



Members of Santa Maria Council 4999 and Father Andrew Doherty Assembly, both in West Palm Beach, Fla., display the U.S. flag they received from the 101st Airborne Division in appreciation for the Knights' support of veterans. Pictured are: Tom Conroy, Mark Chauvin, Kelly Green, Bill Bramlett and Ron Gomes.

PEARL HARBOR SURVIVOR JOINS KNIGHTS

Thousands of Catholic men join the Knights of Columbus each year, but few can say that they survived the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. Tom Mahoney is one such man.

A veteran of World War II, Mahoney, 89, was present in Hawaii 70 years ago when the Japanese launched a surprise attack on the United States. This past January, Mahoney joined the Order during a special First Degree ceremony organized by Union (N.J.) Council 4504.

Mahoney decided to join the Knights after he was involved in a council-sponsored program in 2010 to honor World War II veterans. As part of the program, Mahoney loaned his Pearl Harbor Survivors Association flag to Council 4504 for display in front of the council hall.

At the degree ceremony, Mahoney was honored by more than 60 council members, including 10 who are fellow veterans of World War II. Also in attendance were New Jersey State Deputy Herbert C. Meyer and Membership and Programs Consultant Thomas P. Ciborski.

Medicine for Afghanistan

At the request of a U.S. soldier serving at a medical clinic in Afghanistan, Islands Council 10579 in Savannah, Ga., collected 200 bags of care items for sick children ranging from infancy to 10 years of age. Knights collected personal items like clothing, stuffed animals, baby lotion and diapers for children who come to the clinic for medical aid.

Coats for Kids

Holy Family Council 14016 at the Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts co-sponsored a "Coats for Kids" event with the Hanscom Credit Union. The coats were distributed to military families who do not have adequate clothing for the region in which they have been stationed or who have experienced difficulties at home. The council also hosted a second drive that collected 60 coats for Lazarus House Ministries in Lawrence.

Wingman Cancer Foundation

Slidell (La.) Council 2732 donated \$1,000 to the Wingman Cancer Foundation, an organization founded by Sgt. John Larrieu to aid Air National

Guard and Army personnel in and around Slidell who have been diagnosed with cancer. Larrieu started the organization after he was diagnosed with cancer. He is now in remission.

Care Packages with Students

Msgr. Fernand H. Gouaux Assembly in Lafayette, La., worked with the students and faculty of Broussard Middle School and Comeaux High School to assemble and mail 60 care packages to a U.S. military unit stationed in Afghanistan. The packages contained basic care supplies for the troops, many of whom are living at makeshift facilities during the length of their deployment.

Veterans Memorial

Ocean City (Md.) Council 9053 and John Paul II Assembly donated materials for a new veterans memorial at St. Luke Church. The memorial includes a flagpole surrounded by bronze figures representing the different branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. Knights donated two of the bronze statues for the memorial and provided an honor guard for its dedication.



Petty Officer 2nd Class Marcus Velasco (second from right) of Father John Francis "Jake" Laboon Council 13395 at Naval Base Kitsap in Silverdale, Wash., prepares to serve dinner to residents of Benedict House, a residential facility for homeless men that is operated by the Archdiocese of Seattle. After a long day of work at the naval base, Knights volunteered to serve dinner at the facility.



Praise the Lord and Protect the Nation

Our Lady of Perpetual Help is Catholic ‘quarters’ for military personnel at Dover Air Force Base

by Gary Morton

Editor’s Note: This article first appeared in The Dialog (Diocese of Wilmington, Del.) July 22, 2010, and is reprinted here with permission.

The priest celebrating Mass wore combat boots and fatigues under his vestments.

None of his congregation seemed to notice the blend of military and religion. After all, it’s a way of life for parishioners of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the Catholic community at Dover Air Force Base.

“You’ll see a lot of uniforms on the weekend, a lot of our active-duty folks,” said Lt. Col. Gretchen Kurlander of the Air Force Reserves’ 512th Airlift Wing, who sings in the choir at the 9 a.m. Sunday Mass.

Father (Maj.) Timothy Hirten’s boots and fatigues aren’t the only difference between Our Lady of Perpetual Help and civilian parishes. Perhaps the most obvious contrast becomes evident just getting to Mass: Visitors must be cleared by armed Air Force guards to enter a gate to base housing, where the chapel is located.

Nonetheless, Our Lady of Perpetual Help has a pastoral council and offers many of the same ministries and programs found in civilian parishes: religious education and sacramental preparation courses, outreach programs, and devotional and service groups such as the Sodality and the Knights of Columbus — namely, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Council 9098. Among those assisting Father Hirten are Deacon Thomas Masino, pastoral assistant Debbie Suto, and religious education director Janet Claycomb.

Father Hirten, though, isn’t a pastor; he’s a chaplain, one of five with the 436th Air Wing at Dover. And leading the Catholic community is only part of his job.



Lt. Col. Gretchen Kurlander, a member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Community at Dover Air Force Base, talks with Father (Maj.) Tim Hirten, a Catholic chaplain with the 436th Air Wing.

“I’m the chaplain for all, specifically the medical unit and the [other] units that I’m assigned to” whether the personnel are Catholic or not, he said. “But I’m the priest for the Catholic population.”

Altogether, Father Hirten serves the base community of about 11,000 people, including 3,400 active-duty Air Force personnel, 2,000 Air Force Reserves and Air National Guard members, 1,100 civilian employees and 4,400 dependents. He estimates that about a quarter of that population is Catholic.

DEPLOYMENT WORRIES

The base houses the largest air freight operation in the U.S. defense department, which uses a fleet of C-5 Galaxy and C-17 Globemaster aircraft for missions around the world, including the Middle East. Those missions, along with deployments that can last for several weeks or several months, put pressures on military personnel and their families that the Our Lady of Perpetual Help

community tries to relieve. Father Hirten, who arrived at Dover in March 2009, became immersed in those tensions when he was deployed four months later to Baghdad for seven months. He celebrated Mass and the sacraments at six locations on the base there, and also served the U.S. Embassy and 19 other embassies in Baghdad’s Green Zone.

“The deployment, pre- and after, is very stressful,” he said. “Leaving family, getting things set up — that’s the hard part, more than the real work in Baghdad.”

Members of Our Lady of Perpetual Help encourage family members at Dover to join prayer groups and come to Mass with other families. Parishioners also cook meals and baby-sit children when the spouse needs to tend to other things, he said.

“The big plus in a military parish is when you disappear for three months

Continued on page 3.



and then come back, you know that folks are there for you,” said Kurlander. She joined the Air Force in 1985 and switched to the Reserves in 1995, when the first of her two sons was an infant. She became an active-duty member of the Reserves when her sons became able to care for themselves.

One drawback to a military parish, she said, is youth ministry. “We lack a really good, strong teen ministry or teen missionary trips, things like that, because the kids move so often,” she said. “It’s hard to get the teens engaged and interested because they haven’t built friendships over years and years.”

CLOSE COMMUNITY

“Being in a military parish, there is a closer community,” said Tech. Sgt. Earl Weston, who works in the heating, ventilation and air conditioning shop. “Military members are separated from their [birth] families and yet you are accepted as family.”

Since his wife, Lisa, and their five children arrived at the base, the Weston Family has become even more involved.

“We’re Eucharistic ministers, we’re lectors,” he added. “I call Lisa the volunteer queen. She not only volunteers herself, but the family as well.”

Lisa Weston was drawn to the Catholic community when she visited her husband in February. “It’s very, very family-oriented,” she said. “Everybody knows everybody. They make you feel welcome.”

Our Lady of Perpetual Help also reaches out to young military members, in part by providing about half of the volunteers for the Eagle’s Nest Café.

“The parish really tries to interject itself into their lives,” Kurlander said.

Responsibilities for running the parish, though, sometimes keep Father Hirten

from establishing closer relationships with the young military members, who comprise a large portion of the base. The average age for enlisted personnel is 28, and for officers is 33, according to base statistics.

“He’s the only Catholic [chaplain], so it makes it a little bit harder,” Kurlander said. “All the parish responsibilities are in his lap. He doesn’t have the opportunity to network with the younger folks that he would like.”



Members of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Community Warren Cambridge, 13, and his mother, Sharon, talk with Father Hirten at his office at the base’s housing facilities in Dover.

A WORK-PLACE MINISTRY

Base chaplains interact with military personnel on a daily basis, often visiting them at their work stations.

Sharon Cambridge, who retired in September 2009 after 28 years in the Air Force, described the importance a chaplain can make for a young recruit: “When I joined the service I was very young,” she said. “The chaplains have always been available whenever I needed to talk. It was always an encouragement, even though I felt alone, to know that I’m doing the right thing instead of feeling like I’m different.”

If nothing else, Father Hirten stands out at the base. He is 6-foot-5-inches tall,

a former All-American basketball player at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio, who played professionally in European Pro League for seven years and with the Washington Generals, opposition for the Harlem Globetrotters, for two years before he entered the seminary.

While in Rome, an Air Force recruiter contacted him and his classmates looking for chaplain candidates. He applied and became a member of the Air Force Reserves, serving for 15 years before going on active duty in 2006.

He was ordained for the Diocese of Brooklyn, N.Y., where he served at three large parishes in Brooklyn and Queens.

He contrasts his life as the lone Catholic priest at Dover AFB with his work in New York.

“In my three parishes in Brooklyn and Queens, I never lived in a rectory with less than four people,” he said. “Also, I had a lot more weddings in the civilian parish. The military usually go home or back to civilian parishes [for their marriage ceremony]. However, they will often have their first child and baptism on base.”

Another major difference between the two is his accessibility to parishioners at the base.

“Here I can walk right into their work place anytime I want and they come see me about religious affairs or sacraments on the clock during normal business hours,” Father Hirten said. “It’s a privilege or benefit the military member has; my work with them is official business. That is very different from civilian parishes.”

Almost as different as a priest wearing combat boots and fatigues under his vestments at Mass. ♦

GARY MORTON is a staff reporter for *The Dialog* (Diocese of Wilmington, Del.)