

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION OF CATHOLIC DIGEST (CATHOLICDIGEST.COM; 800-321-0411)



Father Bill (left) with
Pope John Paul II
at the Vatican in
November 1991

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE H

PART 2 OF 2

How *Guest House* saved my life

Guest House

BY **FATHER BILL***

As told to Julie L. Rattey

In part 1 of this story, Father Bill's bishop confronted him about his addiction to alcohol and told him he was sending him to Guest House, a treatment center for clergy and Religious. The day after his arrival, he found himself in the hospital, fevered and shaky.

Guest House had put me in the hospital to make sure I was detoxing properly. I also had to be treated for pneumonia and bronchitis. But once I had made up my mind that I was an alcoholic, the following day I actually had no desire to take a drink. That was a great grace; not everyone is that lucky.

There are no shortcuts to treatment for alcoholism. You just have to work with nature and pray for some kind of recovery. I was in treatment from June until September, during which time I received a lot of encouragement, especially from the sober priest

from Chicago who was appointed my “guardian angel” for eight weeks and visited me during my time in the hospital. The more I surrendered to the process, the more peace came into my body and mind. Everyone at Guest House was so respectful and loving and kind that I began to relax and understand how sick I was.

Every priest, Brother, or nun who goes through Guest House programs — including me — becomes an expert on alcoholism and addiction. At the same time that I was learning, I was attending AA meetings where I would learn strength and hope from other people’s experiences. I’d learn how to

deal with it a day at a time by not taking that first drink, by going to my meetings, by getting a sponsor, by doing what I was told.

I learned to follow that routine on a daily basis. I would eat properly, go to AA meetings, see my doctor, keep my appoint-

■ ■ ■
The following day I actually had no desire to take a drink.

*last name withheld for privacy

ments, interact with the other priests in treatment, and learn to get to my true feelings. I still had a certain amount of shame and remorse. Guest House has helped me to deal with that through group sessions. I'd often been told that alcoholics were bad people, but at Guest House, I learned that I wasn't a bad person; I was a sick person trying to get well. A big turning point came when I received the Anointing of the Sick through a Guest House program. I felt that God was working with me, not against me; that God wasn't going to judge me. I just had to focus on getting well and staying well one day at a time by living the principles of the program. Over time, I began to live a healthy emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual life.

That takes time, though, and I ended up needing more treatment than I'd thought. I went back to my diocese in early September, but they put me in the chancery, which was a mistake. I'm not a chancery person. I went into a depression again, so I returned to Guest House in late February and

stayed until June of 1976. After that, my diocese sent me to a wonderful parish with a pastor who understood alcoholism and was very supportive and understanding. I was able to get my head on straight, develop a routine in my priestly life, and then take my recovery one day at a time.

My last drink was on June 12, 1975. I'm now in my 35th year of sobriety.

Over the years since my time at Guest House I've been giving back through my involvement with the National Catholic Council on Alcoholism and Related Drug Problems (Guest House has a policy that each person who finishes its program receives a

■ ■ ■
**I'm now in
my 35th year
of sobriety.**

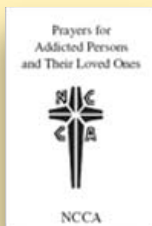
membership). I went to my first NCCA conference in 1977, and it just blew me away. They were talking about developing policies to intervene for alcoholic priests. When I came back to my diocese, my bishop said, "Bill, do what you can to establish a health care policy to help other priests who are sick." After eight years of evaluation and study, we established a

health committee. I was really determined to help.

My involvement with NCCA has been one of the great joys of my life. In 1985, I was working at a sabbatical program in Rome and was asked by Cardinal

Fiorenzo Angelini to give a talk at the first conference of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers, established that same year by Pope John Paul II. Mother Teresa was sitting right in front of me, which made me more nervous. But when I finished my testimonial she thanked me for my talk; I was thrilled to death. Cardinal Angelini invited me to tell my story again at the Vatican in 1991 and I was introduced to Pope John Paul II. In that same year I became certified for substance abuse counseling and have maintained my certification ever since.

We take it for granted in this day and age that an alcoholic can live a sober life, but for years, many



Prayer for an addicted loved one ▶

To request a free copy of the prayer booklet *Prayers for Addicted Persons and Their Loved Ones*, or for more information about the National Catholic Council on Alcoholism

and Related Drug Problems, call 800-626-6910 ext. 1200 or visit nccatoday.org

people didn't think that was possible. That's what AA has done for our country. I've lived without a drink for 34 years. That's a long time for an alcoholic to go without a drink. That's a miracle. And it's not just me: Through Guest House, through the NCCA, we've restored so many priests to service. It's a very great privilege to be part of that.

Today, I'm a retired priest. I was diagnosed with Parkinson's about six years ago, and it has been much less stressful to simply deal with the spiritual aspect of being a pastor (Mass, Confession, etc.), than to deal with the administrative responsibilities of the role. I also give a lot of serenity retreats to recovering alcoholics. I'm 73 and Parkinson's is progressing my age, so it's getting a little harder for

me to get around. But I'm a joyful person despite my struggles. I get by with a little help from my friends, as the Beatles say. It helps to live closer to my family, who are thrilled about my sobriety, and my doctor.

My faith helps keep me going. Along with a sense of humor. A lot of people don't understand how alcoholics can laugh about their sickness. They think, *How can they laugh about getting drunk? This is serious.* But at AA, we all know that. The point is that the alcoholic has survived. When I went to Guest House, I was in an advanced stage of alcoholism, a sickness that had progressed over a period of 10 years. Alcoholism was taking my life, but with the help of Guest House, I took it back. **GD**

Julie Rattey [jrattey@catholicdigest.com] is managing editor of *Catholic Digest*.

THE STORY OF GUEST HOUSE

► In 1956, Austin Ripley, a Catholic layman and recovered alcoholic, founded Guest House to treat Catholic clergy and Religious suffering from alcoholism. Since then, it has been the means for more than 7,300 priests, Brothers, Sisters, deacons, and seminarians to be released from the ordeal of active alcoholism and drug dependency. Today, many of these men and women lead sober and productive lives. Dan Kidd, president and CEO of Guest House, quotes one participant: "Guest House made me the priest I always wanted to be."

The National Catholic Council on Alcoholism and Related Drug Problems is now an affiliated program/service of Guest House. For more information on Guest House, visit guesthouse.org or call 800-626-6910.



LOOKING ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

A large two-engine train was crossing America. After it had gone some distance, the engines failed and the train came to a standstill. The engineer made the following announcement: "Ladies and gentlemen, I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that the engines have failed. The good news is that you decided to take the train rather than fly."

SUBSCRIBER ALERT

Unauthorized Renewals and Subscriptions

It has come to our attention that some baddees to Catholic Digest have been receiving renewal notifications, invoices, and subscription offers in the mail from the following companies that are not authorized to sell Catholic Digest:

Allied Publishing Service Inc.
American Consumer Publishing Association
American Media
Association of Publishers
Associated Publishers Subscription Services
Back to Backs Inc
BWWing Emporium
Bradford Publishing Service
Central Publishers Services
Dennis Simpson
Dominate Marketing, LLC
Epic Subscriptions
Global Publication Service
IC Marketing
Lakeshore Publishers Service
Magazine BWWing and Collection Service
Magazine BWWing, LLC
Magazine Billing Service, Inc.
Magazine Payment Services, Inc.
Magazine Subscription Services Inc
Midwest Marketing
Platinum Publishing Service
Publication Center
Publishers Access Service
Publishers BWWing Service
Publishers Consolidated Subscription Services
Publishers Consulting Service
Publishers Magazine Services
Publishers Marketplace of America
Publishers Processing Services, Inc.
Publisher's Service
Publishers Service Exchange
Publishers Service Network
RIS Group
Seascap Publishers Network
Subscriber BWWing Services
Subscription Billing Service
Subscription Payment Services
Subscription Processing
United Publishers Network
United Subscriber BWWing, LLC
Western Pacific Publishing Corp

These companies are not authorized representatives of Catholic Digest Magazine. You can often recognize these offers because they appear to be an invoice. Please do not send them as yours as we cannot guarantee that any orders placed through them will be submitted to us. Thank you for your help in this important matter.

Catholic Digest if one uses several carefully chosen legitimate subscription agencies to sell our publication. If you have any questions about a subscription agency, please feel free to contact us.

SUBSCRIBER ALERT

An Important Message from the
Publisher of *CATHOLIC DIGEST*

CONSUMER ALERT!

GET A GREAT PRICE DIRECTLY FROM US—
THE PUBLISHER OF
CATHOLIC DIGEST MAGAZINE.

We would like to encourage you to order your subscription directly through us. By ordering directly from us you can enjoy the benefits of easy access to customer service and complaint resolution. And, you support the Augustinians of the Assumption, who promote inspiring media worldwide. You'll also save time and money by doing so. Thank you for supporting our Catholic faith.

ARE YOU HAVING TROUBLE
SUBSCRIBING TO
CATHOLIC DIGEST?

Just visit CatholicDigest.com for quick ordering or use the convenient order cards found only in *Catholic Digest* and other Bayard magazines. You can also order by calling us at
1-800-678-2836!

BEFORE
YOU
RENEW,
LOOK FOR
EITHER
OF THESE
BRANDS

**Catholic
Digest**

THE OFFICIAL MARK FOR
CATHOLIC DIGEST



Bayard

THE OFFICIAL MARK FOR THE
BAYARD MAGAZINE GROUP