

**“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”(II Cor 12:9)**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Lord’s peace to all of you.

In December of 2007, my Bishop, His Excellency William E. Lori of the Diocese of Bridgeport, released me from parish work, at the request of Fr. John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S., to work for the main office of Courage on a fulltime basis. In January of this year, Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan confirmed my appointment as the successor to Fr. Harvey in the role of the Executive Director of Courage, International. I am humbled by the trust Archbishop Dolan, Bishop Lori, and Fr. Harvey have placed in me, and I am grateful to you, dear members of Courage and EnCourage and friends and supporters of these noble apostolates, for your prayers, counsel, and patience during this time of transition.

I have served as a diocesan Courage chaplain since 2003, and this work has been a wonderful source of grace for my priesthood. The men in our Courage group here in Connecticut have taught me a great deal about the nature of same-sex attraction. But more importantly, I have observed in them and other members of Courage, in families connected to EnCourage, and in so many involved in the work of the apostolate, abundant evidence of the grace about which my patron saint writes in Second Corinthians: “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (12:10) This is the Christian spirit at its truest and best, because it is the spirit and heart of Christ on the Cross...and it is very much the spirit of the men and women of Courage and the families of EnCourage...a spirit of trust and filial piety.

Another tremendous source of grace for my priesthood has been Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity. “Joy is the net that catches souls,” she often told us. I have witnessed much joy in those who are part of Courage, their struggles with same-sex attraction notwithstanding, as well as in our beloved founding director, Fr. Harvey.

In time, I would like to offer my ideas about the future of Courage based on the strong foundation built by Fr. Harvey through his exemplary fidelity and generosity for so many years. I think often about our spiritual father, the Servant of God Terence Cardinal Cooke, and the founding grace that I believe he received from the Holy Spirit to begin Courage as I consider the next chapter in the life and work of the apostolate. For now, however, I shall limit this letter to some important information, an earnest request, and a strong suggestion.

Bishop Lori has assigned me to Courage as my principal work for the Church. One of my favorite figures in the Gospel is the centurion (not least because I am a former Marine...) from Chapter 7 of St. Luke. He describes himself as “a man set under authority” (v8), a description very much befitting the priest. So, God’s will for the priest comes through his superior. The priest can always be secure in the conviction that, as he does the work the Church asks of him, he is striving to do exactly what Christ the High Priest requires. In my case, in obedience to my Bishop, I must continue to carry out certain responsibilities here in my diocese, while serving as the Executive Director of Courage. To facilitate this, Bishop Lori and Archbishop Dolan have agreed to relocate the main office of Courage from Manhattan to Norwalk, CT. This move will take place after the national conference.

Now, for my earnest request. Courage receives some limited financial support directly from the Church. When I undertake the frequent travel that is part of the apostolic work of Courage, my expenses are generally covered by the host diocese or organization. But the operation of the main office, to include the salaries of our staff, office rental, etc. rests almost entirely upon our own efforts at fundraising. In years past, we have depended heavily on the response to our periodic newsletter (which as you know has not been published for sometime) in this way. In the future, we will do more to develop our fundraising methods, in order to expand the work of Courage.

For the moment, I am asking everyone who reads this letter to write a check for \$100 as a special gift to Courage. We are in very serious need of the financial wherewithal to move and set up the new office. Some of you may be able to do more, perhaps even considerably more, to support the work of Courage...please don't hesitate! Courage will be a good steward of your generosity. But for those to whom \$100 is too much, please give whatever God's providence will allow.

Finally, my strong suggestion: come to the Courage conference this summer. As you will see in the brochure, we are blessed with a very fine lineup of speakers and seminars. Our time in prayer and fellowship in Christ are invaluable for deepening in all of us the spiritual wisdom and witness St. Paul describes so poignantly. On a more personal note, I am looking forward to meeting you or seeing you again, the souls entrusted to my care during my tenure as Executive Director.

To my brother priests who are serving as Courage chaplains: I assure you of my daily prayers and gratitude for your service to the apostolate. I hope to greet many of you in Chicago and to hear your suggestions about our future work together.

*Gratefully in Christ,*

Fr. Paul N. Check