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PROFILE

True Beauty:
An interview
with Leah
Darrow

—
pg. 28

THE SPIRIT OF CULTURE

THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS' RICH CULTURAL DIVERSITY IS IN PART A RESULT OF THE PROGRESSION OF A MORE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH



MEN FOR EVANGELIZATION

By JENNIFER BRINKER

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A group of men who have attended the Catholic Men for Christ Conference have taken to heart a mission to encounter others in need by journeying with them in friendship



Denny Demeter from Incarnate Word Parish led prayer for a men's group at the Missionaries of Charity soup kitchen. The group is made up of both men who are struggling and others who have reached out to them. Through spiritual intimacy and camaraderie, the men have formed lasting connections.

Thomas Jones sits on the edge of his bed, clutching a couple of bus passes. Plastic still covered the new mattress and box springs, and a crisp, flowered comforter rests on top.

It was the first time in almost two decades that Thomas had a roof over his head that he could call his own. He'd been bouncing around among shelters, family and friends. Sometimes he'd spend the night on a flattened cardboard box on the street or in a park.

On Wednesday mornings, Tony Koester and a group of friends, many of whom got to know each other through the archdiocesan Catholic Men for Christ Conference, meet at Missionaries of Charity soup kitchen for prayer, reading Scripture and sharing faith with men who visit the Missionaries of Charity to receive

sustenance. They've been at their routine for about three years, and it's where Thomas met Tony.

"He was a nice guy, spiritually motivated," Thomas recalls. "I wanted to talk to him, because I knew he could help me in some kind of way." It was there that Tony had offered to help Thomas fix his bike, and a friendship began to blossom, albeit unknowingly at the time.

The way Tony sees it, "What a miracle it was he got shot." As the two of them sit on the edge of Thomas' bed — the direct result of getting involved in Pathways to Progress, eventually leading him to employment, housing and a life of stability — Thomas chuckles at God's providence.

"Think about it, if Christ hadn't suffered and been crucified, we wouldn't be saved," Tony says to his friend.

A couple of years after meeting Tony, Thomas was



Tony Koester, right, and Thomas Jones became friends when Jones, who was homeless, befriended a group from West County at the Missionaries of Charity soup kitchen. The group of men has gone a step beyond providing only material assistance, offering spiritual nourishment and companionship with the men in need that they encounter.

shot several times while he was guarding equipment at a construction site, and he went to live with his sister after getting out of the hospital. Tony visited Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Ferguson to seek assistance for Thomas and his sister. Sister Cathy Doherty, Our Lady of Guadalupe's pastoral associate, recommended looking into Catholic Charities' Pathways to Progress program at St. Francis Community Services.

It's a way that Tony and his friends have taken to heart a calling from the men's conference to put their faith into action. The group doesn't have a formal name, and they're scattered across numerous parishes in the archdiocese. Some are involved in the Knights of Columbus and Knights of Peter Claver, while others volunteer with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Where some people might fall through the cracks of social service organizations, these men are there to fill in the gaps, helping to make those connections.

"That was always the intent, to use the conference as a way to wake men up," Tony says. "The follow up after that is getting them into men's groups and getting them into some kind of ministry."

What started as the Honored Guest program, an effort to invite homeless men to the men's conference in February, has since expanded, with the men doing one-off projects, such as building a wheelchair ramp for someone or helping others to find employment or connections with social service agencies. ▶

 **Read about the Honored Guest program:** www.stlouisreview.com/Tu3



Prayer to Saint Teresa of Calcutta
 SAINT TERESA OF
 CALCUTTA, YOU ALLOWED
 THE THIRSTING LOVE OF
 JESUS ON THE CROSS
 TO BECOME A LIVING
 FLAME WITHIN YOU AND
 SO BECAME THE LIGHT
 OF HIS LOVE TO ALL
 OBTAIN FROM THE
 HEART OF JESUS (here
 mention your request)
 TEACH ME TO ALLOW
 JESUS TO PENETRATE
 AND POSSES MY WHOLE
 BEING SO COMPLETELY
 THAT MY LIFE TOO, MAY
 RADIATE HIS LIGHT AND
 LOVE TO OTHERS AMEN
 Transcribed, ahead of Holy Communion,
 for the prayer of the
 Saint Teresa of Calcutta

Through spiritual intimacy and camaraderie, a group of men—made up of men who serve at the Missionaries of Charity soup kitchen and others who receive assistance from the kitchen—have formed lasting connection. They meet each Wednesday morning at the Missionaries of Charity to pray and share.

FINDING HAPPINESS

It would be easy to say they're involved in charitable works and leave it at that, but these men have taken it to the next step, offering spiritual nourishment and companionship with the men in need that they encounter. Tony sums it up, comparing the early days of his relationship with Thomas to now.

"At first, we had a hard time getting ahold of him, or getting him to call us back," he says. "Now, he calls me to check in, or we sometimes go out to lunch together."

Early on a Wednesday morning, five men — Tony Koester, Leslie Farr, Denny Demeter, Marc Braeckel and Steve Dickhut — make a circle in the chapel at the Missionaries of Charity. They're joined by Richard Henderson, Anthony Miller and Charles Brown, on and off regulars at the soup kitchen. They're continuing a discussion on Matthew Kelly's book "Resisting Happiness."

In chapter 10, the men reflected on what they'd do if given the knowledge they'd have more time to live. "Each



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of us spoke about a wish to visit more friends, spend more time with family, venture out into the world,” says Anthony, a St. Louis resident who’s temporarily out of work. He says personally, he would want to have a better spirituality with God, and become closer to Him. “Our society needs more of that,” he says.

In the meantime, he’s building relationships with the other men in the group, and enjoying the spiritual walk with them. “It’s a very peaceful environment,” he says. “I enjoy the chance to develop my thoughts and study the material?”

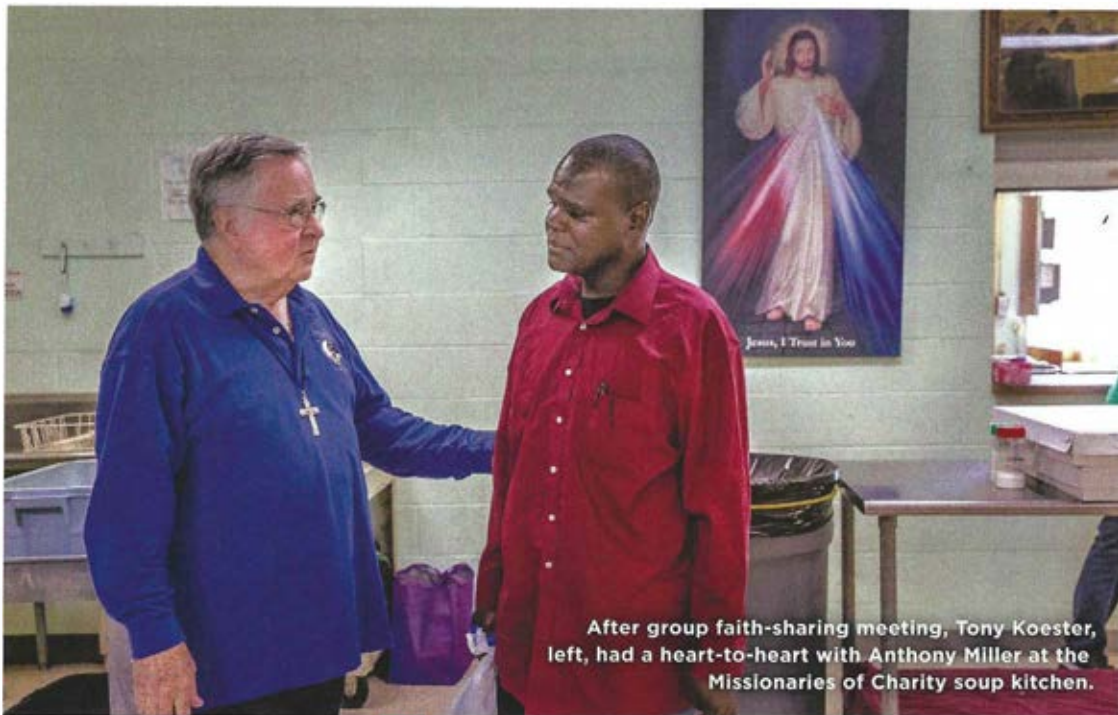
The learning goes both ways, explains Denny Demeter. Once during a conversation on seeking silence in prayer, one of the men from north St. Louis described the challenge of finding silence when “all he hears are sirens and gunshots,” Denny recalls. “He told us, it’s moment to moment — even if it’s 30 seconds to stop and say, ‘Thank you, Lord.’”

“Not only do we come in as teachers, but also as students,” Denny says. “We’re all on the same journey, and we’re here to listen and learn from their journeys.”

Leslie Farr, who got involved with the group via the men’s conference several years ago, says relationship building is what’s going to lead to positive changes in the culture. As a black man, Leslie says what’s needed more now than ever is the presence of God, and for opportunities for men — especially black men — to know that they’re needed and valued.

“When you convince a community that men are not a necessity, it hurts,” he says. “If we lose men, then we lose boys, and then the family.”

“If you lose families, then you lose society,” Denny says. †



After group faith-sharing meeting, Tony Koester, left, had a heart-to-heart with Anthony Miller at the Missionaries of Charity soup kitchen.



Catholic Men for Christ Conference

The 11th annual Catholic Men for Christ Conference will take place on Saturday, Feb. 3 at the Touhill Performing Arts Center at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Speakers include Michael Cumbie, Curtis Martin, Father Godwin Olugbami and Scott Sullivan. Cost is \$40 per person. To register, and learn of additional ways for men to become involved in their faith, visit www.catholicmenforchrist.org, email OLFLCWFC@archstl.org or call (314) 792-7183.

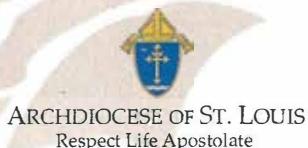
The Catholic Women for Christ Conference will take place on Saturday, March 10 at the Touhill Performing Arts Center. Visit www.catholicwomenforchrist.org for more information.

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