



**James Burns**

I first heard about Voluntas Dei from my ordination classmate, Fr. Timothy Corbley. He had been looking for a community through which he could pursue his ministerial passion and also expand his apostolic activity in addition to the great work he had done as a diocesan parish priest. He had found Voluntas Dei and said to me that he thought this would be an ideal community for me as well. However, at that time, I did not see how such a community would fit in with what I was doing for the diocese and the local Church, which was pursuing my doctoral degree in order to work in the local diocesan university as a professor of psychology. Nonetheless, he said his offer stood to “come and see” some time and discover what he had found.

It would be about 3 years later that I would finally decide to “see” what Timothy had found so attractive about Voluntas Dei. I attended one of the meetings in Newark, NJ and then subsequently had a discussion with Fr. Tony Ciorra. Thus, I did become an observer and after that I become more curious and eager to find what Timothy had found, i.e., a community of believers who came together for support and fellowship but continued to live in the world alongside friends and colleagues in many different milieus, but with an inner desire to develop a sense of peace and brotherhood all in service to others. What initially attracted me was what I would say is the simple yet profound spirituality of Fr. Parent, our founder. His way of synthesizing deep truths and practically connecting them to attitudes

and dispositions of the Christian way of life, for our age and time, has been a great blessing and also a challenge as I seek to live out my vocation and mission in the apostolate of education. As I have become more deeply invested in the community I am more and more profoundly grateful for the invitation that Fr. Timothy Corbley first extended to me, which was followed by Fr. Tony and which has since been, as it were, re-extended many times over through a charism of hospitality by the members of Voluntas Dei.

Which is a second, wonderful and compelling reason that I have discerned to commit myself to Voluntas Dei, i.e., because of the community of individuals who are all trying to do their best to live out the evangelical counsels in the midst of the world and to show forth what it means to be brothers and sisters of Christ. Each of us individually and all of us collectively have been blessed with a spirituality that calls forth so very much from us yet provides so much more. For me it provides a space and a place to hold myself accountable and yet calls me to be more, not in the material sense of “being more,” but in the sense of communion and freedom to be who and what Christ has called me to be at this time and in this moment. Thus, for me, as I move into the stage of stability in formation in the Institute there is a profound appreciation for what the witness to hospitality and living with others in peace can mean. I cannot help but reflect on how amazing it is that a simple invitation to “come and see” can change one’s life course. And how in accepting the invitation, one soul can be afforded such a different vantage point from which to see the world, for the better, and the trajectory of a single life now re-oriented toward eternity can by extension change so many others lives. For that I cannot help but be grateful.

Thank you.

