

Scalabrinians

Faith on the Move:

YOUTH IN THE SCALABRINIAN MISSION



Catholic Youth Group Hosts a Retreat

The retreat emphasized spirituality, prayer, reflection, and community.

Religious Life in Postmodern Times

A Conversation with a Spiritual Director, Fr. Walter Tonelotto.

Reflections on the Prophet Jeremiah

A Correlation of Mission and Discipleship.



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promote and integrate the
least among us in society




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The doors of perception springing up in the heart

Every day, as people browse newspapers or watch videos on social media, scenes of violence, tragedy, and scandals come into view. Key issues, including mass arrests among anti-ICE protesters and undocumented immigrants with criminal records, continue to emerge. There is an upside and a downside to everything we witness in life. Our moral values influence how we make choices and how we assess reality. These represent the negative aspects of moral decline and division across various sectors of society, including within families and evolving relationships.

As we gradually develop our package of reforms to clean up the system and restore trust and confidence, we might also look back further to historical events, like those in Italy in the late sixth century. Socio-economic chaos continued due to corrupt Byzantine tax officials, the Lombard invasion (568), the catastrophic Tiber Flood (589), and the outbreak of plague in Rome. In light of these issues, we can draw inspiration from a rich tradition exemplified by Pope Gregory I “the Great” (590-604 CE). His primary directive regarding charity was to care for, feed,



Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb.

and shelter people experiencing poverty in Rome, especially those who could no longer be saved by speeches. In his generosity, he gave whatever he acquired to people in need. His concern for the people of Rome linked Roman antiquity and the Christian Middle Ages.

At present, we live in a global village replete with challenges that provide new perspectives and new ways of thinking about what it means to be human, and at the same time, to be open to mysteries and to seek hidden forces greater than our human powers. As Christians, we are called to take that journey. As in the gospel account when Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb (Jn. 11:1-45), we are also invited to come out of our individual sepulchers of selfishness, greed,

or disbelief. It involves our authentic sense of discipleship, which reaches out to people around us in a way that reflects God's love.

Like Gregory the Great, who served in a role beyond simply being Pope or even urban prefect, by adopting the charitable frameworks of monasteries for his initiatives in Rome and elsewhere, perhaps in our capacity, we can incorporate cultures that recapture the language built on the presence of God; that lead us to go the extra mile in our efforts to grow and love others through our initiatives. It is described as our inner engine, driving us from within and guiding us toward the heart of God, the source of our strength and purpose. //

Accompanying Jesus on his journey to Calvary

During the season of Lent, most Catholics practice the devotion of the Stations of the Cross, or Via Crucis. As a devotion, it is an invitation to revive Jesus' Passion by spiritually following Jesus in his last steps, from condemnation by Pontius Pilate to his death on the cross. People live in the moment with emotion, and the traditional fourteen stations mostly refer to biblical passages, though some were inserted by tradition and cannot be found in any of the Gospels. However, they have so impregnated the popular understanding of Jesus' suffering that it is almost impossible to think of Jesus carrying the cross without Veronica coming to his aid, battling the guards to come close and wipe his face. Yet, we will not find this passage in the Gospels. It comes from a long tradition, and it does not make the devotion less meaningful.

Talking about Veronica reminds me of a story I heard years ago from a good friend, a religious sister who was leading a group of women in a Bible sharing meeting. The theme was the passion of Jesus, and my friend asked me what the most relevant moment for them was in the passion narratives. A lady answered that it was the courage, bravery, and determination of Veronica, for she had

no fear in facing the guards to come close to Jesus and, in a singular moment, wipe his face, bring some solace to him, who was suffering and losing all his strength on the way to Calvary. The women went on for a while, praising the virtuous Veronica's attitude. Then my friend said: Thank you for sharing, but Veronica is not in the Scriptures. The women paused for a moment, kind of speechless, as if my friend had said a heresy, and after the silence said: *However, she should be!* That was how the matter was settled.

Besides the basis mainly from Scriptures, there are also beautiful adaptations of this devotion. I have been part of, and prayed with "*The Stations of the Cross of Mary*", which reflects on Jesus' journey carrying the cross from his mother's perspective, a beautiful reflection that looked at it from a woman's viewpoint. Every year, the pope leads the Stations of the Cross around the ruins of the Colosseum in Rome with very meaningful reflections at each station.

I recently participated in two Stations of the Cross that will be imprinted in my mind for the simplicity and depth of how people prayed and engaged with the prayers. The first was in the neighborhood streets of the

Guaile sector of Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic. The Scalabrinians serve there, in Saint Ann Parish. The area has faced its social challenges, but the people of the parish gathered to walk along the narrow streets to pray. That Friday afternoon, I saw them kneel on the rough asphalt, trace crosses on the ground with their fingers as if blessing that land that usually sees so much violence, hoping for conversions. Specially touching were their choices of places to stop and pray at each station: in front of houses where people, homebound due to sickness or old age, lived; they could no longer come to church, so the community came to them, and they were at the doors or windows, praying together. This was a clear sign that the community at large cared for their often-forgotten parishioners who were living out the Lord's passion in their lives. The second very meaningful Stations of the Cross I attended and prayed with the people was at San Felipe de Jesus, in Forest Park, in the Atlanta, GA area. It was a Stations of the Cross for Migrants, and at each station a reflection and prayer was done for those who have faced the challenges and danger: people victims of human trafficking, people unjustly detained,



families separated, people forced to seek asylum due to violence, wars, and persecution. Many attending the prayer service could relate to this reality, and no doubt, they could see Jesus' Passion with different eyes: not only was there commotion because Jesus suffered for us, for our sins, but because Jesus continues to suffer each time a brother or sister is mistreated, is denied the dignity that each person deserves. The devotion does not serve only to take us back to the

past, but to make memory, to realize that what happened did happen for a reason, and to walk with Jesus lest we forget that his suffering and death brought us the promised salvation.

The Stations of the Cross are a beautiful devotion in our Church. They help us face the cross and tell the Lord that we do not leave him to die alone. But above all, they represent our faith and hope in the reason why all of this happened: because there is a fifteenth

station, **the Resurrection**. That is the final point where we find meaning in continuing to walk with the cross, as Jesus did: it is not the end, the morning of Easter Sunday signifies the new day, a new creation. All the crosses we carry will have no value on the day of glory and victory. But for now, let us not lose faith in the face of difficult and challenging realities. We don't let Jesus walk alone; it is He who is walking with us, each step along the way.

A blessed Easter to everyone! //

Our Lady of Sorrows Parish - In a lifelong process of ministry

We are a multi-ethnic Roman Catholic faith community, based on Vancouver, Canada, a community welcoming all those who come to the parish, who may worship in English, Italian or Spanish. The Holy Eucharist is the centre of our parish life and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Sorrows, is our Patroness. Our parish mission is to journey together in unity, towards a deeper faith formation and evangelization.



Fr. Rosemond Sylvestre, cs



Archbishop Richard Smith delivers his homily at the World Day of the Sick. (Fr. Rosemond and Fr. Testamar on the right)

Our Lady of Sorrows Parish in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, is managed by the Scalabrinian Missionaries led by Father Rosemond Sylvestre, CS, the pastor, with Vicar Father Henri-Claude Testamar, CS. The parish caters to a diverse community, offering services in English, Italian, and Spanish. At the heart of all activities is the Holy Eucharist, which venerates the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Sorrows, as the Patroness.

Our Lady of Sorrows Parish comprises three different communities: English, Hispanic, and Italian. Originally, it was an Italian parish, serving only Italians, with daily Mass conducted in Italian. Over time, the parish

expanded to include the local English-speaking population and the Hispanic community, becoming a vibrant, multiethnic congregation.

Much like engaging with literature, which reveals the depth of issues and insights that shape the contours and rhythms of life, the community of faith strives to guide the development of its members in a Christ-centered manner. It considers a range of perspectives guided by a pastoral vision that comprehensively understands our purpose, including who we are, our sense of direction, and the reasons behind our actions, all within an in-depth exercise in life witnessing.

SCALABRINIANS MAGAZINE

Scalabrinians Magazine highlights our missionary work across communities in North and South America. It offers a Scalabrinian perspective on migration and related topics, reflecting our commitment to guiding migrants in faith and cultural values. Active in countries like Canada, the U.S., Colombia, and more, our ministry seeks to expand spiritual and pastoral care to migrants.

Inspired by our founder, Saint John Baptist Scalabrini, we strive to become more Christ-like through our service. The magazine invites reader submissions, which may be edited for clarity. Send your articles to:

***info@scalabrinisaintcharles.org or
markescobar25@gmail.com***





Celebration of the Birthday of Fr. Henri-Claude Testamar, c.s. on Feb. 2026

Certain rites and symbols in our religious celebrations continue to help people understand the Christian message of loving one another and living lives that resonate with baptismal commitment. Following the wisdom of Scripture, our core concern is Christian living encapsulated in the twofold love of God and neighbor. These three commu-

nities keep Our Lady of Sorrows Parish vibrant and active. For example, the celebration of each country's patron saints, the parish's patronal feast day, fellowship with seasonal workers, and the celebration of "Joyful Day" are manifestations of unity in diversity. This allows the communities to live their faith and appreciate their traditions

as part of God's great family. The mission and vision of Our Lady of Sorrows Parish have always been focused on bringing people together across cultures. We strive to walk in unity and create a warm community where everyone can see God's presence shining through the variety of cultures, truly feeling like His light among us. //



Saint Bernard's Parish celebrates the feast of Our Lord of Esquipulas

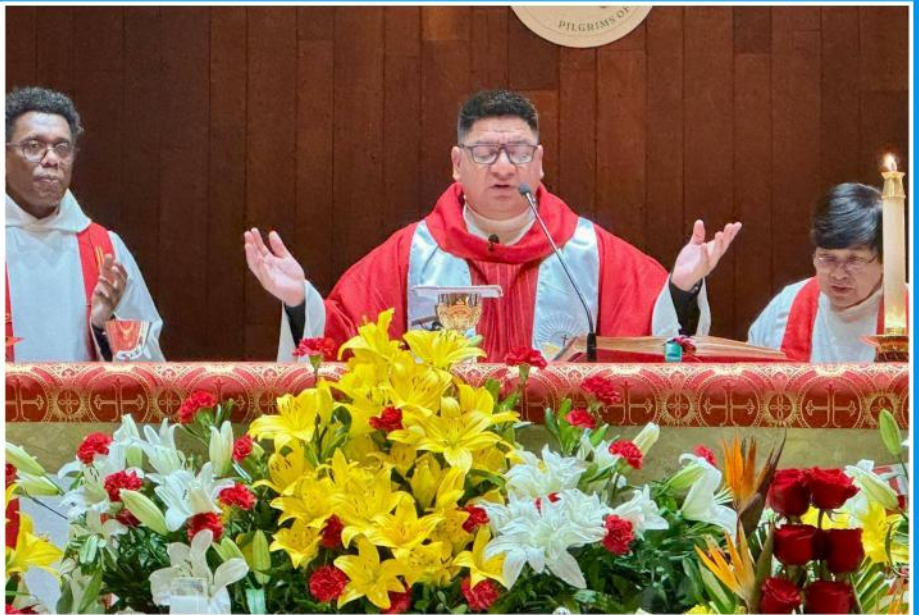
Saint Bernard's Parish celebrated the Feast of El Cristo Negro de Esquipulas with a solemn Mass and its triduum, presided over by Fr. Marvin Ajic, a Scalabrinian missionary who originated from Guatemala on January 17th. In this light, a group of Guatemalans, led by Mrs. Esperanza Toletto, sought to engage other ethnic communities in celebrating the feast with vibrancy and meaning.

While the dark-colored statue of Christ Crucified represents profound faith and tradition, Fr. Ajic, in his homily, pointed out the importance of unity among believers, noting that this feast encompasses all cultures, especially within the parish. This religious devotion to Christ of Esquipulas originated in Esquipulas, Guatemala, which is now considered Central America's greatest pilgrimage center. It is located in the central highlands near the borders of Honduras and El Salvador. Since the 16th century, it has drawn pilgrims from around the world.

According to legend, the residents of Esquipulas requested an image of Christ for veneration and designated Quirio Cataño to sculpt it, resulting in a white depiction. However, as noted by architect Eduardo



Andrade, years of devotion have caused it to darken from exposure to incense and candle smoke. Father Ajic, together with fellow Scalabrinian priests and parishioners, headed to the gymnasium for convivial gatherings and a folkloric presentation of traditional dances from Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador. A representative from the Guatemalan Consulate also attended the event. //



God's inner life - shared in the person of Christ

While the French Revolution of 1789 brought the disaster of anti-religious ideology, the triumph of science, and the abolition of Christianity, today's context seems to show us, with certain layers of animosity, that history repeats itself. We feel that many of the threads of our lives have been torn, and we are now transformed into the legions of the free market. I recall what George Bernard Shaw once wrote:

"The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them; that's the essence of inhumanity."

I think he makes sense, especially in situations like the calamities and tragedies we see or hear about from afar. Social communication networks continue to unfold realities caught up in revelations that concern us at this time. Looking at this situation through the lens of the spirit of sharing and caring for others, we can say that our humanity depends on the personal and interpersonal dimensions, as well as on the interactions that arise from our being human to others. Deep in the heart of debates and arguments, when the rough edges of corruption go beyond proportion,

our moral stance reflects the presence of the Living God as our eternal oasis and citadel. The ongoing secular shift across many aspects of human life is a significant challenge.

There are times when we feel sad or grieve at the thought of accepting some discretionary leverage to help the younger generation today. I would say our ethical standards have taken a nosedive. We come to terms with matters that dominate our Christian values. The loss of our sense of sin these days is like the last straw that breaks the camel's back.





This realization leads to a free market where everyone makes their own choices and sets their own priorities. Some may argue that this reflects our current world, that the “world sets the agenda” for us, as in the church, families, and other areas. However, that’s not quite right. I still believe that God sets the agenda for us. He remains in control, and building on and with Christ in this world means building on a foundation rooted in his will. It involves constructing with Christ, the source of our faithfulness and our highest priority.

I remember a scene in the *Divine Comedy* where Dante meets virtuous pagans in Paradise, at Jupiter’s sphere of justice. The saints explain that “God’s justice is like the ocean floor: visible near shore, but hidden in the depths, yet still present.” Sometimes we can’t comprehend God’s mercy. They add, “Even we, who see God, don’t know all the elect, and through this we are refined, so that God’s will becomes ours.” This is our faith—believing that God’s mercy is more vast and mysterious than we can understand.

Who do we believe Jesus is? As Christians, we face daily challenges to act on our faith and remain loyal to God. His compassion embodies the charity and care shown by those who look after others.

According to the biblical account in the gospels, Jesus is our greatest hope. He ‘fulfills Scripture’ (Matt 5:17-20), is ‘the subject of it’ (Lk 24:44), ‘interprets’ it through himself (v. 27), and ‘opens our minds’ to understand it (v. 45). It forms the core of our foundation in God’s love and His plan for us. //

Catholic youth group hosts a retreat

In a rapidly changing world, a group of courageous young people stepped back to embark on a journey against the prevailing pace. It was a sacred space intended to encounter God. Hence, on January 23-24, 2026, the youth group at Saint Vincent Parish in Margate, FL,

organized a retreat for teenagers called "Youth Against the Current."

The retreat emphasized spirituality, prayer, reflection, and community. The Saint Vincent community welcomed young people from Saint Bernard

Parish in MD to participate and share in a Christ-centered experience. A team of eight youths, accompanied by a chaperone, accepted the invitation, promoting fellowship between two Scalabrinian parishes known for their diversity and openness to migrants.



The retreat, described as a break from a busy schedule, included talks, prayer, activities, and games, and helped build team spirit among youth from Saint Bernard and Saint Vincent Parishes. They discovered that “swimming against the current” is more manageable when done as a community. The happiness stemmed from feeling accepted

and loved by God, demonstrated by 57 young people coming together to play, laugh, and pray, highlighting the vibrancy of the Church.

The main goal of the retreat was to encounter Christ. Through reflection and praise, young people experienced genuine faith away from worldly distractions,

focusing on hope and Jesus' love. The encounter involved both activities and personal growth.

Litzi Huerta Cariño expressed her gratitude, saying, “I thank God for participating in this retreat. I never imagined going on a mission and sharing my faith far from my parish.”



The Youth Group at St. Vincent Parish, Margate, FL

Her experience highlights the purpose of being a missionary: demonstrating a youthful Christ through service and witness.

Sharing a shared mission, Diego Ortega, another volunteer, described the retreat as a wonderful experience, noting that it touched the hearts of young people and called them to a closer relationship with God at Saint Vincent parish. Emmanuel Arriaga, however, also observed God's work during the mission, noting that God used them to communicate with the youth and that he personally received blessings, which encouraged him to continue learning and growing in faith.

This retreat served as both a period of spiritual reflection and an authentic mission experience. Gathering youth from Florida and Maryland underscored the significance of a universal Church functioning with joy and passion. The event demonstrated that when young individuals unite around a noble purpose, they can foster a genuine change in their communities.

"Going against the current is possible when the engine is God's love and the team is the community."

The youth remind us that faith can continue to flourish with joy and hope. //



Local Superiors' Assembly convened

The Local Superiors Assembly, together with the Provincial Administration of St. Charles, gathered from February 9-13 at Casa San Carlos in Delray Beach, FL. It marked a key moment for listening to reports from different areas, realigning with mission priorities to meet new demands, and for collective discernment, which brought forward the province's shared vision and strategic planning.

In his opening remarks, Fr. Horecio Carlos Ankla, provincial superior, warmly welcomed his confreres and thanked them for their participation. He presented the key guidelines for the Scalabrinian life and mission, and gave each local superior the opportunity to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their missionary work. He emphasized a sense of mission, with priorities rooted in collaboration and team continuity to carry out the congregation's charism. He also stressed the need for transparency in a life consistent with a disciplined lifestyle.

The assembly was also characterized by several issues related to improving collaboration with the local church, a future perspective, and a plan to address key aspects of mission and ministry.

Addressing these points together deepened the understanding of what it entails to be a Scalabrinian missionary in today's digital age. As a man of God, a Scalabrinian's core identity is the lens through which he is sent into the world with humility, transcending language and cultural boundaries to serve more faithfully. This, in turn, shapes how he perceives his mission.

The following participants, representing their areas, are as follows: Fr. Mario A. Titotto – Montreal, Fr. José Gabriel Forero – Toronto, Fr. Lino Garcia – New England, Fr. Marcio Toniazzo – New York, Fr. Mark A. Escobar – Maryland-Washington, Fr. Adriano Tezone – Florida, Fr. Francesco Bortignon – Venezuela, Fr. Andrei Zanon – Colombia and Ecuador, Fr. Mario Geremia – Panama, Fr. Rubens Sylvain – Haiti and Do-

minican Republic.

The Provincial Councilors who also presented their reports are as follows: Fr. Jefferson Bariviera, responsible for the mission; Fr. Maurizio Maifredi, in charge of religious life; Fr. Sergio Dall'Agnese, overseeing the province's finances; and Fr. Rubens Sylvain, handling formation.

Drawing on the significant challenges faced by religious missionaries, the essential elements of attentive listening and cultural adaptation remain central to the task. These moments serve as epiphanies of God's presence in his diverse images within the gospel. As a roadmap for pastoral work, continuous discernment helps respond to missionary principles that rekindle and reinforce the shared vocation, illuminated by the Gospel and the signs of the times. //



Revived Youth Group at St. Anthony's Established

Inspired by the Boston Pastoral Youth Ministry for Cor Jovens retreat, the group Young People United for the Same Purpose, also known as *Jovens Unidos no Mesmo Propósito* (JUMP), was established on February 3, 2024, at St. Anthony's Church in Everett, MA. Initially, two young people managed and funded their activities. The group is more than just a youth organization; it also embodies faith, unity, and leadership among the youth members of the said parish.

Currently, the founders oversee it with assistance from two

community members dedicated to pastoral care. The JUMP WhatsApp group has 200 members; about half of them attend in-person meetings on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month. The weekly *Terço Mariano Jovem* gathers 12 young people for prayer. The group also organizes the annual "Acampadentro" retreat to strengthen faith, build community, encourage healing, and foster renewal.

Over the years, the Ministries of Music, Theater, and Dance have been established. Young people now lead the music and liturgy

for the Eucharist on the second Sunday of each month. They have also engaged in various formation programs that cover topics such as religion, spirituality, Christian leadership, liturgy, sacramental life, and mission.

In 2025, the group was invited to participate in the Boston Archdiocese Cathedral Music Festival, representing the Brazilian ethnic group. Other activities include June festivities (*Festa Junina*), where the group collaborates on raffles, and an annual social action program that delivers clothes, gloves,



hats, socks, and blankets to people in need in Boston. Furthermore, testimonies from young Brazilian members confirm that the group has changed and transformed their lives, helping them know Christ on their chosen path. They appreciated the gift of individuals who helped them discover God through their participation in the Eucharist and prayer group. //





II ACAMPADENTRO



Scalabrinian priests celebrate milestone ordination anniversaries

This year's significant milestone in the Scalabrinian Congregation honors some of our jubilarians, particularly in St. Charles Province. Their decades of unconditional commitment and service to the Church exem-

plify the distinctive sign of their consecrated lives. Father Alex Dalpiaz led the jubilarians with 70 years of priesthood, followed by four diamond jubilarians (60 years): Father Zelindo A. Ballen, Father Isaia Birollo, Father

Camillo Lando, and Father Sergio Morotti, while Father Jairo A. Alfonso marks his 30th anniversary.

We extend our best wishes and congratulations to all of them.

SEVENTY YEARS (1956-2026)

Fr. Alexander P. Dalpiaz is from Melrose Park, IL. He took his temporary vows on September 8, 1949, and his perpetual vows on September 8, 1952. He was ordained a priest on June 10, 1956. He describes his priesthood as a gift from God. Likewise, he is grateful for all the graces and blessings God has given him over the years. Throughout his ministry, he has served as a missionary in Colombia, Argentina, Australia, and various parts of the United States. The challenges he faced during his ministry have shaped his personal growth and strengthened his faith, leading to renewed service and dedication to the church and his congregation. His love for God's people, especially the poor migrants, has deeply motivated him to serve and remain in the mission. Due to health reasons, he now resides at the Scalabrini Retirement Center in Sun Valley, CA.



SIXTY YEARS (1966-2026)



Fr. Zelindo A. Ballen hails from Aratiba, R.I., in Brazil. He received his first religious vows on February 11, 1958, and made his final profession on March 3, 1963. His ordination to the priesthood occurred on July 10, 1966, in his diocese of Erechim in Brazil. He has worked tirelessly in the mission work, particularly in Venezuela, where he has spent much of his life and ministry. He holds a deep devotion to the Eucharist and shows respect for people from other cultures. He shares his commitment to spiritual leadership and gratitude to God for all the blessings he continues to receive in his ministry. The countless lives he has touched have profoundly impacted his own life. He now lives in Brazil, serving as a parochial vicar at Paróquia São João Batista in Campos Novos, SC.

Fr. Isaia Birollo, an Italian, has served the congregation in various capacities. One of these was as a Superior General and Provincial Superior of St. Charles Province. He took his first vows on September 23, 1959, and made his perpetual profession on September 23, 1963. He was ordained a priest on June 11, 1966. As a man of God, he has demonstrated his leadership both within the religious congregation and through his pastoral work with great humility and obedience to the consecrated life. His love for the poor has radiated throughout his missionary work. He currently serves as an assistant priest at Parroquia Santa Ana in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. He still keeps himself up to date on various issues worldwide, especially social concerns that involve the church's participation.



Fr. Camillo Lando, an Italian, has shown his administrative skills by managing parishes he was assigned to across Canada and the U.S. He pronounced his temporary vows on October 7, 1959, and made his final profession on October 7, 1964. He was ordained a priest on September 3, 1966. His commitment to the church teaching and Tradition is reflected in his consistent orthodoxy. He is described as the voice of 'canon law' among his confreres when applying the moral norms of scripture and sacraments in today's context. His upbringing reflects precision and discipline, which he embodies in the ethical character of his lifestyle. He is grateful for the gift of the priesthood and for the rich experiences that have shaped him from within. He currently resides at St. Paschal Baylon Parish in Thornhill, Ontario, Canada.



Fr. Sergio Morotti, an Italian, has demonstrated his steadfast commitment to the congregation. He took his temporary vows on October 7, 1959, and made his final profession on October 4, 1963. His ordination as a priest occurred on September 11, 1966. His missionary work has taken him to countries such as Venezuela, Italy, and Colombia. He served once as a provincial superior in Italy and spent most of his life in formation. As a lifelong process of growth, he subscribes to the Founder's great devotion to the Eucharist and prayer. He has multifaceted talents in music, history, liturgy, and scripture. He communicates with the foundational insights of history and an appreciation for classical music. His deep engagement with religious formation highlights the truth of mission and academic preparation. He is now based at the Mother House in Piacenza, Italy.



THIRTY YEARS (1996-2026)



Fr. Jairo A. Alfonso, a Colombian, pronounced his temporary vows on August 15, 1991, and made his final vows on November 25, 1995. He was ordained to the priesthood on August 3, 1996. He has dedicated most of his missionary work to Canada, particularly in Mississauga and Montreal, and has also briefly ministered in Brooklyn, New York. He has a gift for expressing his mind in solid Spanish discourse, drawing situations with precision of expression in his critique. He is firm in his principles, however, gentle in demonstrating them to others. His ministry with the Latinos and other cultures has a familiar cadence in engagement with one's identity and background. Currently, he serves as a parochial vicar at Notre-Dame-de-Pompeii in Montreal, Canada. //

"The soul of one who serves God always swims in joy, always keeps holiday, is always in her palace of jubilation, ever singing with fresh ardor and fresh pleasure a new song of joy and love."

- John of the Cross -



Let's talk!

Be a Scalabrinian!

Religious Life in Postmodern Times

A CONVERSATION WITH A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR, FR. WALTER TONELOTTO

Good morning, Father Walter. Thank you so much for accepting our invitation to join this interview, where we'll explore the meaning and importance of religious life, especially within our Scalabrinian community. It's great to hear about your work as the Spiritual Director for our students at the House of Discernment and your role as a parochial vicar at St. Bernard's and Our Lady of Fatima Church in Maryland. Could you start by telling us a little about yourself? I'd love to hear how you're feeling about your new role, even though it's familiar territory for you, given your many years of experience in formation.



I feel like I have completed a full circle in my Scalabrinian vocation. You know, as a young priest, I spent seventeen years in seminary formation on Staten Island (NY), in Queens (NY), in Guadalajara (Mexico), and in Port-au-Prince (Haiti); so now in Maryland, I feel that I have come back to my early experience in formation.

In today's culture, it appears that the younger generation has lost a sense of the sacred, particularly in prayer, even among Catholics. Do you believe that, as religious missionaries, this is an area that needs to be strengthened in our seminary formation? The Church teaches, "the first and foremost duty of all religious is to be the contemplation of divine things and a diligent union with God in prayer" (Code of Canon Law 663.1)



Yes, I believe that during the Vatican II years, we shifted from a contemplative to a more active view of the priestly mission. We may have forgotten that our primary responsibility is to honor and

praise God, which then leads to loving our neighbor. Perhaps this is why our pastoral ministry sometimes feels stagnant. I see in young people today a search for "the sacred"; their traditional inclination shows that they are seeking a deeper relationship with the Lord. It's not uncommon to see them reading classics of mystical life on their own. Many seminaries now also provide students with ample time for prayer; daily Eucharistic adoration is common, daily Mass is requested, and confession twice a month is available.

In the years following the Second Vatican Council, the development of Roman Catholic theology has also reflected its growth in prayer, which can bear God's presence to an individual. Central to its foundation is our faithfulness, which intertwines with a call to establish intimate friendship with God in Jesus Christ. Do you think the academic life of our students should be embodied in the ethical character of seminary formation, which leads them to interiorly grasp the revelation of mysteries through their lived experience?



Regarding intellectual formation, I disagree with the common trend in seminary formation today. To offer a higher level of intellectual formation, many seminaries have opted to join a "Catholic University" program for priestly formation. The issue is that, since these universities are also open to lay people and anyone interested in studying theology, they have adapted their programs to meet these new demands, moving away from what was strictly a "priestly formation." They might have gained a few more students, but they have lost the aspect of a

“specifically seminarian formation.” In fact, here in Maryland, we have chosen a program run solely by priests and seminarians, even though we could have attended a well-known university like Catholic University in Washington.

Years ago, the late Pope Francis convened Synods of Bishops on the Family in 2014 and 2015. The family and family virtues continue to be the subject of moral conflict, as the focus now turns to an integrated response to modernity that seeks to place Christian morality in critical dialogue with postmodern secular sciences. As a man of God, what’s your position on keeping Christian morality in mutual agreement with secular fields of thought? Could you speak about the interplay between the Gospel witness of religious life and the role of families?



This is a question that requires more thought and analysis. I can compare today’s young people with those from 50 years ago and see the differences. Young people today enter the seminary with a variety of experiences that were not available in the past. One common element is the experience of “conversion.” Almost all of them have had a personal moment when they had to change their life direction and follow a new calling; somehow, they feel they have nothing to miss about the world, yet they have made a complete turnaround. It’s interesting to know that most of them took on the challenge and made their decision during a youth retreat. There is also a side effect to this, because many arrive at the seminary with wounds that need to be addressed. Collaboration with a professional is very necessary to help seminarians work through their past.



Fr. Walter Tonelotto

You joined the Scalabrinian Order as a young boy in Italy. What initially drew you to religious life? What specifically attracted you to St. John Baptist Scalabrini and his missionaries?



Yes, I joined the minor seminary in Italy when I was 11, and I am very grateful for that. Nowadays, this might be seen almost as an abuse (taking a poor child away from the love of his family). Still, I must say that I enjoyed my years in the seminary tremendously. Looking back, I feel that I was spared many family and societal problems that affect many young people today before they enter the seminary. In this light, we need to find a way to accompany and protect “children” from the many dangers present in today’s society. My feeling is that Jesus called his disciples at a very young age.

Since you are no longer responsible for administrative tasks or holding positions in the parish, are you happy with where you are now? How do you perceive your journey as a religious priest, and specifically as a Scalabrinian, in



Fr. Walter celebrating his birthday

preparing you for leadership roles in parishes? How has retirement affected your life as a religious?



Good question! Even though the Archdiocese of Toronto requested my resignation when I was 75, I felt a bit of rejection, since I still felt I could go on for a few more years. I now see the benefit of the church rule. Yes, I could have gone for a few more years, but then I would not have had the time to prepare for retirement.

Retirement is not a time of “inactivity” or “il dolce far niente”, but another stage of our religious life. We do not cease to be religious; we do not cease to be ministers of God. This is probably a moment of reflection and reorganization of our lives as “friends of Jesus.” I do not

call you servants (of the people) but friends (of God).

I can say that I have rediscovered the deeper dimension of my vocation. I love the free time I have to pray and to spend hours in church next to the tabernacle. Now I realize how much I missed this time alone with Jesus; I look back on my beautiful ministry and see how much love Jesus had for me, even when I was unaware of it. Part of aging is accepting physical limitations. I was very active in my life, and I now must learn to slow down. I now have limited eyesight, so I have to learn to listen to “audible” books instead of reading or writing. But this is what I can offer now to my Lord in gratitude for all the years of grace, forgiveness, and love He has secretly granted me.

It seems that often what holds back young people from pursuing the religious life is fear of commitment. Sometimes the idea of discernment becomes the limiting factor. What advice do you have for young people who may be considering a vocation to consecrated or religious life?



To young people today, we must present religious vocation as a challenge. I remember a talk by Bishop Barron to young people, where he told them:

"Happiness comes from real love; the more you love the more happiness you will find in life; the priest is the man who is called to love the greatest number of people in life; the priest can be the happiest person if he learns from Jesus how to love the greatest number of people."

I think we have to teach our young people the secret of love "as" Jesus loved us. Then they will be all set for the rest of their lives.

Finally, what are your hopes for the future of religious life within the Church?



My only hope is for eternal life whenever the Lord decides. If the Lord has given me so much love and joy in this life, how much more will He give me in heaven? I am just waiting to find out. I can say that I die happy and I will be happy to die whenever He calls.

Thank you so much, Father Walter. I appreciate the time you took for this interview and particularly admire your core strength: your integrative perspective, which demonstrates the so-called 'interior master' that continues to guide your vocation and nurtures a close relationship with God. //



Fr. Walter at a mass in the Church of the Holy Rosary (Washington D.C.)

Reflections on the Prophet Jeremiah - A Correlation of Mission and Discipleship

The word of the Lord came to me, saying: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you."

When we first began our ministry as missionaries, coming from Latin America, Asia, or Europe, we faced the challenges of adjusting to new cultures, climate, food, and other aspects of foreign lands. Living in a community was another test that made us aware of our vulnerability as humans and of the importance of working together or helping one another, especially in times of need.

There's a saying that goes, 'for people of faith, nothing happens by coincidence.' I believe this is true when we reflect on our experiences, our journeys down memory lane, and our frequent reminders of what God has done for us, especially when we struggle to reach our goals or decide which path to take in life. However, in my mind, many voices tell me that challenges must be faced. These challenges are meant to strengthen us and to realign us with the fundamental gift of service. After all, this is our calling, no matter the circumstances or stage of life we are in; we are all called to serve.

Jeremiah's prophetic calling highlights that God knows each of us personally. He is aware of our strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and limitations. As it states: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you" (Jer 1:4-5, 17-19). Clearly, even before Jeremiah's birth, God had a plan for him and called him to a mission, specifically, to be a prophet, serving Judah and other ancient Near Eastern nations during a time of crisis, marked by the last days of monarchy and the beginning of captivity. Throughout his lifetime, Jeremiah witnessed his people's suffering as Judah was taken captive after defeat by Babylonian armies, and he saw the fulfillment of prophecies, including the destruction of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah challenged them to trust God and to repent from their sins.

They had forsaken Yahweh and had worshipped pagan idols. He was faithful enough to warn them of God's judgment on Judah. He was on the brink of giving up as a prophet because they would not listen to him. He said, "Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak because I am a youth" (Jer 1:6). Like many other prophets of the Old Testament, they were not at all willing to submit to God as a prophet. We could recall Moses, for instance, when he confessed openly that he was not an eloquent speaker. He did not have that off-the-cuff style in the public spotlight, so to speak. Isaiah, too, said that he was a man of unclean lips. Hence, he was not meant for that job. Jonah, too, as we all know, ran away to avoid God's instruction to go to Nineveh. However, God called him to preach to the Ninevites.

It is interesting to imagine how these prophets made headway

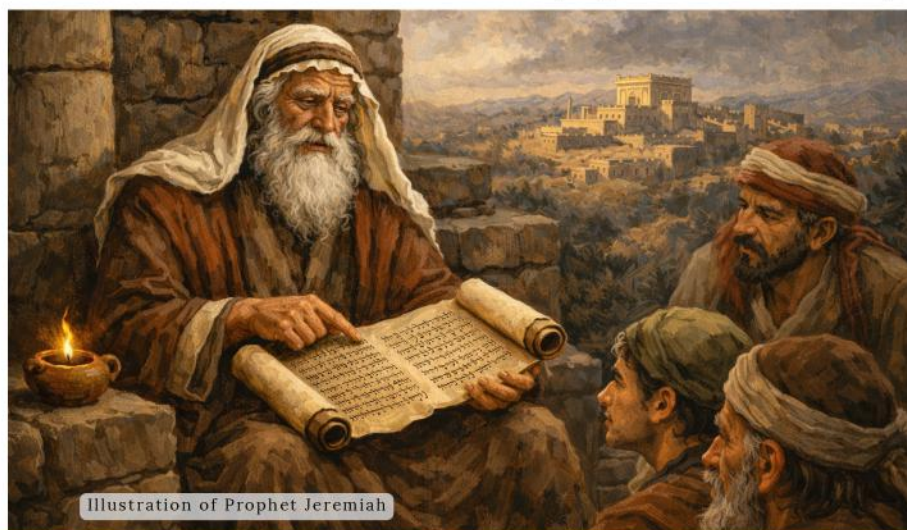


Illustration of Prophet Jeremiah

in their valiant efforts to assure their own people that God had a future for Israel and Judah. They had to know that God remembers his covenant with Israel even when Israel, repeatedly, has rebelled against it. According to some scholars, Jeremiah's ministry as a prophet may have extended over 40 years.

His active ministry during the reigns of three Judean kings was filled with turbulence and opposition. He was branded and identified as a traitor by King Manasseh, Judah's most ungodly king (2 Chron 33:15-19), and King Jehoiakim, the oldest son of King Josiah, who refused to follow his advice to accept the Babylonian rule. As a result, Jehoiakim, the oldest son of King Josiah, who refused to follow his advice to accept the Babylonian rule. As a result, Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon in 601 B.C. This is why King Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem and occupied the whole city's population. Zedekiah, the youngest brother of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, was captured by the Babylonians due to his rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar.

Looking at Jeremiah's background, his life and ministry as a prophet, we see that he is the only prophet with striking similarities to Jesus' life and ministry. He is the most Christ-like

among the old prophets. Both delivered messages to their people, Israel and all of humanity. Both were compassionate and loving, prompting some Jewish scribes and Pharisees to see them as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Both faced storms of opposition, standing firm against attacks from Jewish leaders. Both were condemned, accused by their enemies of political treason, and ultimately faced persecution. Both predicted the destruction of the temple (Jer 7:14; Mk 13:2).

Both used everyday situations, employing nature or figurative language to communicate their message and relevance. Both came from distinguished backgrounds: Jeremiah from a priestly and prophetic family, with his father Hilkiah possibly the high priest who discovered the Book of the Law during Josiah's reforms (2 Kgs 22:8-10), and Jesus from a divine, royal lineage tracing back to David through the stump of Jesse.

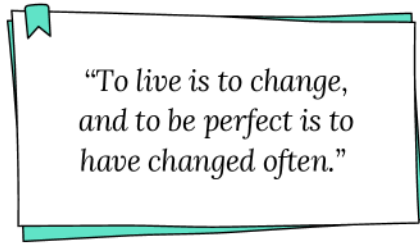
They both wept over Jerusalem (Jer 9:1; Lk 19:41), denounced priests of their time, and challenged corrupt practices in temple worship. They also faced rejection by their own families (Jer 12:6; Jn 1:11).

While affirming our mission as dedicated Christians, we share a common vision as living testimonies of God's word. Although

we may face rejection or a lack of acceptance for various reasons, we do not give up. We persevere, remaining in the race until we understand the hope that lies ahead, allowing ourselves to be shaped by the wisdom gained from our experiences. Often marked by countless ebbs and flows, leaving scars and blisters along the way, we continue to grow in our appreciation for God's wonder and mystery as we embrace our human condition.

During this time, as many people worldwide face the hardships of significant calamities, ongoing conflicts, and tragedies in countries like Iran, Israel, and the United States, it is wise for us to focus on a shared sense of connection within our personal and professional environments. Although seasons vary, we all experience a process of letting go and embracing new human developments that life presents.

We have faced various challenges that have shaped our lives and our mission. Furthermore, with the evolving nature of our faith, we are compelled to consider John Henry Newman's maxim:



*"To live is to change,
and to be perfect is to
have changed often."*

The So-Called Toir¹

It's hard to make a recount
of my own journey - a religious life;
It's like Odysseus' adventures,
With so many tests and encounters.



I stumbled so many times
met different people;
with certain personalities
that at times could be - difficult to live by.

But the grace of God
hastened to keep me going;
led me to walk through
and be undaunted by rough times.



I think in each chapter
of my struggles within;
There's always a whisper
where God was invoked within.

I couldn't deny the fact
that his presence through the years
made me see what the following
Or does discipleship really mean?

It cost a fortune, it's a great deal
that I need to wrestle with,
Be attuned to and focused on him
as my Master and Lord of all.



Those people that I met,
along the way in formation,
ministry and social affairs,
molded the wealth of my faith.

I thank and wish them well
for they made a big difference
in the so-called 'toir' within.

Thorns and Thistles

1. An Irish word which means 'search' or 'quest'.

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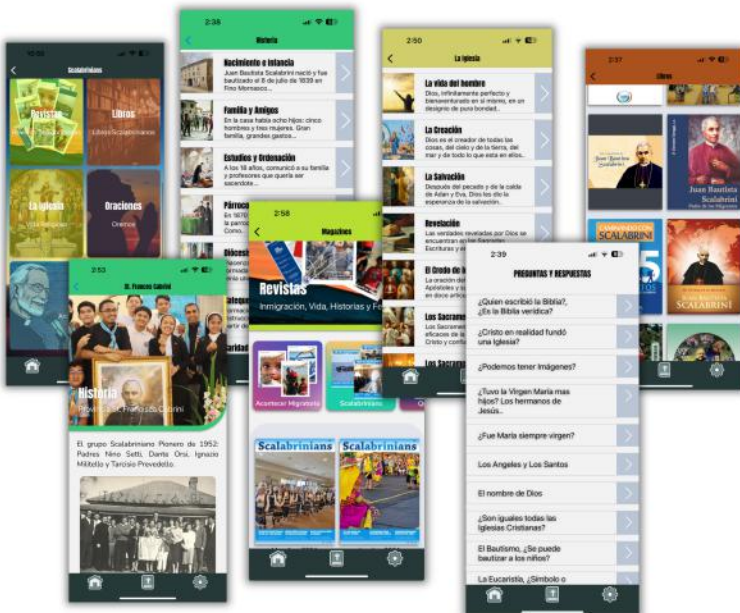
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Jesus is our life, our everything. It is to Him that we owe the grace and friendship of the Father, the trust and freedom of children of God. It is to Jesus that we owe all the goods of nature, of grace and of glory that we receive from God."

(St. Scalabrini. Pastoral Letter, Lent, 1878)

