Faith in the future

This summer, we celebrated (clockwise from top left) glimpses of hope in Haiti, the profession of new Redemptorists, partnerships in Vietnam, and the bright promise of young adults in the Church.

ROMA, Fr. Alfred Bradley & Fr. Vang Tran/Courtesy
In 1966, I was a junior at St. Mary’s High School in North East, PA, and our civics teacher, Father John McGowan (now my mission preaching partner who tells people that I taught him!) organized a class debate on the war in Vietnam. He had a hard time finding volunteers who would argue against the war.

As I went on to college and graduate school, the war in Vietnam continued and became one of the most divisive issues in American history. I would suspect that many of us in that class in 1966 may have had different feelings as the years went on.

In some ways, I came of age during the Vietnam War. I had a high lottery number and a seminary deferment so the war did not touch me directly. Yet, I had friends and neighbors who were fighting in the war, and I was swept up in the powerful feelings of the day. Vietnam was a far-away place where the enemy was.

Today, more than 40 years later, the Redemptorists are growing rapidly in Vietnam, and have one of the largest provinces in the Congregation. Despite some outside harassment, we have many young men in that country who want to be Redemptorist priests and brothers. The Vietnam Province is very strong in faith and personnel, but very poor financially. Their provincial told me that he has a hard time even feeding all of his students, and might have to turn away good vocations.

Over the past 10 years or so, the Baltimore Province has formed a special bond with the Vietnam Province. One of their men whom we sponsored to come to the U.S. to study, Father Paul, just obtained a doctorate in theology from Catholic University.

We are also assisting other Vietnamese Redemptorists in their education so that they can go back and teach in the seminary. A young priest from Vietnam is in our parish in Brooklyn where he says Masses in English, Chinese, and Vietnamese. I tease him that he will soon learn Spanish. He left his home and family in Vietnam to become a missionary in Brooklyn.

Now, we are seeking to educate some Vietnamese Redemptorist seminarians in our formation program in Boston to prepare them for the priesthood. Doing this will lighten the financial burden on the Vietnam Province. I am also sure this initiative will bring many blessings to our Province.

Two of our confreres who will be responsible for the formation of these candidates, Fathers Denis Sweeney and Raymond Collins, recently spent some time in Vietnam and came back overwhelmed with the welcome they received and with the deep faith of the people. (Editor’s note: Read more about their visit on page 7.) I am so very proud that the Baltimore Province has begun this program of solidarity with our confreres in Vietnam.

God has a way of surprising us in life. The people of Vietnam were once an enemy in a faraway land. Now, I see them as my confreres and brothers with whom we share a love of Jesus Christ and the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

Very Rev. Patrick Woods, C.Ss.R.

Congratulations to Fr. Joseph Tobin, C.Ss.R.

Father Joseph Tobin, whose term as Redemptorist superior general ended in November 2009, was named in August as secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Apostolic Life. He will be ordained a bishop, and hold the rank of archbishop. Father Tobin is a member of the Denver Province of the Redemptorists. Please join us in praying for him as he begins this new ministry.

A day to celebrate

On August 1, Redemptorists in Paraguay celebrated the establishment of their own independent province within the worldwide Congregation. More than 80 years ago, Redemptorists from the Baltimore Province founded missions in Paraguay to preach to the poor. It was a blessing to celebrate with our brothers as they begin this new chapter in Redemptorist history.
Advancing the Mission

Among others, three major events have marked my summer: preaching the Solemn Novena in honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Limerick, Ireland in June; attending my high school seminary reunion for graduates from St. Mary’s in North East, PA in July; and experiencing Dialogue 2010, a gathering of Redemptorists and young adults at Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua, NY in August.

As some of you may have read on my blog, “Irish Impressions,” (go to redemptorists.net and search for “Irish Impressions”) I was quite heartened by how many young people are still attending church in Ireland — at least for the nine days I preached in St. Alphonsus Church in Limerick. I’m told the same novena Redemptorists preach in Belfast attracts even younger crowds. During my time there, I interviewed one young couple who shared that their faith is strong despite the true but troubling reports about the sexual abuse crises in Ireland. This is good news in difficult times.

At my high school reunion, I met a graduate from the class of 1940 who had never been back until this year — 70 years later! Tom was going on about the place that has meant so much to so many of us. I was happy to see my old classmate, Hugh, after 28 years. Two Masses, Marian devotions in the grotto, a softball game, and a walk to Lake Erie brought it all back. Though we are older and grayer, the crowd (and some wives) that attended were full of gratitude and nostalgia.

Finally, the trinity of summer events culminated in a gathering of 65 Redemptorists and young adults from Canada, the United States, and beyond (specifically from our units called the Provinces of Baltimore, Denver, Edmonton-Toronto, Ste.-Anne-de-Beaupré; the Vice Province of Richmond and the English-speaking Region of the Caribbean). It was a week spent discovering the gifts God has given all of us, and listening to how he’s calling us to use them — whether that meant helping our team win the “Amazing Grace Race,” singing for Mass, or weeding gardens for low-income families. By now, you should have seen pictures from this event on our Web site. (If not, go to our archives at redemptorists.net.)

These three experiences highlight my pride in the Redemptorists. We are strong, international, innovative, energetic and obviously relevant enough to still attract young people to minister with us.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Plentiful Redemption that spotlights some of the things my fellow Redemptorists and I have done this summer. Support from people like you helps us reach everyone with the good news of God’s love. If you’d like to join us in these adventures, I invite you to use the enclosed envelope.

May St. Gerard Majella, a young Redemptorist brother who is one of our best-loved saints and whose feast is October 16, assist us to always stay youthful at heart, and pray that more young people will join us in our mission.

In the love of Our Redeemer,

Rev. Daniel Francis, C.Ss.R.

You’re invited...

If you’re in the Baltimore/Annapolis/Washington, D.C. area Nov. 7, I’d like to invite you to visit us in our new home. The Redemptorist Office for Mission Advancement (ROMA) has moved from our Baltimore location to the historic Charles Carroll House in Annapolis, MD.

Meet members of our staff that day from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

For more information, call us toll-free at 877-876-7662 or write to us at events@redemptorists.net. I hope to see you there.

Redemptorist preaching near you!
For updated mission and retreat information, visit redemptorists.net

September to November 2010

Sept 12-16
St. John the Evangelist
New York, NY
Fr. Kevin MacDonald

Sept. 17-26
St. John the Evangelist/Bl. Kateri Rockview Prison (bilingual)
Bellefonte, PA
Frs. Gerard Brinkmann & Sean McGillicuddy

Sept. 18-30
St. Joseph
Cockeysville, MD
Fr. Alex Ortiz en Español

Sept. 26-30
Sacred Heart
Altoona, PA
Fr. Kevin MacDonald

Sacred Heart
Yankton, SD
Fr. John Murray

Oct. 3-6
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
Whiting, NJ
Fr. Bill Gaffney

Oct. 3-7
St. Thomas More
(University of New Hampshire)
Durham, NH
Fr. Kevin MacDonald

Sacred Heart
Bloomfield, NJ
Fr. Paul Bryan & Sr. Mary Sninsky, OSF

St. Jude
Erie, PA
Frs. Patrick Woods & John McGowan

Oct. 10-14
St. Francis of Assisi
Binghamton, NY
Fr. Kevin MacDonald

Oct. 16-20
St. Aloysius
Littlestown, PA
Fr. Sean McGillicuddy

Continued on page 11
Alphonsus and the Eucharist: Communion

By Rev. Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R.

(Third in a four-part series)

Alphonsus also wrote a great deal about one of the major effects of receiving the Blessed Sacrament: communion with Christ. He referred to the Eucharist as the great “sacrament of love” and highlighted the great privilege it is to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord in Holy Communion.

God’s love manifests itself to us by God’s benevolence, our heartfelt, reciprocal response aided by the influence of divine grace, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. When we receive the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ enters into us and mingles with our own.

This close contact of our body and blood with the Body and Blood of the Lord deepens our incorporation into his Mystical Body, the Church, and serves as a funnel through which divine grace transforms our hearts and prepares us for an even deeper experience of God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

For Alphonsus, receiving Christ at Mass was the highlight of a person’s life. There was nothing more noble or dignified than worthily receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion.

In his brief devotional work Acts for Holy Communion (1745), he encouraged his readers to make heartfelt acts of faith, contrition, humility, desire, and love before receiving Holy Communion, and to respond afterwards with similar acts of welcome, thanksgiving, spiritual offering, and petition. Alphonsus believed that receiving Holy Communion was the highlight of our day and that we should fill the time before, during, and afterwards with intimate, heart-to-heart sharing with the Lord.

Alphonsus was also well aware that there were times when, for whatever reason, we could not receive sacramental communion. For this reason, he encouraged the devotional practice of making a spiritual communion, a simple prayer telling God of our burning desire to receive the Blessed Sacrament.

He believed that a sincere act of spiritual communion could bear just as much fruit in the life of a believer as the actual reception of Communion itself. This prayer could be made at any time and at any place. Its purpose was to intensify our love for Jesus and to increase our desire to receive the sacrament. He exhorted everyone desiring to advance in holiness to make a spiritual communion at least once a day. This devotion, he believed, was both spiritually beneficial and easy to carry out. We can make a spiritual communion without being observed and without the necessity of fasting. We can do it, moreover, at any time we wish: a simple act of love is all that is required.

Fr. Billy, a Redemptorist of the Baltimore Province, taught the history of moral theology and Christian spirituality for more than 20 years at the Alphonsianum Academy of Rome’s Pontifical Lateran University. Currently scholar-in-residence and John Cardinal Krol Chair of Moral Theology at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, as well as the Karl Rahner Professor of Catholic Theology at the Graduate Theological Foundation, Fr. Billy has authored or edited more than 25 books and has written extensively in the area of Alphonsian spirituality.

Reflection Questions

• What happens when you receive Jesus in Holy Communion?
• Do you take time for giving thanks after receiving Holy Communion?
• Do you consider it the occasion for an intimate conversation with Jesus? If so, what kinds of things do you share with him?
• Do you share your problems with him? Your deepest yearnings?
• Do you rest quietly in his presence?
St. John Neumann: Redemptorist, Bishop, Saint

When St. John Neumann arrived in America in 1836, his dream was to spend his life preaching the Gospel on the frontiers. His first assignment as a priest of the Diocese of New York was to the outlying settlements in Buffalo, NY. But the work was lonely — living miles from his nearest parishioners, traveling for hours on horseback or, more likely, on foot.

To continue living his missionary dream, in 1842, Neumann joined the Redemptorists, who had first come to the U.S. 10 years earlier. After discovering that ministry among the Native Americans was hurting their community life, the Redemptorists settled in the cities to care for the neglected German Catholics who were flooding into places like Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

Neumann relished his work with the people, but quickly found himself promoted to leadership positions within the Congregation, including superior of all the Redemptorists in America. In 1852, at the age of 41, he was named the fourth bishop of Philadelphia.

He reluctantly accepted, but his hesituation didn’t affect his enthusiasm for providing for his flock. During his time as bishop of one of the nation’s largest dioceses, Neumann built almost 90 churches, started the nation’s parochial school system, founded several orders of women religious, and promoted the Forty Hours Eucharistic devotion.

He defended the rights of immigrants, and managed to expand his diocese despite a shortage of funds and priests. Through it all, he never lost his connection with his people.

When he died of a heart attack on a street corner in Philadelphia in January 1860, Neumann was already known as the “saintly bishop.”

Beginning on January 5, 2011, the Redemptorists will celebrate a jubilee year in honor of Neumann’s 200th birthday. Several celebrations will take place throughout the year in Philadelphia, and in Redemptorist parishes and retreat houses in the Baltimore Province. We will also offer Neumann-themed parish missions, a nationwide essay contest for school students, and a tour of a significant relic of the nation’s first male American saint. During the Neumann Year, we also encourage you to visit the Shrine of St. John Neumann in Philadelphia.

Look for more information about the Neumann Year in the winter edition of Plentiful Redemption. You can also find more details at redemptorists.net/neumann.

Join us in celebrating the life of St. John Neumann!
Visit redemptorists.net/neumann for information about:
• Special Masses
• Retreats
• Parish missions
• Student essay contest
• And more!
For a complete listing of events during the Neumann Year, visit redemptorists.net/neumann.

Join us as we celebrate the 200th birthday of a saint for our times.
On a recent trip to Haiti, Very Rev. Alfred Bradley, vice provincial of the Baltimore Province, found striking contrasts. Rubble still fills the streets, people still sleep in tents, and yet life goes on.

In late June, two Haitian Redemptorists traveled to the Basilicas of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Brooklyn, NY, and Boston for the feast of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, the patroness of Haiti. The priests carried with them the gratitude and prayers of the people of Haiti for all those who have reached out to help after the January earthquake.

“I sat under a makeshift shelter at twilight, sharing a common pot of spaghetti and hot dogs with a group of Redemptorist students,” Father Bradley wrote after his visit. “They continue to live and study in the rubble of what was once their house of formation. They sleep now in tents and study under the light of a few dim bulbs, but somehow they find the strength to sing Mary’s Magnificat in a harmony that would melt the hardest heart.”

He also visited an orphanage run by a Redemptorist brother; the visitors brought candy with them and were treated by the children like “the Magi bearing gifts.”

Father Bradley traveled to Haiti with Redemptorists from the Ste.-Anne-de-Beaupré Province, which includes the region of Haiti, to survey the damage and help plan for rebuilding.

On the Web
Visit redemptorists.net/newsletter.cfm to view video footage from feast day celebrations in Brooklyn. Look for “Web Extras.”

How You Can Help
If you would like to contribute to the ongoing rebuilding and relief efforts in Haiti, visit redemptorists.net. Click on “Donate Now.” Please enter “Haiti” in the memorial box.
Brothers in mission

By Stephanie K. Tracy

In the central highlands of Vietnam near Pleiku, the Jarai people live an isolated and meager existence. As an ethnic minority, they are shunned by most Vietnamese. But they are certain of the care and love of at least one group — the Redemptorist Fathers and Brothers.

For decades the Redemptorists have ministered to the Jarai and other marginalized groups in Vietnam, providing education, food, shelter, and spiritual food.

During a visit there this summer, Fathers Denis Sweeney and Raymond Collins from the Baltimore Province got a firsthand look at the work their fellow missionaries are doing in Pleiku as well as in the cities.

Father Sweeney, the director of theology students, and Father Collins, pastor of Mission Church in Boston where the students are housed, went to Vietnam to meet with four seminar-ians who will travel to the U.S. this fall to study.

There are so many young men seeking to follow God’s call as Redemptorist missionaries that there is a shortage of funds and resources to educate them.

“The students from Vietnam study in Canada, Thailand, and Australia,” Father Sweeney said. “There are lots of vocations, but not enough professors.”

The Vietnamese students will study English in the U.S. for at least one year before beginning their theology studies.

In recent years, the Vietnamese government has made headlines for actions that have threatened religious freedom. The Redemptorists found themselves in the center of the dispute earlier this year when a brother was severely beaten and left for dead.

The Communist government decides how many priests can be ordained each year; any more than that number are not recognized. Political leaders also routinely order inspections of identity papers and regularly deny visas for religious to leave the country.

Despite the difficult environment, Redemptorist vocations are flourishing in Vietnam. In July, nine Redemptorists were slated to be ordained to the priesthood, and 15 students were scheduled to take first vows.

Stephanie K. Tracy is the communications manager for the Redemptorists of the Baltimore Province.
By Elizabeth Góral-Makowski

When my father died suddenly 16 years ago, my family and I were deeply moved by the outpouring of support and love from countless people. There were so many tributes, and so many flowers we needed a second room just to hold them.

The flowers we gave to the parish rivaled those of Easter. The mound of flowers at my father’s gravesite was overwhelming.

In the weeks following his funeral, I found myself wondering if we should have asked, “in lieu of flowers, please make a donation to…. ” Wouldn’t my dad, who was a vigorous man and loved life, be delighted that someone remembered him in a way that would touch the lives of others?

Flowers are a wonderful way of showing love for the deceased person. They are a beautiful symbol of comfort and hope. Yet today, it’s more common to see, “in lieu of flowers, please make a donation to….” These donations are an opportunity to honor the person and the continuing blessing of that life in the world.

The Redemptorist Office for Mission Advancement (ROMA) is deeply grateful for our donors and their families who come forward during a time of grief and request, “In lieu of flowers, please make a donation to the Redemptorists.”

Like the beauty of flowers, these special donations offer hope to those the Redemptorists serve, especially our poor and abandoned brothers and sisters. A gift to the Redemptorists is a remembrance that lives long after flowers fade.

If you or a loved one would like to honor someone’s memory upon his or her death, please include in the notice: “In lieu of flowers, please make a donation to ROMA (Redemptorist Office for Mission Advancement) 107 Duke of Gloucester Street, Annapolis, MD 21401.”

We will send a thank you to the donor, and send a notice to the family listing the names and addresses of those remembering their loved one.

As we come to the end of the summer, and move toward the month of All Souls in November, our staff joins the Redemptorist family in giving thanks for the benefactors who have gone before us to our heavenly home.

Elizabeth Góral-Makowski is the associate director of ROMA.
By Rev. Richard Bennett, C.Ss.R.

Many of our fathers have served as enlisted men in the U.S. armed services. My dad joined the Navy at about 18. These fathers, like so many others of their generation, often referred to their early careers as “being in the service.” That common expression used for service to one’s country has stayed with me throughout my life.

This past year I had the opportunity to come to know a fine 22-year-old man by the name of Erik Johnson. Erik was born in Irondequoit, NY and raised in Pittsford, NY (in the greater Rochester area).

Until recently, Erik lived at home with his parents and older sister while attending St. John Fischer College and serving in the New York Air National Guard. But he is now the newest member of our Redemptorist formation program. To have the honor to serve God and country are core values for Erik. Shortly after his high school graduation in July 2006, he “joined the service.”

President Woodrow Wilson stated in a speech he gave in May 1919, “there is something better, if possible, that a man can give than his life. That is, his living spirit to a service that is not easy, to resist counsels that are hard to resist, to stand against purposes that are difficult to withstand.”

It is this spirit of service that must enflame the minds and hearts of those who wish to follow in the footsteps of St. Alphonsus, the founder of the Redemptorists. Our rule reminds us in Constitutions Nos. 11 and 54 about the whole purpose of our missionary work and the focus of our communal religious life:

“Redemptorists are thus ‘Apostles of Conversion’ in so far as the chief object of their preaching is to lead people to a radical choice regarding their life — a decision for Christ — and draw them firmly and gently to a continuing and total conversion” (No. 11).

“In this way, pastoral charity gives soul and unity to the life of its members. Community life is really at the service of the apostolate. Continual conversion, the result of their total surrender to God, increases their availability for the service of others” (No. 54).

Erik told me he used to “play priest” when he was a young child. His father served as a deacon in his local Catholic parish, which probably inspired him and also gave him all of the insights he would need to “play priest” in the private sanctuary of his suburban home.

I told Erik that his childhood play was actually an experience he and I, and many other priests and religious, shared in common when recalling those memorable boyhood days. God later touched his heart through a long series of events — conversations with friends, colleagues and military chaplains; an inspirational EWTN program; his deployment to Bagh-
dad; vocation retreats made with the Redemptorists — along with an unquenchable desire to serve God’s people.

Thoughts of “God and country” continued to pluck the heartstrings of Erik’s soul as he began to see yet another way of being “in the service.” Erik may not be promoted or have great honor bestowed upon him on his new religious path. Rather, it is best understood as a path that re-directs where true honor and glory belong… with God.

As Erik joins our formation program in the Bronx, NY, studies in philosophy and theology await him at St. John’s University. This will be his new assignment with the Redemptorists and the people of the South Bronx of New York City. He will stand side-by-side with his brother religious as he takes the leap of faith into the uncharted waters of the future.

Erik said he wanted to become a Redemptorist because they are “a community where I could help my fellow men along in their spiritual journey, where they are your brother, your family.” As members of the Church, we are all one family in faith. Let us join our prayers for Erik and all our men who are in training for that day when they will together pledge their lives to being “in the service” of Christ and his gospel.

Fr. Bennett is vocations director for the Baltimore Province.

Congratulations…

We hope you’ll join us in congratulating our students who professed vows this summer:

• Kevin Bellott, C.Ss.R. who professed final vows in the English-speaking Region of the Caribbean

• Jacky Merilan, C.Ss.R. who professed first vows, also for the Region of the Caribbean (pictured at left with Kevin Bellott)

…and please pray…

For Deacon James McCabe, C.Ss.R. who professed final vows in July and was ordained a transitional deacon Sept. 4, 2010, at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. Deacon McCabe is assigned to St. Martin of Tours Parish in Bethpage, NY, while he prepares for priestly ordination in May 2011.

On the Web

For photos of this summer’s professions and Deacon McCabe’s ordination, visit redemptorists.net. Click on “News & Events.”
Father Robert Hopwood, who energetically ministered to the people of Paraguay for a half century, died June 24 at the St. John Neumann Residence at Stella Maris in Timonium, MD. He was 84.

Father Hopwood was born in Oil City, PA, and was one of 11 children born to Arthur and Eldene Schoonover Hopwood.

On his golden jubilee of ordination, Father Hopwood recalled the notice he received for his first missionary assignment: “You will leave New York City on the Rio Jachal Ship of the Argentine State Line on March 8, arriving in Buenos Aires where you will transfer to a tramp steamer to sail north on the Paraná River to Asunción, Paraguay. From there you will leave for Ponta Porá, of the Mato Grosso State of Brasil, and from there west to Bella Vista, Paraguay, your first mission.” The journey, he recalled, took five weeks.

Father Hopwood spent more than 50 years serving the poor in the remote areas of Paraguay. In his later years he was assigned to parishes in the city where he helped establish a medical clinic for the poor.

Father Arthur Mahoney, a missionary, military chaplain, rector, and mission preacher, died July 17 at the St. John Neumann Residence at Stella Maris in Timonium, MD. He was 86 and suffering the advance of Alzheimer’s disease.

Father Mahoney’s first three assignments were to the U.S. Virgin Islands at Holy Cross Church in Christiansted, St. Croix, in 1953; Sts. Peter and Paul Church (now a cathedral) in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, in 1954; and Holy Cross in 1960. After 13 years in the tropics, Father Mahoney was assigned to St. Michael Church in Baltimore. He was there for only a year when he volunteered as a military chaplain in Vietnam.

After completing his military service, Father Mahoney was assigned to St. Alphonsus Church in New York City in 1971 and then to San Alfonso Retreat House in Long Branch, NJ, the following year. He went to Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baltimore, serving as rector from 1972-78. Other assignments included St. Christopher Church on Kent Island, MD, and St. Gerard Church in Lima, OH.

In 1987, he began his ministry with the Missionary Band, that group of Redemptorists who travel no matter what the weather and live out of suitcases to preach at far-flung parishes to regenerate and renew the faith of the people. The group preached from Maine to Florida.

He was assigned to St. Clement Mission House in Ephrata, PA, in 1993 and to St. Mary’s Church in Annapolis in 2001.

“Let us not lose the beautiful crown which I see prepared for everyone who lives in observance and dies in the Congregation.” — St. Alphonsus Liguori

The Redemptorists
Of the Baltimore Province

redemptorists.net

- Daily audio homilies
- News from the Redemptorists
- How you can help reach the poor and most abandoned
Opening the gift

More than 60 Redemptorists and young adults from across North America gathered at Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua, NY, for Dialogue 2010. During this annual retreat for young adults, participants explored the gifts God has given them and how they can best use them. There was time for prayer, service projects, and fellowship.

On the Web
For more photos from Dialogue 2010, visit redemptorists.net. Click on News & Events.
Holy Communion

By Rev. Andrew Costello, C.Ss.R.

Two sisters got married and each had two kids so far. Both had a boy first and then a girl — cousins. They also ended up living within two streets of each other. The two little guys became the best of pals — most of the time; the two little girls — both younger than their brothers got along well with each other most of the time.

In fact, both sisters, brothers-in-law, cousins — all got along with each other most of the time. Wonderful. Holy communion can be wonderful.

And they were churchgoers. In fact, each Sunday both families went to the same 10 a.m. Mass at their gray-stone Catholic Church. After Mass they usually went out for breakfast together at Pancake Heaven. Wonderful. Holy communion can be wonderful.

Just one minor glitch — not big — in fact, a rather cute glitch.

But it would happen up front when both families walked up the long line for communion at Sunday Mass. The two boys, cousins, 6-years-old, had not made their First Communion yet. This made them unhappy campers.

Their younger sisters both aged 4 were beginning to get that unhappy feeling as well. The parents liked the idea that the priest gave the little ones a blessing. The kids didn’t like it when they didn’t get the round bread that the older folks were receiving. Unfair.

They always reached out for the bread. When this happened, the priest smiled because it was showing a kid’s hope to receive Jesus in communion. Moreover, at the actual moment of communion and blessing — there was usually some bumping and almost tripping.

Good news — the two oldest, the boys, finally received their First Holy Communion. Bad news — now the two younger girls really felt the injustice. Not only were the big people getting the round bread — but now their older brothers were also getting the bread as well. Unfair. A very whiny unfair.

Good news. It all changed one Sunday — when the two boys took matters into their own hands. They just put one hand out for communion — and with the other hand took their little sister’s hand and both said “Amen” to the priest or Eucharistic minister’s words, “Body of Christ.”

That’s all. Ooops. I forgot to add, husbands and wives did the same hand holding as well. It was a bit awkward at first, but ... Wonderful. Holy Communion can be wonderful. Amen.

To read more of Fr. Andy’s work and some homilies, visit his blog at http://reflectbay.blogspot.com.