



Our Lady of Perpetual Help Retreat and Spirituality Center

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Newsletter

September 2023

Beginning Again

The date was September 27, 2022. Hurricane Ian was on its way, and even though it was originally predicted to pass to the north of us, our group bookings had been cancelled. We did have two individual retreatants on site—a 28-year-old woman from Texas, and a 37-year-old man from Louisiana. I had decided that I would stay at the retreat center overnight to see to their safety. Our closest neighbors, whose home lies on slightly higher ground, had invited us to come to their home if it became necessary.

At 3 p.m., I had my usual daily meeting with the retreatant from Louisiana to discuss his prayer. In God's providence, he was a survivor of Hurricane Katrina, and he had been following the latest updates on Ian. "Father," he said, "I think I'm going to evacuate. I just talked with a friend in Ave Maria and I can stay there tonight."

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Now reluctant to stay on site with only one retreatant, I walked with him to the chapel where the other retreatant was at prayer. After the three of us conversed in front of the Blessed Sacrament, we decided to evacuate together. We left OLPH at 5 p.m., and arrived at Ave Maria, Florida just as the rains were getting heavy.

Although water did not breach the doors and windows of the retreat center until the cresting of the Myakka River three days later, our evacuation prevented what would have been a terrifying experience as the waters began to rise. The significance of the name of the town to which we evacuated was not lost on me: Ave Maria means "Hail Mary," and Our Lady of Perpetual Help was taking care of us.

The rest is history. Ian made landfall as a category 5 hurricane, all seven of our buildings suffered tremendous damage, and over 90% of the contents of those buildings were lost to flooding. There would be no more on-site retreatants for the next nine months. ([Click here](#) to review an early account of the devastation.)

Last month, from July 25-28, we welcomed our first three individual lay retreatants since the hurricane for a three-night retreat. Sometime earlier, we had realized that although we would not be ready for groups at that time, our two smaller villas could be made ready with the help of our dedicated staff and volunteers.

Before the first retreatant entered my office to meet with me on that July 25th afternoon, I read her brief retreat application and noticed her place of residence: Ave Maria, Florida. There was a clear interior message for me: OLPH was picking up right where it had left off nine months earlier.

I was moved as I felt the complete newness and yet strange familiarity of that meeting. Everything was new: The chair she was sitting in, the table beside her, the floor of the office, the desk and chair that I was listening from. Even the wall behind her chair was new drywall, freshly painted. And yet, I listened to her story as I had listened to so many others before Ian, I recognized that God was acting in her life, and I tried to help her to respond. As always, our Divine Master acted gently and powerfully.

We are on track to welcome our first large group of retreatants next week. Much remains to be done, but the worst is over, and the quiet work of changing lives through the Gospel, the sacraments, and the wisdom of St. Ignatius of Loyola has resumed.

We are back. And by God's grace, better than ever.

Rev. Mark S. Yavarone, OMV

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Welcome Fr. Gregory Cleveland, OMV

On September 24th, we will welcome Fr. Gregory Cleveland, OMV to join us at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Retreat Center, replacing Fr. Shawn Monahan, OMV. Fr. Greg is a native of Chicago and graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in business administration. After working as a marketing manager for a Midwestern railroad company, he followed God's call to priesthood in 1987, joining the Oblates of the Virgin Mary and attending Our Lady of Grace Seminary and St. John's School of Theology in Boston.



After completing an M.Div. in Theology and an M.A. in Spiritual Theology, he was ordained a priest in 1995. His first assignment was to St. Andrew's parish in Avenel, New Jersey, where he worked especially with the poor, disabled and imprisoned. He obtained certification in spiritual direction from the Center for Spiritual Development in New York City, and returned to Boston to work seven years in seminary formation as rector and novice master.

Prior to joining us at OLPH, Fr. Greg served as executive director of the Lanteri Center for Ignatian Spirituality in Denver, Colorado, where he offered spiritual direction and retreats while teaching training programs in these ministries. He is also the author of *Awakening Love: An Ignatian Retreat with the Song of Songs* and *Behold Beauty: Mary and the Song of Songs*.

Sponsor a Chapel Chair



As a result of the flooding caused by Hurricane Ian, OLPH had to dispose of all the chairs in St. Joseph Chapel, Dining Room, and Conference Center. As you would suspect, insurance only covered a portion of our loss. To defray the cost of the chapel chairs, we have established a ***Sponsor a Chapel Chair*** initiative. Monies we receive for the Chapel Chairs will allow us to re-use the partial insurance monies to help pay for the dining room and conference center chairs.

Our new chairs will be very similar to our previous chairs; however, the upholstery will be burgundy befitting of St. Joseph. Although not the exact chair, the adjacent picture will give you an idea of our new chapel chair. Each chair costs \$233.00. This donation is 100% tax deductible. To date we have 40 out of 125 chapel chairs sponsored! If you are interested in sponsoring a chair, we will install a plaque at the back of the chair with your chosen inscription. Thank you so very much for responding to our need.

[Click Here to Sponsor a Chapel Chair](#)

One-Day Retreat

Lessons from Hurricane Ian: God Speaks out of the Whirlwind (Job 38:1)

Saturday, October 14

Fr. Mark Yavarone, OMV

Natural disasters have always elicited a variety of responses from God's people, ranging from "God sent the disaster to punish us" to "God is simply absent." With time, it is possible to come to a different conclusion: God allows disasters as He works out our salvation in a fallen world. One year removed from Hurricane Ian, Fr. Mark will speak on the experience of the retreat center and the people of Florida, and attempt to arrive at some wisdom that can help us whenever tragedy strikes. This retreat begins at 8:15 with registration and breakfast. The remainder of the day includes two conferences, break-out sessions, lunch, and Vigil Mass for Sunday. The day concludes at 4:30. The cost is \$50.00. [Click here to register](#)

Volunteers Needed



On September 5th, we will re-open all of the villas, making it possible for us to fully host groups and private retreats. We are booked nearly every weekend until Christmas, as well as have numerous groups scheduled during the weekdays. We are very thankful that individuals and groups remember OLPH and are interested in coming! Along with that comes a need for volunteers, as we will not be increasing our staff although we will be increasing our retreat counts. Perhaps there is a friend, family member, retiree, spouse, grandchild, etc. that would be interested in volunteering. If so, please have them contact Simona Handley at handley@olph-retreat.org or 941-486-0233 or [click here](#) to complete the online form.

Receptionist / Office Assistant

We have the following timeslots available or you can serve as a backup when our scheduled volunteers are on vacation or unavailable. [Click here for more information.](#)

- ♦ **Tuesday or Wednesday:** 8:30 to 11:30 OR 11:30 to 2:30
- ♦ **Friday:** 10:00 to 1:00
- ♦ **Saturday:** 8:00 to 11:00

Dining Room / Kitchen

Our needs in the Dining Room and Kitchen vary depending on scheduled retreats and group size. Therefore, there are no set schedule from month-to-month. If you are interested in assisting, you will be sent an email each month that identifies our needs and you would just register via **SignUp Genius** based on your availability.

Adopt a Garden Bed

Do you enjoy gardening? Perhaps you would like to Adopt a Garden Bed at OLPH. OLPH is in the process of installing new weed mat, plants, and ground cover in several beds. We are looking for individuals to adopt a bed and maintain it. This would include a monthly visit to de-weed the bed, trim bushes, and identify plants that OLPH needs to consider. The beds in front of Villa I, II, Office, Conference Center and some statues are available for adopting. [Click here to send an email](#) to inquire on a garden bed or to schedule a time to review with an OLPH staff person.

Can You See Me?

This retreat, last offered in Spring 2022, is back this Fall! Scheduled for October 27-29, 2023, this retreat provides the opportunity to encounter the Love of our Lord in his sacrifice, meditate on the love of the Father and Son, and increase a personal relationship with the Eucharist. The retreat begins with check-in on Friday between 2:00-4:00 pm and dinner at 5:00 pm. The weekend's schedule includes conferences, opportunities for meditation, and Mass. The per person cost for the 2-night retreat is \$350 for a private room, \$250 for a shared, double occupancy room, and \$150 for commuters. [Click here to register for this retreat.](#)





Monthly Day of Prayer

The Monthly Day of Prayer is an opportunity to take time to focus on God and devote time to prayer and reconciliation. This day retreat is led by an OLPH priest and includes two conferences, continental breakfast, lunch, opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Adoration, and Mass. The day begins at 9:30am and concludes at 3:15pm. Please see below for the schedule. Advanced registration is required. The cost is \$40.00.

The bishops of the United States called for a national Eucharistic revival that began in June 2022 and will continue until June 2025. Fr. Mark Yavarone, OMV and Fr. Gregory Cleveland, OMV will focus on the Eucharist at the Monthly Day of Prayer (MDOP) sessions from September through December 2023.

[Click Here to Register](#)

September 2023: Knowing and Loving Jesus in the Eucharist (Fr. Mark Yavarone, OMV)

At the September MDOP, Fr. Mark will bring us back to the basics using images and stories that will help us to know and understand the Eucharist better—as far as this is possible for us humans! For the time of private prayer, he will offer some prayer helps toward a greater love of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

October 2023: The Eucharist: Ten Years of Wisdom from Pope Francis (Fr. Mark Yavarone, OMV)

Pope Francis has spoken extensively about the Eucharist since becoming Pope in 2013. He often speaks about how the Eucharist nourishes us and thereby enables us to nourish the lives of our brothers and sisters. At this Monthly Day of Prayer, Fr. Mark will focus on the talks that Pope Francis has given each year on the feast of Corpus Christi.

November 2023: The Medicine of Immortality. The Eucharist and Healing (Fr. Gregory Cleveland, OMV)

The Lord has freed us from the slavery of sin and made us his adopted sons and daughters. And yet we forget our new birthright and inheritance and fall into sin, idolizing the things of this world, falling into addictions, and losing a sense of our own dignity as children of God. Fr. Greg will speak about how the Lord heals us through the Eucharist on all levels: physical, mental, and spiritual.

December 2023: How to Pray the Mass (Fr. Mark Yavarone, OMV)

Venerable Bruno Lanteri, the founder of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary who staff Our Lady of Perpetual Help Retreat Center, offered a profound method of praying the various parts of the Mass from the heart. Using *A Biblical Way of Praying the Mass* by Fr. Timothy Gallagher, OMV, Fr. Mark will explore this way of entering into the Mass during this Day of Prayer. (Fr. Shawn Monahan used the same book for a presentation last year; Fr. Mark will give his own perspective supplemented with video content.)

Interested in a 1-Night Retreat?



On occasion, we all need time away from the busy and hectic pace of life, even if it is only for a day. Jesus himself spent time in the desert in prayer with his Father. A 1-Night (Desert Day) retreat is a quiet day of reflection for pilgrims looking to spend time with the Lord and reflect upon their life and their relationship with God. These retreats include exploration of the matters of the heart, a meeting with a priest, and availability of Mass and Confession. All meals are included. [Click here for more information.](#)