



Pulse of '62



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“Faith Journeys from Kalaepohaku” by Brian Clarke & Rupert Hunt

This year marks the canonization of Father Damien De Veuster—the Leper Priest of Molokai.



Did you know that Saint Damien finished his studies for the priesthood at the original Ahui-manu campus of Saint Louis School in Kaneohe, Oahu?

In honor of our distant classmate, Brian Clarke and I have taken our class’s spiritual pulse in the year 2009. The stories that follow encapsulate our faith journeys since high school.

We may not be as saintly as Damien, but we hope our stories are at least as relevant, reassuring, and inspiring.

My father believed strongly in Sunday Mass and a Catholic education. When I was in the 4th grade, he would watch from his parked car to make sure I made it to Catechism class.

Later, he sent me to Saint Louis where the Sodality inspired me to live my faith more fully. After graduation



I was so enthralled with a call to the religious life that I entered the Marianist Novitiate, only to opt out after a short stay.

I know now that I wasn’t cut out to be a priest. But I felt I owed God something for the invitation, so I promised Him that I would attend daily Mass when I returned to



Honolulu. What actually happened was much different.

Fresh from the Novitiate, I enrolled at the University of Hawaii. One of my courses—on comparative religion—caused me to doubt the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This skepticism of basic Catholic tenets soon grew into total neglect of my religious obligations.

Only the pressure to set a good example for my children prompted a return to Sunday Mass years later. I used to come in late and stand in the back of Saint Patrick’s in Kaimuki. One Sunday a priest noticed me and—undaunted by my evident lack of enthusiasm—he asked me to read the Epistle.

Suddenly I had found another calling. For doing the readings led to other lay ministries, which eventually bonded me with the Church community. When I retired

three years ago, I finally fulfilled my earlier promise to begin attending daily Mass.

Yet my journey has been anything but direct. Even now, my Act of Contrition stalls whenever I say the part about being sorry for my sins. Deep down my fear of being punished is greater than my concern for offending God.

Maybe I’m still just looking for a sure way to Heaven. A spiritual life in progress? Aren’t we all?

In 1986, John Karasaki fell 30 feet from a Hawaiian electric pole, breaking his neck, back, and hip.

“It happened fast,” he says. “All of a sudden I was looking up at the sky with a piece of neck bone lodged in my spinal canal.” Knowing he was badly hurt, John drove home, walked into the house, and collapsed.



There was a lot of pain and his doctor was not optimistic about his chances of recovery. Yet John felt everything would be alright. Indeed, he started walking with crutches the day after he was fitted with a body cast.



Two weeks later he walked without assistance. As he rehabilitated during the next year, John gathered lava chunks for a friend whose work was building walls. “It was a form of therapy,” he says. “I often talked to God out there on the lava near the Kona Airport. I felt so blessed. All I could say was ‘Thank you!’”

Life has been different since the accident. “I guess you could say the accident led to a spiritual awakening. I’ve become more sensitive to people,” John says. “I keep busy doing things for my friends.”

An older man who lives across the island in Hilo often asks for John’s assistance. “I’ve done electrical, carpentry, even landscaping work for him,” John says.

Helping others even extends to non-humans. John recently converted a small backyard pond into a swimming pool-sized Koi sanctuary, complete with filters, lighting, and waterfalls.

“Helping others feels right,” John confides.

As a boy, Martin Charlot was so impressed with the gospel message that he knew he would have to take the words of Jesus seriously at some point in his life.

In the early 1970s he was living on the Big Island with his wife and four children. One day he returned home from work to discover his wife had left him and taken the kids, too. Martin was devastated. Broken and miserable, he realized the time had come to let Jesus into his life.

A friend gave him some Christian tracks to read, one of which implored him to give his life to the Lord. He had heard the message before but it had never registered. Martin prayed and had a born-again experience. “Suddenly I knew that God loved me and there could never be anything more important than that.”



A professional artist, Martin began painting images whose themes reflected his religious feelings, among them a Hawaiian being born of lava. Martin realized that he had wrongly built his religion around his wife, instead of God. Soon good things started happening. Most importantly, his children whom he loved, were returned to him to raise as a single parent.

A few years ago, Martin lost an eye and his ability to walk to spinal meningitis. Yet he never lost faith. “I had felt God in my life so personally years ago,” he said, “that it never occurred to me to doubt the love of Christ.”

Bill Carreira knows a challenge when he sees one. He’s worked in different capacities for a dozen local companies, but he usually remains only long enough to complete a project before moving on to new challenges.

Yet for twenty-five years, one of Bill’s constant challenges has been his work as a lay Eucharistic Minister. Every Sunday he visits hospitalized patients—including the terminally ill—whose needs he serves along with those of their families.

Involved with service to the church since he was a young man, Bill was often frustrated by church bureaucracy. As a Eucharistic Minister he saw a way to serve people directly. “This is one-on-one work,” he says. “The challenge is to respond honestly to whomever I encounter.



“I’m there primarily to handle the patient’s spiritual needs. The challenge is in guiding them towards a peaceful state, especially when terminal. My training and experience enables me to care for them and their family on their cultural terms. It’s important to me to send someone peacefully into eternity or give them the courage to continue living.”



About retirement Bill says, “No way! I see patients lose their self worth because they have no purpose in life. Without meaningful involvement, they close up and pass on rapidly.

“Others find the will to live to the max. Even knowing they have little time and lots of pain, they can still laugh or be concerned about the welfare of others. They have great trust in the Good Lord. They’re my inspiration.”

It was my good fortune to be born Catholic. The Church educated, sustained, and protected me into adulthood. Yet in my mid-thirties, I could no longer abide by

its parochialism.

Looking around for a vibrant religious community, I discovered the Honolulu Friends Meeting. Quakers practiced a simple form of Christianity with no dogma, no clergy, and—in place of ceremony—only silent worship of God within. For twelve years I was a Meeting stalwart.

In the late 1980s, however, new life experiences rendered the Meeting passé for me. Friends weren’t the same community I had joined in 1977, and I wasn’t the same man. I left the Meeting with no regrets.

At that point circumstances forced me to deal with several spiritual issues. First, although I already knew it was easier to live in righteousness than to suffer a guilty conscience, imperfection is inevitable. In short, I had to learn to forgive myself by making good on my faulty behavior and resolving again to follow my conscience.



In addition, without a church to focus and sustain my spiritual practices, I soon felt a spiritual gap in my life. Constantly anxious, I needed to take personal responsibility for my spiritual well-being. And, since I wasn’t willing to be in a church, I set about creating my own spiritual practices, including regular prayer and meditation.

These days, constant seeking has led me to a Buddhist view of life. Buddhism builds on Quaker meditative practice while also challenging me to be mindful of everything I’ve learned about religion and morality since first-communion catechism.

Am I still Catholic? Quaker? Though I’ve learned from both, I’m neither. Outwardly, I’m at peace with a simple life, serving a self-chosen community of good people. Inwardly, I’m aware of being profoundly alone, yet fundamentally with others.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Brian Clarke trains recreational distance runners and triathletes. He has lived on Maunalani Heights for thirty years.

Rupert Hunt and his wife Collette have been married 44 years. They are Brian's neighbors on Maunalani Heights.

Invitation to Respond:

It is the objective of “Pulse of ‘62” to present a broad cross section of contemporary subjects and views that will stimulate interest and promote positive response from our classmates. You are invited to respond by e-mail (garydemello@yahoo.com) or postal service (SLS Class of ‘62, 4207 Carnation Place, Honolulu, HI 96816-3905).

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