

## THE HISTORY OF THE RARITAN CONGREGATION OF THE ORATORY OF ST. PHILIP NERI

While all Congregations of the Oratory belong to the same spiritual family, each Congregation is an independent and self-governing community. As a result, each Congregation has its own history of how it came into existence. The origins of what would become the Raritan Congregation of the Oratory go back to a conversation a small group of clergy and laymen had in 1989 at St. Joseph Church in Bound Brook. This group's intention was to consider various ways priests and laymen might live together to support one another in ministry and in living the Christian life. It was during this time the idea of St. Philip's Oratory first emerged.

With the support and permission of the late Bishop Edward Hughes, then Bishop of the Diocese of Metuchen, three men began to live the common life in St. Joseph Rectory in May of 1989. While the idea of the Oratory was presented as an option it was not at that time the favored choice for a way of life. Over the next three years this small community continued to gather for prayer and discernment, though the common life experience ended in 1990.

By 1992 St. Philip's Oratory had become a much more serious option and it was in that year that contact was first made with another Oratory (Brooklyn, NY), for the purpose of obtaining a deeper understanding of Oratorian life. A pivotal moment took place at the nascent community's annual retreat at Spencer Abbey in Massachusetts, in June 1992. Four of the five men on the retreat arrived at a definite "yes" to the idea of founding an Oratory; one was still uncertain. He would go on to become the founding Provost of the Oratory and the only one of the five to remain an Oratorian!

In December 1992, the group took two important steps towards founding an Oratory: they met with the Delegate of the Apostolic See for the Oratory, Fr. Michael Napier of the London Oratory, who would serve as the guide of the growing community; they also gave a formal proposal to Bishop Hughes for the establishment of an Oratory in the Diocese of Metuchen. In 1993 Bishop Hughes assigned the initial members to begin the common life with the intention of moving towards the establishment of an Oratorian house.

In 1993, the community in residence at St. Bartholomew Parish in East Brunswick was established as a Pious House by Bishop Hughes for the purpose of living the common life in order to discern a vocation to the Oratory. They began to live the Oratorian way of life, learning at times by trial and error. The structure for their daily prayer gradually took shape, with daily prayer in the Oratorian tradition and dinner becoming the key moments of the day. A study of the Constitutions of the Oratory as well as other pertinent documents was also undertaken.

1994 saw two other important moments in the community's development. First, a journey to Rome and England by two of the members, to meet with the late Fr. Antonio Dario of the Oratory of Verona who was then serving as Procurator General of the Confederation of Oratories, and Fr. Michael Napier, from London, who had been entrusted by Fr. Dario with the oversight of the developing community. In February 1996 Fr. Napier would make his first official visit to the Community in East Brunswick. During this visit Fr. Napier and Bishop Hughes established an

excellent rapport with each other; both agreed that more time was still needed before canonical establishment.

The years 1996-1998 saw growth and change in the young community in formation. Original members moved on and new members arrived. The community experienced one of its first sorrows with the untimely death of Fr. Napier who had become a much beloved advocate. They would soon find a fitting successor in the new Procurator General, the Very Rev. Edoardo Aldo Cerrato, now Bishop of the Diocese of Ivrea in Italy. Fr. Edoardo visited in September 1997, and again in April 1998, when he announced his approval for the request for canonical establishment. One of the last things needed was a residence for the new community. Through the kindness of the Consolata Missionaries in Somerset, the young community obtained the use of an old farmhouse on their property.

In the summer of 1998, the community took up residence on the property of the Consolata Missionaries in Somerset. Shortly thereafter, on September 8, 1998, the Holy See established the Metuchen Congregation of the Oratory as a Congregation of Pontifical Right. With Bishop Vincent de Paul Breen's decision in 2001 to entrust to the Oratory the campus ministry at Rutgers, the foundation period reached its conclusion.

Undertaking the common apostolate in campus ministry ushered in a new era for the Oratorian community. One opportunity that arose was that of attracting young vocations to the Congregation. After four years in campus ministry, the Congregation was also entrusted with the care of St. Peter the Apostle Parish in New Brunswick. The Oratorians began parish ministry at St. Peter the Apostle in Advent, 2005 while continuing their involvement with campus ministry at Rutgers University. In January 2006 the community moved from the old farmhouse in Somerset into St. Peter's Rectory. It was at this time that our name was canonically changed to the Congregation of the Oratory of New Brunswick.

Now living in New Brunswick and close to the Rutgers campus, the Oratory continued to minister to the student population, developing a fruitful collaboration with the Brotherhood of Hope, the Sisters of Jesus Our Hope, permanent deacons, and talented lay ministers. St. Peter's Parish experienced a spiritual renewal, owing especially to the emphasis placed on liturgical life and adult formation. In a time of transition for the parish and its surrounding neighborhood, the community became younger and more diverse. In time, bridges were built between the student and parishioner communities. This movement culminated in the designation of St. Peter's as a University and Community Parish, in January 2014. The parish campus also experienced revitalization through a multi-phase, multi-million dollar process of renovation and restoration of the historic church and the former convent, which became the new center for Catholic campus ministry at Rutgers.

Also during this time, Fr. Kevin Kelly, who was ordained in 2006, became gradually more involved in ministry to the Spanish-speaking immigrant population in New Brunswick. Becoming fluent in Spanish, he made the transition to full-time Hispanic ministry in 2009 at St. Joseph Parish in New Brunswick (which, in 2014, became part of the newly-formed Holy Family Parish). Within a few years, this became the fastest-growing community in the diocese. More recently, due to the unique challenges facing undocumented immigrants, Fr. Kevin has become more deeply involved in prison ministry and especially the pastoral care of detained immigrants.

In 2017, Bishop James Checchio surprised the Congregation with a request to move to the Borough of Raritan (about 12 miles from New Brunswick) and to take on an array of ministries in Raritan and the surrounding area. After a yearlong process of discernment, the Oratory moved to Raritan in July 2018, and began working in the parishes of St. Ann in Raritan and Holy Trinity in Bridgewater. Frs. Peter and Kevin temporarily continued their involvement in ministries in New Brunswick for an additional year. Later in 2019, the Congregation anticipates taking on additional apostolates in Raritan, including St. Joseph Parish and the Shrine Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, a center for Eucharistic devotion and the Mass in the Extraordinary Form. In Lent 2019, Fr. Kevin began a weekly Spanish Mass at the Shrine Chapel, which has already begun to develop into a flourishing community.

Currently, the Congregation consists of four priests and two seminarians:

Very Rev. Peter R. Cebulka, CO, ordained in 1993, serves as Provost (Superior), teaches in St. Ann School, and assists with parish ministry, as well as serving as financial administrator of the Shrine Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in Raritan. A native of Chesterfield, NJ, Fr. Peter, a former Franciscan brother, has advanced degrees in education (Seton Hall) and liturgical music (Catholic Univ.). After ordination, he served as Parochial Vicar and later Principal at St. Bartholomew Parish, East Brunswick; then as chaplain at the Catholic Center at Rutgers University (2001-2019), where he served for several years as Director of Campus Ministry and Associate Director of Vocations for the Diocese of Metuchen. Fr. Peter has also served on the diocesan Schools Commission and as chairman of the Historical Records Commission.

Rev. Jeffrey M. Calia, CO, ordained in 2010, a 2002 alumnus of the Rutgers campus ministry apostolate, serves as Pastor of Holy Trinity Parish, Bridgewater, as well as Vicar, Novice Master, and Prefect of the Secular Oratory. He formerly served as Parochial Vicar, St. Peter the Apostle Parish, New Brunswick, from 2010-2018. Fr. Jeff is a member of the Board of Trustees of Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Metuchen. Since 2011, he has also served as a part-time chaplain for the IndyCar Series. He is originally from Hazlet, NJ.

Rev. Thomas A. Odorizzi, CO, ordained in 1992, is Pastor of St. Ann Parish, Raritan, and also serves as Secretary and Treasurer of the Congregation. He formerly served in the parishes of St. Augustine of Canterbury, Kendall Park, St. Cecilia, Monmouth Junction, St. Bartholomew, East Brunswick, and Rutgers Campus Ministry, before becoming Pastor of St. Peter the Apostle Parish, New Brunswick, from 2005-2018. Fr. Tom is a native of Raritan (baptized in St. Joseph Church), a graduate of Bridgewater-Raritan High School West, and has a degree in electrical engineering from Virginia Tech.

Rev. Kevin P. Kelly, CO, ordained in 2006, serves in Hispanic Ministry. He has formerly served in Rutgers Campus Ministry, the diocesan Office of Evangelization, and as Parochial Vicar of St. Peter the Apostle Parish (2006-2010) and St. Joseph/Holy Family Parish, New Brunswick (2010-2019). Born in Silver Spring, MD, and raised in Scotch Plains, NJ, Fr. Kevin is a musician and visual artist who studied painting at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

Rev. Br. John Fredy Triana Beltran, CO, is a transitional deacon serving in our parishes while preparing for ordination to the priesthood (anticipated in fall 2019). He completed his studies at

Immaculate Conception Seminary, South Orange, in May 2019. Br. Fredy is a former professional soccer player originally from Bogota, Colombia.

Br. Steven J. Bolton, CO, a 2015 alumnus of the Rutgers campus ministry apostolate, is a novice in the Congregation and has begun his studies for priesthood at Immaculate Conception Seminary. Br. Steven is from nearby Hillsborough, NJ.

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