

HE SERVANT



Ron Fender

#239
Eastertide 2016

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The Servant

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OF STONES, WIRES, WOOD—AND A LIFE REMEMBERED

Some years ago, Ron Fender went on a private retreat into his beloved mountains. These woods and streams were a part of his blood; they were what made up the man that over the years became our cherished and loved Brother Ron.

On that retreat, Ron spent many hours at a favorite stream, contemplating and praying. Each day he gathered stones which, as he told me, represented the many prayers offered for all of us—his Gregorian family. What would he bring back and give to me? He contemplated this for many days and then he assembled those stones into a cross. Stones and wire: basic things of everyday life; smooth stones mounted on two branches found in the woods. That cross hangs on the outside wall in my perennial garden—and it has been there in the elements for years now. It is weathered and worn and still there.

That was Ron: weathered and worn and,

like that cross, still hanging in until that day when his heart could not beat just one more time. I imagine that one day

the cross will give in, the wires will have rusted through, and it will fall apart. Ron fell apart. And we, his brothers, have in some ways fallen apart, too—apart from this amazing man—this Spirit-filled mountain man—who gave us so much. I pray that the cross on my garden wall remains for some time still—for it brings comfort and joy—just what Ron gave us—his brothers.

RTB



(photo Ed Barels)

RON FENDER: STATE OF GRACE!

Few people confront their own mortality “in a state of grace”—but there can be absolutely no doubt that Ron Fender was one who accomplished that longed-for feat. Ron was an active presence throughout the Brotherhood’s Winter Convocation 2016, leading and participating in the liturgies and retreat programs of that annual gathering of Gregorian Friars. On the final day of the convocation, Ron enjoyed breakfast among his brothers, telling stories and sharing anecdotes from his youth, as he always did. Morning Prayer and the Holy Eucharist followed breakfast, and Ron was both

joyous as he joined his brothers in prayer and also sad that he had to leave this idyllic company that morning and depart for his home in Chattanooga. At the end of the liturgy he made very sure to kiss and hug each of his brothers as he bid a loving ‘farewell’ to each of them, and then he was driven to the local railway station to catch a train down to meet his flight at the airport.

Ron never made that flight. He boarded the train, placed his luggage in the overhead rack, and took his seat. It isn’t clear exactly when it happened, but



Ron’s farewell performance of Stephen Vincent Benét’s monologue, “The Mountain Whippoorwill: How Hill-Billy Jim Won the Great Fiddler’s Prize” (1925)

shortly thereafter he had a massive heart attack. At the next station, he was taken to Saint Luke’s Hospital in Newburgh, where he was officially pronounced dead at 11:40 am—just as the Gregorians who were still at the retreat center began the Noonday office. None who said those prayers, knew that Ron had met his fate at exactly as we gathered. But all felt his absence from among us, as those who remain always do during these final hours of the “Farewell Symphony” that marks the end of a convocation.

Ron Fender was a giant of a Christian soul and we shall never know another like him. But we are consoled in the knowledge that he had spent his final moments in this life among those whom he loved dearly and who loved him just as much. And he had had the opportunity to express his love with a kiss and a hug, and to receive those same tokens of deep affection from each of his brothers. If this isn’t a description of what “a state of grace” means, then we have all greatly misunderstood what it means to be alive and to be in love.

James Teets

RON FENDER: SERVED THE CITY'S HOMELESS FOR MORE THAN TEN YEARS

Brother Ron Fender BSG, formerly of Asheville, North Carolina, left this life for his eternal home on January 29, 2016. "The Monk," as he was affectionately called by many, was born in Asheville on October 1, 1954 to Bernie Fender and Exie McIntyre Fender Boyd and is survived by sister Joyce Osteen, brother Conley Fender, seven nephews and four nieces.

Ron was a graduate of East Henderson High School and Western Carolina University. He enjoyed a long and successful career in theatre, becoming well-known and loved in the theatre community, traveling the world in his work as actor, director, stage manager, company manager and artistic director. He was also a gifted storyteller and loved to share the lore of his native Appalachian region.

Ron dedicated his life to serving the lost, forgotten, and broken souls of our world; he impacted all who came into his wide net and was a true friend to anyone in need.

In 2002, Ron traveled to Chattanooga, carrying only a bucket and a suitcase, to fulfill his calling of washing the feet of the homeless. For more than ten years he served as an outreach case manager with the Chattanooga Community Kitchen, where his foot care ministry grew to serve thousands each year. During his tenure, he also developed permanent supportive housing, focused on end-of-life care, was a tireless advocate and was simply unconditionally present for anyone who needed his help.

A vowed member of the Brotherhood since 2006, Ron made life profession of vows in 2011 and lived into his vocation as a Gregorian friar through his work among the homeless. He spent the last week of his life on retreat among the brothers of his beloved community.

Truly a "Saint of Chattanooga," Ron was a parishioner at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Chattanooga where he served as a lay reader and volunteer. He was a frequent speaker before community organizations and guest preacher in local churches, always sharing his love of Christ and his firm belief in showing that love through service.

Ron's joyful, humble and generous spirit touched the lives of people from all walks of life and inspired many others to engage in similar works of mercy. His impact on those most vulnerable will live on forever.

—*with thanks to The Chattanooga.com*

COMMUNITY NOTES

Winter Convocation 2016

“The Great Blizzard of 2016” hit the Mid-Atlantic over the weekend prior to Winter Convocation this year, delivering up to three feet of snow over a period of just 72 hours! Did this stop Gregorian friars from making every effort to travel to Upstate New York for this greatly-anticipated event? Blizzards—or at least the possibility of inclement weather have always been a possibility when planning each year’s Winter



Michael Piper performs Bernstein’s “A Simple Song” from Mass, as part of “Gregorian Performances.”

Convocation, so there was nothing new to consider. As it turned out, while much of the East Coast was buried under tons of snow, and airports, trains, and highways were at a standstill, the village of Wappingers Falls, New York got nary a drop of snow! So, while travel arrangements were adjusted across the country and obstacles cropped up on the travel days, there was nothing here that Gregorians hadn’t dealt with before, and Winter Convocation 2016 opened on schedule, thanks be to God! This five-day respite served the Brotherhood as a time of retreat, including education, self-study, worship and prayer.

The Brotherhood’s Education Committee, chaired by David Luke Henton, developed a varied retreat

schedule once again. Three morning-long programs were presented:

“Visio Divina”—Vision of the Divine: David Luke led the Gregorians through an exercise which asked each person to select a picture from among many photos, paintings and illustrations provided, to meditate on that image, and then to discuss any rev-

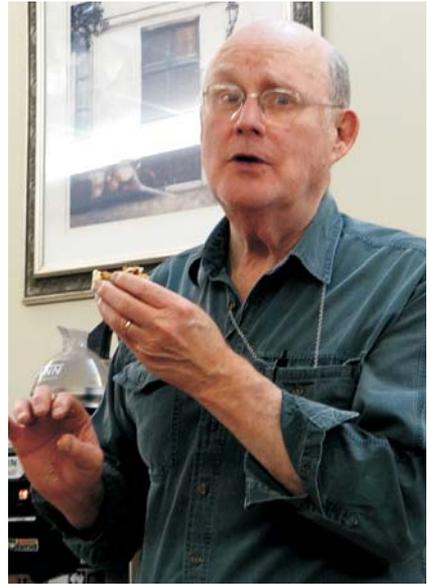


Brothers explore meditation on what can be seen, pointing to that which cannot be seen.

elations obtained from that time of contemplation within a small group and then among the assembly.

Gregorian Performances: Following Morning Prayer in the chapel, all remained seated for an amazing exposition of some of the gifts and talents lavished upon members of the community, sharing gifts with one another. These included songs and musical presentations, readings and even a short film, and by the end all were overwhelmed by the gifts shared. Ron Fender, Thomas Bushnell, David Hedges, Michael Piper, Karekin Madteos Yarian, William Henry Benefield, Scott Michael Pomerenk, and Richard Thomas Biernacki were the presenters, and the whole community greatly enjoyed their offerings.

“Finding the Sacred in the Secular: How Books Have Formed Us” Taking as their text Jeremiah 18:1–2 (“Go down to the potter’s house and there I will let you



“Blessed are the cheesemakers!” Peter Budde is always ready to share pointers on the art.



Thomas Bushnell and Michael Piper share a moment in the break room.

This is my letter to the world,
That never wrote to me,—
The simple news that Nature told,
With tender majesty.
Her message is committed
To hands I cannot see;
For love of her, sweet countrymen,
Judge tenderly of me!

From this starting point, Ron presented selections from the works of four of his favorite authors — Jack Kerouac, Thomas Wolfe, Carson McCullers, and James Agee

hear my words”) retreat co-leaders Ron Fender and Peter Budde began with a discourse on the proposition that there is nothing in life that is secular, since everything is sacred. To those with open eyes, spiritual life is nourished in the ongoing presence of the everyday, mundane facts of what we call “reality.” Ron Fender shared a poem by Emily Dickinson—



Brothers always make time for conversation and fellowship.

— as brothers volunteered to read passages that illustrated a brief experience of each author’s life. It seemed that everyone present heard or sensed something new with each “revelation,” and no one left that room quite the way he entered it.

As always, the daily retreat sessions were set

within each day’s round of worship, prayer and refreshment as formed by the Daily Office, the Holy Eucharist and ample time for conversation and rest. Tobias Stanislas Haller and David Hedges presided at the Eucharists, with the assistance of deacons Edward Munro and Gordon John Stanley, together with members of the community serving as lectors, offertory bearers, and acolytes; all supported by sacristans John Henry Ernestine and Eric Shelley. Preachers included Thomas Bushnell, Ron Fender and Scott Michael Pomerenk; Nathanael Deward Rahm organized the daily music, and Richard Thomas Biernacki, William Henry Benefield, Nathanael Deward and Enoch John Valentine served as organists.

As with all Brotherhood convocations and retreats, the sound of laughter gently mixed in our memories with the prayerful solemnity of the Holy Eucharist and our times spent in prayer and reflection together.

Province 1

Our prayers and congratulations go out to Br James Koester SSJE upon his election as Superior of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, Cambridge, Massachusetts. “God bless you in your new ministry!”

After consultation and reflection, the Brotherhood Council released Donald Sutton from the novitiate.

Province 2

Saint John’s, South Salem, New York recently celebrated the 25th Anniversary of Richard John Lorino’s service as their organist and choirmaster, even as our beloved “Brother Rick” celebrates his silver jubilee in vows of profession as a Gregorian friar. Congratulations, and thanks be to God!

Province 3

James Teets and Tobias Stanislas Haller are settled in to their new Baltimore environment and have become active at the Church of the Advent in the Federal Hill neighborhood. They made their debuts on the 4th Sunday in Lent—Tobias Stanislas as celebrant and James as lector. Then, as part of the parish’s Lenten Education Series held on Wednesday evenings, they led the first of two seminars exploring “A Rule of Life.”

Province 3 held a day of reflection on March 12th at the home of James and Tobias Stanislas in Baltimore, celebrating the feast of Saint Gregory the Great. This day in-

cluded Morning Prayer and Noonday, a house Holy Eucharist, and a discussion of the BCP Collect for Lent 1. Edward Munro, Minister Provincial, joined James and Tobias Stanislas, along with the Rev Timothy E Kroh SCP, Rector of the Church of the Advent.

Province 4

On Saturday January 9th, Trinity Cathedral, Miami, held a gala celebration in thanksgiving for the ministry of Bishop Leopold Frade. Mark Andrew Jones, Rector of Saint Nicholas, Pompano Beach, and Postulant Angel Roque who serves as a Verger at Trinity Cathedral, were among all those who came to bid “bon voyage” to their beloved bishop. Bishop Leo is a long-time friend of the Brotherhood beginning decades ago when he was Bishop of Honduras, during which tenure he created Richard Thomas Biernacki and James Teets honorary canons of the Honduran cathedral.



Angel Roque and Mark Andrew Jones

We take this opportunity to wish Bishop Leo and his wife, Diana, a most blessed and fruitful retirement!

Minister Provincial Thomas Lawrence Greer provided the following account of our beloved brother Ron Fender’s burial liturgy:

Eleven members of the Brotherhood were present for Ron Fender’s “Celebration of Life,” which took place at Saint Paul’s Episcopal Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee at



The opening procession at Ron Fender’s funeral (photo Ed Barel)

2:00 PM on Saturday, February 13, 2016. Six brothers from Province 4 attended: Thomas Lawrence, Ælred Bernard Dean, Mark Andrew Jones, Bo Alexander Armstrong, Larry Walter Reich and Max Steele; Thomas Bushnell and Scott Michael Pomerenk attended from Province 8; Francis Jonathan Bullock represented Province 5; Eric Shelley from Province 3; and David Luke Henton from Province 7.

Anywhere you find Gregorians, there is sure to be joyful fellowship, even in the midst of sorrow. This event was no exception. On the Friday evening, the brothers met at one of Ron's favorite venues, Bea's, a family-style restaurant with a southern charm that is hard to resist, and even harder to get



Bo Armstrong and Phillip Fuller place Ron's remains by the Paschal candle. (photo Ed Barels)

out of your chair after the meal! Later arrivals met at the Terminal Brew House, where the food was good and the beer even better.

On Saturday morning, the brothers gathered for Morning Prayer at Saint Paul's. We had a delightful lunch at the English Rose Tearoom. Here, we were all one group together with Phillip Fuller, Lynn Armstrong (wife of Bo Alexander), Erica Hein (wife of Scott Michael), and Tim Kruse (husband of David Luke).

The Celebration of Ron's Life was one that he had planned in detail. The liturgy included some of his favorite readings, hymns, canticles and the Collect of the Brotherhood. Saint Paul's was very gracious in permitting the brothers to take the largest part possible in the design and delivery of this powerful memorial liturgy. Saint Paul's Associate Rector, the Rev Quinn Parman, officiated, while Gregorian friars graciously and thankfully took on the roles of celebrant, deacon, preacher, readers, eucharistic ministers, vergers and pall bearer.

Attendees numbered in the hundreds as people converged from far and near to pay their respects to the man now known as "The Saint of Chattanooga." A number of the members throughout the community held periods of si-



Ælred Bernard Dean proclaims the gospel. (photo Ed Barels)

lence or meditation at the time of commendation as a symbol of solidarity with those present. The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory will celebrate a Memorial Holy Eucharist at Annual Convocation 2016.

Ron saw the observation of our Rule of Life as a great opportunity to deepen his spiritual life while growing into a more faithful Christian person, and he loved his brothers of our order and he definitely experienced the return of that love in the great respect all held for him. He spent the last week of his life on retreat with his beloved brothers, and who among us could want for more?

The brothers who attended this weekend were among those whose lives Ron had touched. At the reception following the memorial liturgy, this was exemplified by commentary from young and old. Ron's joyful, humble, and generous spirit touched people from all walks of life and inspired many others to engage in similar works of mercy. His impact on those most vulnerable will live on forever.

“Well done, good and faithful servant! Come and share your master's happiness!”



Elred Bernard, the Rev Quinn Parman, and Mark Andrew at the altar (photo Ed Barels)



Gregorians share the peace. (photo Ed Barels)



Gregorians with friends and spouses after the celebration of Ron Fender's life (photo Ed Barels)

Max and Sonya Steele were wed on “leap day”—February 29th—in Chattanooga TN. Max is a novice in the Brotherhood. Each Gregorian Friar sends the happy couple warmest best wishes for a long and happy lifetime together!

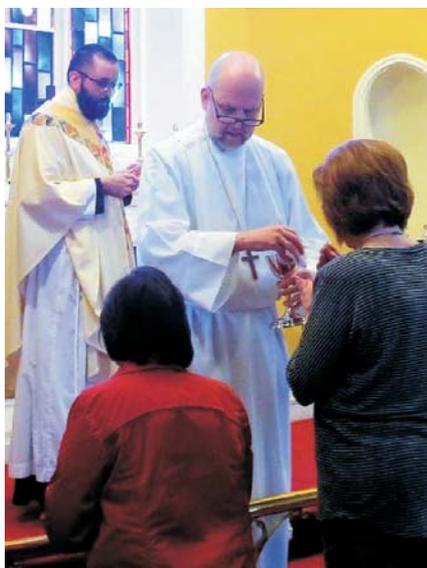
Province 5

Francis Jonathan Bullock made an Advent retreat at Saint Gregory's Abbey, Three Rivers, Michigan. It is always a blessing when one of our own Gregorians can visit the

Episcopal monastery named for our shared patron, Saint Gregory the Great. We trust that your time away was everything that you hoped and prayed for it to be!

Province 5 brothers and postulants gathered at Saint Peter's, Sycamore Illinois, on the feast of Saint Gregory the Great for a day of retreat. Postulant David Hedges is rector of Saint Peter's, which is located about 70 miles west of Chicago.

The facilitator for the day was Sr Catherine Marie Carroll of the Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit, and the day's theme was reconciliation and forgiveness. The Worker Sisters and the Brotherhood have a long, shared history; our founder and Minister General, Richard Thomas Biernacki, and the late Sr Angela Blackburn, founder of the Worker Sisters, worked tirelessly and



David Hedges and Joseph Basil Gauss distribute communion.

successfully beginning in 1982 to provide for the place of contemporary communities in the canons of The Episcopal Church.

The Offices were sung in the church, and David presided at mass where Catherine Marie preached. Nathanael Deward Rahm, Minister Provincial of Province 5, was organist for the day, Ronald Augustine Fox and Postulant Michael J Piper were lectors, Francis Jonathan Bullock was intercessor, and Joseph Basil Gauss assisted at the mass. David's wife, Carly, provided an excellent lunch for everyone in the rectory.

Province 7

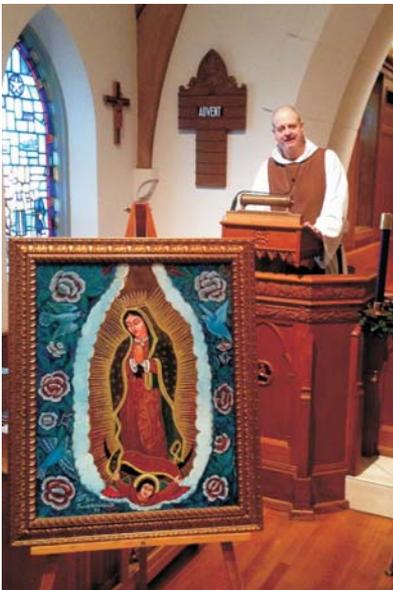
Province 7 gathered at William Henry Benefield's and Christopher Bryan's home in San Antonio on the weekend of 3 Advent to celebrate the Feast of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. The theme of the weekend was the faithful perseverance of mission in this part of Texas. The group attended a mass at William Henry's parish, Saint Paul's, Grayson Street, at which David Luke Henton preached on the coming together of the inexplicable mysteries of the day's feast and the coming celebration of the Incarnation—Christmas.



Worker Sister Catherine Marie Carroll with Gregorians of Province 5

Following the mass the group toured the four remaining active mission parishes on the San Antonio River: Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purisima Concepción, Mission San José, Mission San Juan Capistrano and Mission San Francisco de la Espada. A fifth mission church—Mission San Antonio de Valero, known as The Alamo—is no longer an active parish. At each mission church there was time for quiet reflection as well as touring the grounds.

On Sunday the brothers and guests returned for mass at Saint Paul's, Grayson Street, followed by the Lessons and Carols Program there.



David Luke preaching at Saint Paul's, Grayson Street



(l to r, front) Tony Blando, Betty Budde, William Henry Benefield, James Patrick Hall and Tim Kruse; (l to r, rear) David Luke, the Rev Brad Landry, and Peter

Province 7 met in Denver in March for their Lenten/Spring Retreat hosted by James Patrick Hall and Tony Blando. The theme of the weekend was the ministry to the poor, led by James Patrick. This entailed touring Saint John's Cathedral, the Shrine to Mother Cabrini, and a mass at the Saint Francis Center where James Patrick has been appointed the worship leader. The Center is a mission of the diocese.



The Lenten retreatants, including the Rev Sandy Boyd, center

Province 8

The brothers of Province 8 gathered for a Lenten Gregorian retreat in Los Angeles on the weekend of March 4th-6th, sharing a Gregorian Quiet Day with members and staff of Saint Mark's, Glendale. The morning reflection at the parish, facilitated by Richard Edward Helmer, focused on the three figures of the parable of the prodigal son. The brothers then spent the afternoon and evening enjoying Thomas Bushnell's hospitality—good food and great conversation—at his home, re-



Province 8 celebrates the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe...

flecting together on their various ministries and common life under the Gregorian Rule. On Sunday at Saint Mark's, Scott Michael Pomerenk and Karekin Madteos Yarian offered fine sermons shaped in part by the conversations the day before. The brothers then parted in the afternoon, with Francis Sebastian Medina, Karekin Madteos, and Richard Edward returning to the San Francisco Bay



... and a Lenten retreat day.

Area, Scott Michael to his new home in Denver, and Thomas heading on a work-related trip to Ireland. They look forward to being reunited this summer at Annual Convocation and again this autumn in a retreat around Foundation Day (Holy Cross).

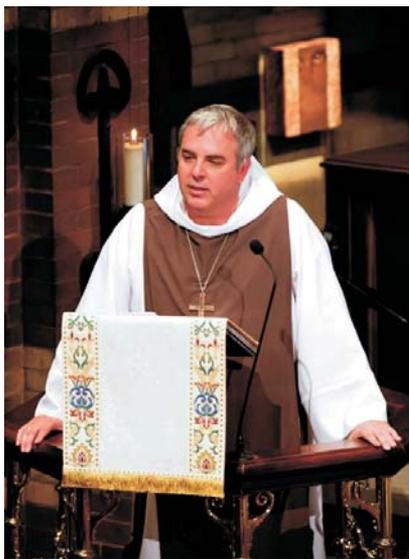
WHAT LOVE'S GOT TO DO WITH IT

That rather lengthy canticle that we just recited is a love poem. It's a weird love poem, because it's a love poem of creation to God. So you need to imagine rocks speaking, and these beautiful hills speaking, and the Tennessee River speaking. Brother Ron loved Annie Dillard, and she knew how to put into words what it was when nature spoke its love song to God. The wind, the snow, the ice, the planets: we need to add our own scientific understanding, every atom, every subatomic particle, and every remote galaxy is caught up in this love song to God. And it's a love song that echoes back the love song that God sang at creation: God who sang all of these things into being, God who sang the complexity and diversity of human life into being, God who sang everyone in this room into being, God who danced with joy when Brother Ron made his appearance.

But while that's a lovely image—and it is true, there's nothing false about it—we know as well that our lives are a little more complex than just love poetry. In the same way that any real relationship of love is a little more complex than beautiful love poetry, things break in the world. Ron's heart couldn't be healed, and that's why we're here today. It broke. And I think our hearts broke the same day.

Ron made a life that was captured up in looking for people whose hearts had most been broken, and holding them tenderly: holding their feet, holding their heart, holding their hand. This love song of creation to God and of God to creation is not a plaster-saint love song. This is a beautiful church, but one of the things I think is most beautiful about it is that the brick walls are not all cleaned up. The beautiful parquet floor here is scuffed with generations of feet. Probably there are scratches in the pew next to you that were carved by some fiddling toddler fifty years ago. We are reminded, in this space and in this life, that joy and sadness come together, that the real joy—the joy that is most worth having—is the joy that comes through the sadness, not despite the sadness.

Paul knew this joy. This love of Christ of which he speaks, this love stronger than death, this love that cannot be separated from us by any earthly or heavenly power: that love was shown us through the cross, which is not a plaster-saint message, is it? It's a message about how the brokenness of the world can reach out and break people. And yet, not defeat them.



Thomas Bushnell preaches at Ron Fender's Funeral. (photo Ed Barels)

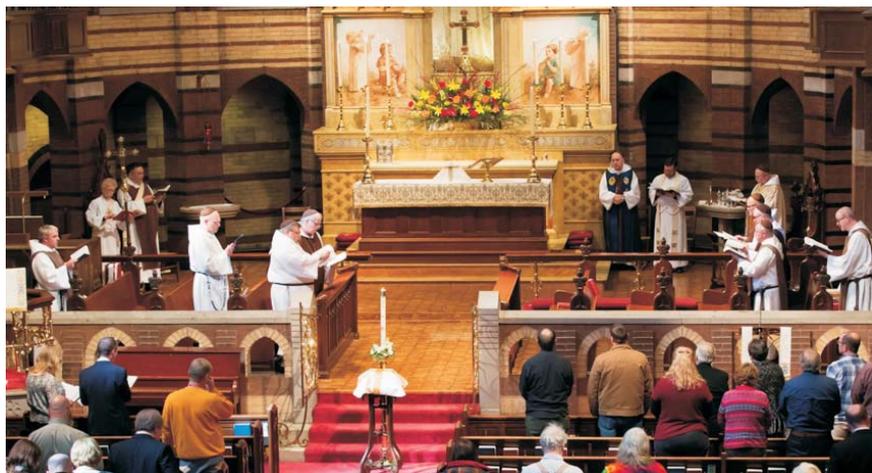
I've read stories, countless letters, countless reflections, from our brother Ron, telling us of praying with someone under a bridge or taking someone to an AA meeting or finding someone a warm meal or caring for someone's calloused feet. And through all of these messages, the real story he was telling us was, "Let me tell you how I saw Christ today." Because it's not that Ron thought he was Jesus. Ron was not bringing light to dark places. Ron was going into places that the world calls dark, and finding in them unapproachable, mystical, glorious light. In the midst of that brokenness, Ron knew, was to be found the love song of creation.

You might not know one of the reasons I'm certain Ron chose that first reading, "Let us now praise famous men." Let me tell you a little about its context. It's part of a very long poem about wisdom and life. And the poem ends with a long recitation of all of Israel's heroes, from Moses down to the author's present day. But before the author can tell us about those heroes, we are reminded of those whom nobody remembers. Because, let's face it, virtually all of us, probably all of us, will not be remembered two hundred years from now. At most, we might be a plaque on a wall. And the author reminds us that in the love song of creation, the love song of God's love for God's people—yes, there are heroes of the faith—the anonymous people are the vast bulk of the ones whom God loves, who are remembered not in books, not in words and heroic tales—only a small number are in that category—most are remembered by those they have touched: by their posterity (we don't have to read that literally). They are remembered by the person they transformed. Because that person they transformed has a sacred calling to go out and do it again.

I may scandalize the priest-in-charge here by telling you that this place is not the place you find God. This is the place that you come to give thanks to God, but the place you find God had better be out there, on the other side of these walls, or you're unlikely to find God at all. The beautiful music, the splendid liturgy, the stirring poetry: all of that is valuable as a response to the God whom we can only meet in the face of others, and only when we meet them as the real human beings they are: broken, wounded, beaten upon.

The place you find God had better be out there, on the other side of these walls, or you're unlikely to find God at all.

And if we want to meet Christ in those people, we have a real challenge, because we need to tear down the ego that sets up a wall between us and them. And I'm delighted to tell you that this building has an architectural symbol of that. There are brass gates you can see right there, and if you look, you can tell that they're being held up by supports. If you look closely, you can see that the supports are a different brass. They were added later. So when those gates were built, they could swing open and closed; there's a clasp and a hinge. And at some point somebody stopped closing those gates and they remained open, and then somebody realized that the hinges were going to get weak if they didn't get supported. So these open gates now have supports which are bolted on. These gates physically can no longer be closed. Because between out there and that



Ron Fender's life is celebrated. (photo Ed Barel)

door, and this altar, there is nothing. There is nothing, but that font sitting back there. These gates I commend to you as a symbol of God's love's inability to be shut out. It is as if God himself could not shut God's love apart from us if he tried. Not even angels can separate us from the love of God. Not that fiery angel outside the garden of Eden, and not the demons that we carry within us.

The egoless life is one none of us will achieve. Ron did not have it. Ron had an ego. Ron could be caught up sometimes with his own self. But that isn't the point. He was on a journey. And it's a journey that we all need to recognize that we are part of. We have been claimed—not by Ron—we've been claimed by Christ, who wants us all to be poor in spirit, who comforts us when we mourn, who has special concern for the meek, the hungry, the thirsty, for the merciful, for those who are beaten upon by the world, those who are persecuted, and those who make peace their priority. That's our sacred calling. And I don't mean "our" as The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory's, I mean "our" as human beings. It comes before everything else. Because that's the flip side of what Paul says. If none of these things can't separate us from Christ, well, what else can't separate us from Christ? Barriers created by race, by class, by sexual orientation, by gender, by job, by socio-economic status, by which side of the tracks you live on, by whether you have a house to live in or not, by whether you're hungry or not. Those things can become barriers, and there is no barrier between human beings which is not a barrier that those human beings are trying to set up between themselves and Christ.

So I commend to you the singing of creation. I commend to you our brother Ron, whom I imagine is dancing pirouettes in heaven, singing that love song, probably rubbing someone's feet with a pumice stone. "You look weary," he says, "tell me what's on your mind."

Brother Ron, we will miss you.

Thomas Bushnell

Thanks to a mentor

LOVE AND JOY

It is the work of the Brotherhood to witness to the love of God in Christ Jesus, which has been freely bestowed upon us and upon all of creation. This witness grows and is nurtured by a life in conversation with God, and is nourished daily by active prayer and meditation while living fully in the secular world.

—from *The Rule of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory*

Brother Ron Fender BSG died of a heart attack on Friday 29 January, on the train home just after leaving the Brotherhood's Winter Convocation.

He always insisted that he was neither scholar nor academic, but he could wax eloquent on the plays of Samuel Beckett, the poems of Walt Whitman, or the books of his two favorites, Jack Kerouac and Annie Dillard. He spoke rhapsodically of both his North Carolina roots and of big cities like San Francisco and New York. Most considered him one of the most devout and holy men they knew, but he could tell the dirtiest joke you ever heard. He was a passionate liberal, but could find common ground with conservatives. He was equally comfortable singing the church's great hymns or the Appalachian folksongs of his childhood.

What connects these apparent contradictions may be Ron's belief that the sacred was often found in the secular—that everything was sacred.

Ron was dirt-poor most of his life—at first by birth, and later by choice. He held his vow of poverty more literally than most Gregorians, and found a deep vocation in identification with people living in the worst indigence.

He spent much of his adult life as a stage actor and director, ministering to the souls of theatergoers. The later part of his life was spent in ministry to those on the fringes of our society. Shortly after becoming a postulant in BSG, he came to Chattanooga's Community Kitchen with the request to be involved not just as a volunteer or employee, but as someone who would live among the impoverished clients, provide foot care for them, and never accept more than minimum wage payment. He went on to found the House of the Magdalene, where he lived with and cared for several men who had previously been homeless. Throughout his time in Chattanooga he attended those living on the street, and often provided for and attended to the burial of those who died. Local acquaintances called him "The Saint of Chattanooga."

Ron was my mentor in BSG—appointed to shepherd me through the three years of formation—and though I only knew him for the year-and-a-half that I've been in the community, he left a lifetime of lessons for me to continue learning.

Brother Ron loved everyone he met without judgment, without exception, without hesitation—and had no embarrassment about expressing it. Even in a community in which brothers are unabashed about expressing love, Brother Ron stood out. Every conversation we had began and ended with him saying, "I love you." And there was no doubt that he meant it with all his heart.

Or at least no doubt once I got over my initial shock: at first I was a bit wary of the love expressions of Brother Ron and the other Gregorians. We talked about how unnerving this brazen brotherly love can be in an early formation exchange, and Brother

Ron said to me: “We live in a culture where love has been degraded and polluted down to carnal levels. So often when someone tells us that they love us, I suspect that deep down in the very pit of our psyche, we think: ‘So, what is wrong with you?’ The Love of Christ is something we like to hope for, but all too often it is something we really do not truly accept. We sit in church on Sunday and hear the good news of love, but we do not believe a word of it. And that is the essence of chastity: we love one another in a pure and holy sense and bear witness to the perfect love God gives us in Christ.”

Another key element of formation in religious life is learning to be free of fear—especially of one’s own death: our lives are in God’s hands and ours is not to worry but to trust the Creator. Brother Ron had mastered this.

He often spoke of “that sweet day” when God would call him home; brothers have recalled that he seemed to say this more often than usual in that last week, and many later reported instances that seem clairvoyant in retrospect: he seemed to know his life was nearing its end. But he expressed no anxiety; only calm joy. “Joy always! Joy everywhere! Stay away from the little deaths. Let Joy kill you!” he would often say.

After Compline on Wednesday night, he remarked to Brother Larry Walter Reich and myself about the closing hymn, “Now The Day Is Over,” “Now Brothers, you remember that’s one of my funeral hymns, and I want you to sing it just as beautifully as you sang it tonight!”

Brother Ron lived free of fear: fear of death, fear of what other people thought about him, fear of loving. I’ve known many people—both in and out of the church—who have overcome one, two, or all three of these fears, but few who have done so to quite this extent. I hope to grow into the freedom that Brother Ron lived—to be able to share that love with all I know, in words and actions.

According to his wishes, Brother Ron’s ashes will be buried in a family plot, under a plaque with no name, just the motto of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory: *Soli Deo Gloria!* To God Alone the Glory!

Scott Michael Pomerenk



Ron and Scott Michael (photo Yarian)

INTERCESSIONS

For the Brotherhood

Episcopal Visitors Sun

Rodney R Michel
Horace WB Donegan d 11.11.91
Paul Moore, jr d 5.1.03
Walter D Dennis d 3.30.03

Professed

Richard Thomas Biernacki
John Nidecker d 6.20.88
 James Teets
 Luke Anthony Nowicki
John Peter Clark d 2.25.94

William Francis Jones Mon

Thomas Joseph Ross d 12.18.01
 Tobias Stanislas Haller
William Bunting d 10.12.88
 Edward Munro
Charles Kramer d 10.23.06
Bernard Fessenden d 8.10.93
 Donovan Aidan Bowley
Edward Riley d 9.15.05

Christopher Stephen Jenks Tue

Ciarán Anthony DellaFera
Damian-Curtis Kellum d 10.9.07
 Richard John Lorino
 Ronald Augustine Fox
 Maurice John Grove
 Virgilio Fortuna
 Gordon John Stanley

Karekin Madteos Yarian Wed

William David Everett
 Thomas Bushnell
Patrick Ignatius Dickson d 7.20.05
 Robert James McLaughlin
 Peter Budde
 John Henry Ernestine
 Francis Sebastian Medina
 Elred Bernard Dean

Joseph Basil Gauss Thu

Mark Andrew Jones
 Richard Matthias
 William Henry Benefield
 Nathanael Deward Rahm
 Thomas Lawrence Greer
 Enoch John Valentine
Ron Fender d 1.29.16
Michael Elliott d 2.8.12

David Luke Henton Fri

David John Battrick
 Bo Alexander Armstrong
 Francis Jonathan Bullock
 James Patrick Hall
 Richard Edward Helmer
 Eric Shelley
 Larry Walter Reich

Novices Sat

Max Steele
 Scott Michael Pomerenk

Postulants

Michael J Piper
 Angel M Roque
 David Hedges

For Religious Communities

Sacramentine & Visitandine Nuns
 Society of the Atonement
 Order of Friars Minor
 Community of the Paraclete
 Companions of Saint Luke~Benedictine
 Community of Celebration
 Little Sisters of Saint Clare
 Anamchara Fellowship
 Anglican Order of Preachers
 Rivendell Community
 Sisters of Saint Gregory
 Third Order SSF
 Worker Sisters & Brothers of the Holy Spirit

Camaldolese Benedictines
 Society of Saint John the Evangelist
 Anglican Oblates of Saint Benedict

Community of the Gospel
 Community of the Transfiguration
 Oratory of the Good Shepherd
 Community of Solitude
 Companions of Dorothy the Worker

Oratory of Saint Mary and Saint John
 Order of Julian of Norwich
 Order of the Holy Cross
 Order of Saint Helena
 Community of Saint John Baptist
 Society of Saint Francis

For Ministries

Joseph Richey House
 Fessenden Recovery Ministries
 Baltimore Int'l Seafarers' Center
 Saint Paul's Grayson St, San Antonio
 Aldersgate UMC Dobbs Ferry
 Saint Christopher's, Kileen TX
 Saint James, Austin
 White Plains Hospital
 Saint James Church Fordham
 The Community Kitchen

For the Departed

Benefactors, Friends & Associates: Charlotte Morgan, Arsene & Louise Lemarier, Norman Hall, George Koerner, Henry Fukui, J Steward Slocum, James Gundrum, Cecil Berges, Marion Pierce, Helen Marie Joyce, Kenneth Staples, Elizabeth Holton, Richard A Belanger, Brendan W Nugent, Sarah Elizabeth Wells SSG, Sue Bradley, Jack Merryman; Paul Power, William Russell, Mark Domoguen; Elizabeth Mary Burke SSG

Ibrahim baba
 McRae Benefield
 Elaine Dvirnak
 Virgilio Elizondo
 Emily Faris
 Frank
 Graham French
 Paul Golio
 Harry B Jones
 Marianne
 Becky Pritchard
 Ed Reeves
 Lou Romeo
 Gordon Spencer
 Daniel Sullins
 Susan
 Chris Zylo
 Miller Cragon Jr
 James Alexander
 Donald Casey

Al Walters

Thanksgiving

For the birth of Annabel
 Charlotte Joan Battrick
 For the ordination of Elred
 Bernard Dean to the diaconate

Where there's a will

You can assist and further the ministries of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory by remembering the community in your will. If you choose to do so, the following form of wording is appropriate:

I hereby give, devise, and bequeath to The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, Inc., a New York State not-for-profit corporation and its successors for ever \$ _____ and / or _____ percent of my estate to be used in such a manner as determined by its Directors.