

## SETTLING IN AT HOLY GHOST

I arrived in Opelousas at the beginning of August and began settling in at Holy Ghost Rectory within the Holy Ghost Faith Community. I was welcomed by your Pastor, Fr. Lambert, the Parochial Vicar, Fr. Rofinus, your Deacon, Deacon Charles Richard, our Cook, Brenda Cook and a number of parishioners I met upon my immediate arrival. I am grateful to all of you for such a warm and wonderful welcome that made me feel at home immediately, thank you.

I was born in the summer of 42, to Collins Henry James, Sr. and Eva Anthony James, in a little room designated as a hospital for "the colored" in New Iberia, La. I grew up in St. Martinville, La., and I am the oldest of three children; I have one sister, Sister Geneva, SSF and a brother, Mr. Collins James, Jr., a contractor. I attended Notre Dame elementary Catholic School run by the Blessed Sacrament Sisters who were founded by Katharine Drexel. My first pastor was one of the First Four Black Priests ordained in the United States, Fr. Maurice Rousseve, whom I vaguely remember. Succeeding him as pastor was one of his classmates, Fr. Anthony Bourges. During the summer months I had the opportunity to work for him. After completing grammar school, I enrolled in the seminary in Bay St. Louis, Miss. After completing High School, I attended our Divine Word College in Miramar, a small town near Plymouth, Mass about twenty miles outside of Boston. Today I can say I stood on Plymouth Rock where the Pilgrims landed. From there I entered our novitiate in Conesus, New York, right outside of Rochester, New York, (the home of Kodax Film). There, I spent three years; two years of novitiate, (spiritual discernment) and two years of philology, the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of novitiate dovetailed with the 1<sup>st</sup> year of philosophy, at one point, they were joined together.

After completing my studies in Conesus, New York, I was asked to teach at our minor Seminary in Bay St. Louis, Miss. for one year. One of my classmates, Daniel Kilkeary also joined me and we had a great time teaching that year. Upon completing our year of teaching, I volunteered to work at a boys' summer camp at our minor seminary in Riverside, California. The Camp was indeed a great learning experience. It was then and there that I began to realize there was a parallel between my teaching experiences and my summer camp experiences, they had important and common learning insights that would benefit me and I would eventually use and need in every day ministry.

From the summer camp, I went to Techny, Illinois, a few miles outside of Chicago to begin my Theological studies, and also do graduate work in Philosophy at Loyola University in Chicago. This was also an exciting. Then after two years, our seminary at Techny moved to Chicago. We were housed at the Wyndemere Hotel and attended our Theological Studies at Catholic Theological Union, (CTU). I lived at the Wyndemere Hotel on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor for 2 years, so I had the opportunity to continue my graduate Philosophical studies at Loyola and complete my Theology at Catholic Theological Union, (CTU); and attend other universities in the area, such at Chicago University, DePaul, Loyola, Mundelein, and Lutheran School of Theology. I also had a rare opportunity to be in Chicago for the 1968 Democratic Convention and witnessed brutal mistreatment of human beings! A group of seminarians, a few my classmates also had the opportunity to work at a phone bank set up set up by the former CBS

Broadcaster, Mr. Ike Pappas, to control the outlandish rumors that people called and asked us about. In their questions the vitriolic hatred came out, still today I am grateful to Mr. Ike Pappas, for his calming effect because it was at that convention, Mayor of Chicago, Richard Daley said shoot to kill! Wow! This was a great learning experience about politics.

Following all the moving and studying, my class was ordained to the Diaconate in 1969. As a Deacon, I was assigned to work at St. Anselm on 61<sup>st</sup> and Michigan, close to the Chicago White Sox ballpark and that was a tremendous experience. I had the opportunity to see Dr. King come to Cottage Grove and Stony Island! He had an apartment in the area. Times were exciting. Then Al Dixon and I returned to the Bay to be ordained by Bishop Boudreaux on December 18, 1969. My class was ordained by Cardinal Cody, former Archbishop of New Orleans, who requested Bishop Harold Perry to be his Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans. After ordination Fr. Dixon and I returned with other members of our class to enroll in a 6 months Hospital Chaplaincy Program (CPE Hospital Ministry), at Lutheran General Hospital in Northfield a few miles from Techny. This was every day for 8 hours. During this time, I received my first appointment to the Western Province. Bishop Francis asked our General Council in Rome to change my appointment so I could and would be assigned to teach at Verbum Dei High School in South Central La., (Known to Many as Watts; the place of the Watts Riots)! Teaching kids from the inner city was challenging, frustrating, awesome, frightening but exciting. They call often and I say to them I am peaceful, old and enjoying my fishing. I witness a different community from the one I grew up in, raised in, and how the gangs impact the community .Here are some the gangs I am familiar with in my 25 years, namely; the Crips. The Rolling 60s, the Grape Street Gangs, the Denver Lanes, the Brims, these are only a few of the black gangs; our Mexican Brothers have similar gangs also. I had an LA Times article where most of the gangs were identified, as I unpack I may run across it. I was also blessed to be the Dodgers' Chaplin, during the time; Tommy Lasorda was the manager and Manny Mota was one of his coaches; Dr. Buss was also a great asset and a great friend in helping us with Scholarships for our students. I loved Los Angeles but I needed to see my nieces and nephews grow up, now for me that is a wonderful and a wonderful family experience, a part that was missing, now fulfilling!

After 25 years I returned to the Southern Province, spending 11 years at St. Edwards in New Iberia, 14 years at Immaculate Heart of Mary in Lafayette, three years at St. Joseph in Broussard and now at Holy Ghost and I am grateful to be here, continuing to learn about ministry and people. I thank all of you and I do see how you love your parish. For that I am very grateful!

- a) At the present time, I have been asked to write a short History of the Southern Province and assemble information about our Province in the Dioceses that we ministered in and these are the states we have provided priests and brothers in our work; Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Texas, Arkansas and California before it became part of the Western Province. As I navigate and assemble some pertinent information, I hope to share with our young clergy so that they can have materials for continuing education! The following may be critical for them:
  - i. Developing a Mentoring Program to assist our Junior Clergy
  - ii. Enroll them in a program that helps with accent reduction
  - iii. Trace some of the challenges that face America and Ministry

- iv. Explain and explore the Civil Rights Movement: we have parishioners in our Faith Community who would be tremendous assets in this area!
  - v. The meaning and importance of the Montgomery Boycott!
  - vi. Dismantling Racism in America, one of our greatest challenges!
- b) At the present time, I am also a Board Member of Hospice of Acadiana
- i. The Hospice Program: We can get a speaker to explain the programs that could be vital to our community.
  - ii. The Palliative Program: Exactly what it does
  - iii. Along with the Director of Community Outreach we have a Program called MACRA, (Military Assistance Community Resource Alliance)!At the present time this program has young people writing letters to our Veterans; getting our young to be grateful and write letters of gratitude, we have to teach them now others sacrificed for all of us, if not now hardly ever!
  - iv. Adopt-a- Family: I have friends who share some finances with me, and then we help families in need.
- c) In closing God has blessed me tremendously and in my old age, I am most grateful, now He is giving me some strength to give back a little where I can, HE HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR ME IN 50 YEARS IN MINISTRY WITH GREAT PEOPLE AND RESOURCES BUT MOST OF ALL HE BLESSED ME WITH GREAT PARENTS, A SISTER AND BROTHER, AND FOR THAT I AM MOST GRATEFUL.
- d) My final gratitude is to the faith community of HOLY GHOST CATHOLIC CHURCH, THANK YOU AND BE BLESS!