

## *Meeting the Community* The Punk Monk

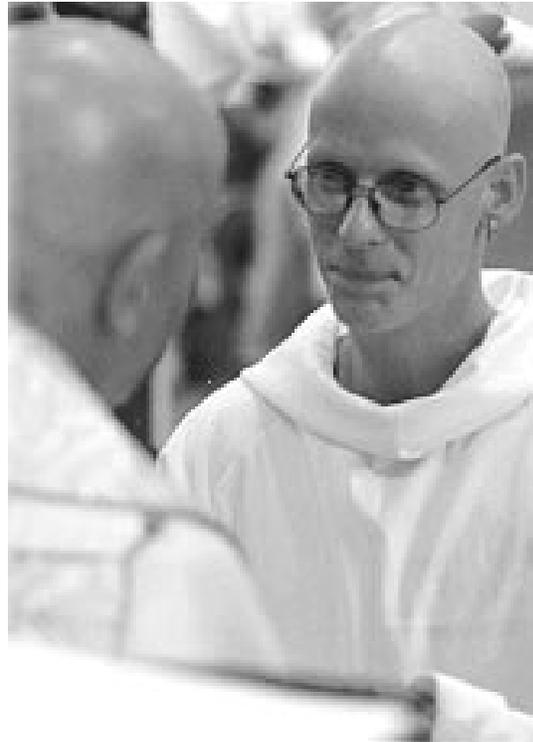
*Karekin Madteos, BSG*

I can always see it coming; the look of surprise that spreads across the faces of new acquaintances as they start to learn more about what I do. “You’re a *what!*” they exclaim. It makes me laugh and causes me to praise God. Perhaps I should explain.

I’ve always been a bit on the fringe of the mainstream. As a youth who felt more comfortable challenging the acceptable norms of our society than living within the framework of what we are all taught makes us successful, I confess that I have often trod the darker and more dangerous paths of the Generation X subculture.

I made the decision to enter the religious life when I was twenty-five. The decision followed a radical awakening to the power of God after a rather close brush with the abyss, the inner Hell that I’d created for myself. In the process of this ongoing awakening, God has awesomely and mercifully transformed my life. In my gratitude, I decided to give back to my peers what was so freely given to me — God’s love.

At thirty years old, I still look much as I did back then. My shaved head, crazy attire (especially my hats), my earring and tattoos (the ones that always remind me of where I come from) have earned me the rather notorious nickname among my peers — “the punk monk.” People are often astounded that some of my favorite pastimes still include dancing, singing with a band, and reading Nietzsche. However, I must confess that my joy comes from my work as an apostolic friar in the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory. Therein lies the miracle of God’s transformative power and the sheer unpredictability of



what can take place when we answer the call to servanthood.

I live in San Francisco, “The City” as it is affectionately known here. Perhaps the one place in our diverse society where the dichotomy of my life is not so surprising. My primary ministry is among those deeply affected by substance abuse, especially the youth. In a city where 37 percent of the tens of thousands of homeless marginalized persons are under the age of 21, the work is often daunting and results extremely disappointing. But God’s power is certainly at work here. There are a tremendous number of agencies and programs in San Francisco that work to overcome the statistics of teenage transience and substance abuse. I am grateful to be a part of such a network.

## The Poor

In life one wanders  
through stormy paths  
and days of vivid truths.  
We pass through vineyards  
valleys and mountain terrain  
carrying out mindful burdens  
heavy or light gazing  
skyward and watching celestial  
birds taking flight.  
What has civilization become  
when it neglects the poor?  
Where is the shadow  
of the Shepherd who represents  
poverty in unadorned Raiment?  
His spirit dwells  
in those who care  
and love the unfortunate  
who roam the world  
seeking a tender embrace  
a kind word  
a crust of bread  
a humble benediction.  
We see beauty  
in the eyes of children  
men and women  
touched by misfortune.  
Take my hand  
I will feed you  
clothe you  
shelter you  
and give you Love.  
Christ is Love  
Christ is Peace  
Christ is Poverty  
We redeem our lives  
by embracing His Spirit  
in humble dedication  
to humanity's poor.

*Ulric De Vaere*

*Ulric is a Minister to the poor and homeless in  
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It is in The City that I have had the best opportunities to live out my vocation as it has been revealed to me. As I grow in my witness to the gospel of Christ as expressed in our Rule, I live with the certainty that spread out across the United States, I have the love and support of my brothers and sisters. Although I am the only member of BSG in San Francisco, I am ever aware that the community's prayers are with me as I go about God's business. The daily cycle of prayer that we offer up for each other and the ministries that we serve, creates a comforting rhythm much like the dancing that I love so much. Sometimes urgent and driving, sometimes hypnotic and soothing, it is always in celebration of the miracle of redemption.

Being a member of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory has given me an opportunity to experience the very sense of belonging that we need to convey to the most marginalized of our society. The community is a rich and diverse mixture of people who have been graced by God to "be" the gospel in action. We carry this gospel into the world to the extent that we go out into the world. The nurture, support and acceptance that I experience within BSG is the same that I try to carry to the abused and frightened teen addicts on the streets. When I look at these young people, the Generation X haircuts, the tattoos and attitudes, their resentments and their battle scars, I remember where I come from. When they look at me, I hope they see that the power of God's mercy is available to all people, even someone who looks, and at one time felt, just like they do. In their faces I recognize my own redemption, and when just one of them responds to the message I try to carry, I am repaid a thousandfold by the hope that once again, God will be glorified and the world transformed.