



## Rev. John Phelps, C.Ss.R.

My journey began on June 19, 1942. The second of eight children born to Ray and Margaret Phelps. My older brother Ray, Jr. is 21 months older than me. My brothers - Bob, Tom and Mike - are four, six and eight years younger. My sisters - Peggy, Mary Anne and Anne Marie - are ten, thirteen and seventeen years younger.

I chose the road less travelled by seeking to discern if I was being chosen to be a Redemptorist priest. All my siblings married except for my sister, Mary Anne, who lived for only thirty-seven minutes. I remember burying her in the cemetery marked out for "Angels". She made a lasting impact on my life, as I look back. I have fifteen nieces and nephews.

I had summer employment through high school and college until I went to the Novitiate to take a year to discover if I was being chosen to be a Redemptorist. I had been inspired by Fr. Frank Lee, a Redemptorist, whose preaching was like an "old shoe" that was just the right fit. On August 2, 1963, I took my first vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. Three years later I took my final vows with the fourth vow and oath of Perseverance. What attracted me to the Redemptorists is our passion to want to find ways to connect with people where the Church has little impact on their lives.

My high school years were in a small town outside of St. Louis. My college years were in Wisconsin. I completed my graduate work in a small town north of New York City. I enjoyed sports especially soccer, hockey and softball. My formation was at Redemptorist Seminaries, all of which are closed.

Turmoil and demonstration were the twin dynamics within which I developed my willingness to pioneer. What was clear to me by 1968 and has been my key to my persevering to date is the fact that being faithful to my relationship with Jesus would depend on Mary and the Eucharist more than my peers. As I look back, I am amazed that I survived and remain. The majority did not.

After five years of varied ministries, I met Fr. Alex Steinmiller, a Passionist, Sister Rosalie Esquerra, an Adrian Dominican, and Alex & Judy MacDonald. When we met in 1973, we saw young people being killed every 18 hours in Detroit. We wanted to get to the cause of violence. We began our work in public schools and their neighborhoods.

As we did so, we grew to be aware of the miseducation of the Catholic, especially in the Sacrament of Confirmation. We wanted to awaken the joy flowing from being chosen by Jesus. We saw young adults 18 to 35 years of age positioned to lift up hope for life and reduce violence in all its forms.

I co-founded Life Directions, to awaken a hunger for values among public school young people and focus: LIFE, to develop a thirst for forgiving among young adults and adults who care about them. Our work has impacted over 168,000 youth and young adults in six areas of the country. I spent my life working among the economically challenged.

We have conducted over 250 multi-cultural Young Adult Retreats. We were part of the Tercer Encuentro in 1985. We developed young adult training materials to implement the African American Pastoral Plan in 1989-91. We have given over 125 city and suburban Parish Missions and Revivals.



We trained over 30 parish-based Young Adult Ministry teams. We developed four-phase Evangelization Training Process for faith-based communities. We wrote over 30 handbooks and workbooks along with on-going editing of our training manuals.

We recently published the book *Life Directions: Raising Hope, Building Peace* (2014). It is written to inspire others by telling our story. Core to our transformation is forgiving as the way to respond to violence in all its forms. We tell what we learned to show a way to do what we have done - doing our best with God doing the rest - Peers Inspiring Peers Through Forgiving."

In late 2016, I became part-time Pastor of St. Peter Claver Catholic Church. Having been Pastor of St. Alphonsus "Rock" Church from 2005 to 2007, I wanted to respond to the urgent pastoral demand for a "new model of parish" in an urban, poverty challenged community. We "see" our parish community as 40,000 parishioners. We "judge" the goodness of each person as founded on our being chosen to be a gift for each other. We "act" believing we can make a difference one person at a time.