to 11/18/09.

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51st Annual Detroit Bishop's Dinner

Long-time Board Member Bob Koval Receives Annual Award



Guest House Board member Bob Koval (left) with President Dan Kidd

Each year, Guest House recognizes a Detroit-area individual who demonstrates— through words and deeds— compassion and assistance toward Catholic clergy and religious suffering chemically-based addictions, such as alcoholism.

This year, *The Bishop Kevin M. Britt Award* was extended to long-time friend, benefactor and Guest House Board member Robert W. Koval.

Mr. Koval received the award at the 51st Annual Detroit Bishop's Dinner on Friday, October 16. More than 250 guests attended this landmark event, hosted for the first time by His Excellency Allen Vigneron, Archbishop of Detroit.

The Dinner took place at the Auburn Hills Marriott Pontiac at Centerpoint in Michigan. Cardinal Edmund Szoka, retired Archbishop of Detroit, also was in attendance, along with Master of Ceremonies Father Tim Birney, Director of Priestly Vocations in the Archdiocese of Detroit. Preceding the Dinner

was a concelebrated Mass at St. Hugo of the Hills in Bloomfield Hills. Archbishop Vigneron was the principal celebrant.

The *Bishop Kevin M. Britt Award* was established in 2007 to commemorate the late Bishop Kevin Britt, a former auxiliary bishop in Detroit and Bishop of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Bishop Britt served as Guest House's Episcopal Moderator from 1996 to 2002, and was a member of the Men's Advisory Board for the Guest House program in Rochester, Minnesota, until his untimely death in 2004 at the age of 59. He chaired the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Vocations, and was noted for his unwavering support for priests in recovery.

Koval joined the Guest House Board of Trustees in 1998, serving as Chairman of the Board from August 2004 through August 2006, and as Chairman of the Capital Campaign from 2005 to the present. Additionally, he has served on the Strategic Planning, Development and Human Resources committees. Bob was a Co-Chair of the Detroit Bishop's Dinner in 1996 and 1997. He and his wife Patti were honorary chairpersons of the Detroit Bishop's Dinner in 2007 and 2008. He served as an Ex Officio member of the Guest House Institute Board from August 2006 through August 2008.

In Appreciation

Guest House acknowledges with gratitude the following permanent endowments and trusts which have been set up by donor friends.

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GuestHouse®

Attitude of Gratitude

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Have all of my problems and defects disappeared during these years of sobriety? By no means. As we know, A.A. is a program of PROGRESS NOT PERFECTION, as the Big Book reminds us. I still struggle with the detours and road blocks that life can confront us with. But today, I don't have to drink over them. And, at this writing, I don't WANT to drink. But I am well aware that I am only one drink away from resuming the life of drinking knowing that, once we pick up that drink, we believe we start where we left off. Alcoholism is a progressive disease.

As I finish this article just a few days before Thanksgiving, what better time to express my profound gratitude for all the blessings I have been given? Above all, the blessing and gift of sobriety and all the rewards it brings. Yes, so many promises described in the Big Book can and do come true, if we but try and live in that spirit of gratitude. As one of those promises states: "Our whole outlook and attitude on life will change." It's with that "attitude of gratitude" that I think of St. Paul's exclamation of thanksgiving to God for saving him. With a little editorial comment thrown in, I too want to exclaim: "By the grace of God, Guest House and A.A., I am what I am."

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Guest House wishes to express its most profound thanks to the following individuals who so graciously remembered us with gifts in their wills, received between June 6, 2009 and November 24, 2009.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace, Amen.

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Passages

Guest House notes the passing of three priest alumni last year: Reverend John T. Shirley, O.S.A., Reverend Michael J. Polewczak, and Reverend Charles J. Schneider. We are saddened by the loss of these three servants of the Church—but happy that we had a part in their recovery and renewed ministries!

Father Jack, as we knew him, was cared for at Guest House as an outpatient for one-and-one-half years beginning in 1970. He was a dear friend who came almost without fail to all of our Alumni Conferences and Reunions and many of the retreats held here in Michigan and around the country. A member of the Augustinians in Illinois, Father was also an officer and active participant in the Guest House Alumni Association for decades. He passed away in November after a short battle with cancer.

Father Polewczak, who died in June after a very brief battle with cancer, was a priest of Jesus Our Risen Savior Church in Spartanburg, South Carolina. He was cared for at Guest House in 1987. "Guest House rescued him," said Deacon Robert Sturm, parish life facilitator at the church. "He then became the effective priest he always wanted to be."

Finally, we note the passing of Reverend Charles J. Schneider of West Virginia, who graciously remembered Guest House by requesting that donations in his memory be directed to us. Father Charles, who passed away in June, served in a host of parishes throughout West Virginia until 2002 when he entered retirement. In addition to his work on the Priests' Senate in his diocese, Father was also instrumental in establishing programs for teens and was involved in various local hospital boards and commissions.



Life After Treatment for a Chemical Addiction

The following kind of information is typically given to Guest House graduates to help them on their recovery journey beyond treatment. We've adapted it for use by any person, lay or religious who is in recovery and has recently left treatment.

Most chemically-addicted individuals, such as alcoholics, enter treatment too afraid to admit they are afraid, wanting help but trying to hide what it is they need help with, and so low in self esteem that they trust few people, if anyone. Not surprisingly, it often takes a spiritual experience to help these individuals to get to a place where they can live each day in reality versus the denial of active addiction.

Most "12-step" recovery support groups, like Alcoholics Anonymous, are spiritually-based and urge the individual to "get in touch" with God as they understand Him to be. Recovering individuals are also strongly urged to stay involved! In other words, to make their recovery a top priority in their lives by being in touch with it every day. Here are a few specific tips and suggestions:

- Take a moment each day to pray for your continued success. Pray for others who are in recovery too, especially those you know.

- Take a few moments to reflect on what you learned in treatment and about the people you shared your treatment experience with.
- Regularly read any literature or listen to any tapes you've been provided by the treatment facility. Keep this advice fresh in your mind!
- Stay in touch with your sponsor and, if possible, counselor or medical professional who helped you. Stay in touch with those who were treated with you, if possible.
- Attend! Attend! Attend! Go to your 12-step meetings. They are so important to your long-term and lasting recovery because you will be with others who've experienced the same trials and triumphs.
- Be available to others needing treatment or recovery advice. This is sharing your experience because, in a very real way, "you've been there!"

Above all, if you are struggling, tell someone! Get in touch with your sponsor, with the facility where you were cared for, or with friends and associates who know you are in recovery and can lend you support. And remember, it's "one day at a time!"

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The Guest House Facilities:

- Management Services Offices Lake Orion, Michigan
- Lake Orion Treatment Center and Recovery Residence Lake Orion, Michigan
- Rochester Treatment Center Rochester, Minnesota
- Guest House at St. John Vianney Downingtown, Pennsylvania

Guest House, fully accredited and licensed, is listed in the Official Catholic Directory (OCD). Donations to Guest House, which is non-profit and tax-exempt, are deductible as allowed by law.

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