

OUTREACH *The Corner*

*Saint Augustine and Saint Francis Xavier parishes’
newsletter for Summer/Fall 2020*

Meet Father John Gribowich

*The Corner Outreach Interview with
Fr. John Gribowich, Administrator, St.
Augustine – St. Francis Xavier*

CORNER OUTREACH: Welcome to SA/SFX. Your arrival has been long anticipated by parishioners. You’re not so far from your previous residence at St. Charles Borromeo. How has the transition gone?

Well, the transition has been painless, since I will remain living at the rectory of St. Charles Borromeo. I will be working for DeSales Media Monday through Friday and I thought it would be best to be at a “neutral site” as I balance my responsibilities. I have been walking or riding my bike to Park Slope on Sunday afternoons to explore the neighborhood, which has been great!

COR: You seem extremely busy with your fingers in much of the pie. There are only 24 hours in a day. Yet you seem to be energetic. How do you do it?

I find that my energy comes from three sources: contemplative prayer, exercise, and staying in touch with family



and friends. I have a routine of getting up at 5:00 AM every morning and going for a 6-mile run. It puts me in good headspace, and I find that if I can do that run in the morning, the rest of the day is pretty easy to manage. I also like to take photos while I’m running—especially since the sun rises during that time. Photography for me is a means of contemplation.

COR: You came to the priesthood a bit later in life. You went to school and earned multiple MA’s. You worked various jobs and had many interests that you pursued before you became a priest. What finally brought you to the priesthood?

I have felt drawn to the priesthood since I was in the first grade, yet my many interests (including girls!) sidetracked the calling for sometime. When I was enrolled at Pratt Institute, I spent a summer abroad in Venice. It was then that I came to the realization that I simply would not be true to myself unless I was a priest. It was the summer of 2009, but I did not actually reenter the seminary until 2012. I say reenter because I tried out the semi-

nary in 2002, but left after a semester. I think God just wanted me to explore the world for a bit before I finally took the plunge. I have found that all of my life experiences have prepared me well for priestly ministry.

COR: You're from Pennsylvania yet you entered the seminary in NY. Why is that?

In 2007 I moved to Brooklyn to study art history and library science at Pratt. When I learned that the Diocese of Brooklyn is 100% urban (since it consists of the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens), I thought that I might do well as a priest in this setting. Thus, I decided to pursue the priesthood here.

COR: At a recent meeting of the Joint Advisory Parish Council you commented (and I'm paraphrasing) about "not being Catholics who only speak to Catholics and providing everyone with the opportunity for faith sharing." Can you briefly explain this to the parishioners?

I am not sure in what context I said this, but I do believe that it is important that we as Catholics not become so insular that we think that we have a monopoly on the truth. The joy of being a Catholic is having the freedom to see the truth, beauty, and goodness of Jesus Christ everywhere—especially in our Protestant brothers and sisters, those who are non-Christian, and even those who profess no belief in God. As baptized Catholics we recognize that we participate in the truth, we do not own it. The more open we are to the presence of the Spirit working all

around us can, in turn, help us to rejoice in the faith that has been revealed and handed on to us!

COR: In response to one of your recent homilies a parishioner commented to me that he was taken by your ability to bring the secular and the theological together. Is that something you do consciously or is it a natural result of your years as a layman?

I guess it's both. I do think that if a



Fr. John has come in a time of great changes in our parish and nation.

homily does not have a tangible "take away," meaning something that is applicable to the contemporary world, then it's essentially worthless. The Word of God that is proclaimed at each Mass is living and always applicable in the present moment, we just need to bring our current situation to the Word and be open to how God wants to enlighten us.

COR: You're a self-admitted big Bob Dylan fan. What draws you to his music?

Lots of things! At first it was just the sound of his early music, especially how he recorded his music live in the

studio with a band. Being a musician myself I am fascinated by these things. Then came the lyrics. Most of Dylan's lyrics are so enigmatic that you just need to get lost in them in order to find meaning in what he is doing. And then it is the person of Dylan himself. He is a person who understands his calling, his vocation. He has repeatedly stated in interviews that he finds that the wellspring of his creativity comes from a higher source. The fact that he still records music and tours also shows

that he is insistently committed to his vocation. I think the way that he lives his vocation inspires me to live my vocation even more fully.

COR: To quote a Bob Dylan song "The Times They Are A-Changin'." Dylan wrote that in 1964 in an attempt to create an anthem of change for the times. Seems just as relevant 56 years later.

Comment?

A sign of good art is that it is timeless. "The Times They Are A -Changin'" conveys the simple truth that the only constant in the universe is change. The struggle to better know the meaning and purpose of life necessitates change. We are constantly evolving. Dylan gets that. His music is always evolving—usually faster than people want it to. Some of the albums that he wrote throughout his long career were only understood as works of genius many years after they were initially released.

COR: You once said in an interview "music is a great source for me in experiencing God." How so?

Music has the ability to transport us back in time (how many of us think back on our high school days when we hear a song that was played at our prom?) or even “remove” us from what occupies our attention in the present. This reveals that there is a certain transcendent quality to music. I do not think that this can be underestimated. Harmonious music brings us into harmony of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

COR: Do you have any “temporal” heroes?

Well definitely Bob Dylan, for all of the reasons previously mentioned. I am a big reader and I love reading anything from Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Dan Berrigan, William Cavanaugh, Stanley Hauerwas, Richard Rohr, Joseph Ratzinger, Luigi Giussani, Julián Carrón, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Taylor Branch, Robert Caro, Jack Kerouac, Jane Jacobs and many, many more! They are all “heroes” to me in that they always push me out of my comfort zone.

COR: What do you look forward to at SA/SFX?

Just getting to know the people! Every person is an opportunity for me to meet the living presence of Christ. How could I not be excited about that?

COR: What can parishioners expect from you?

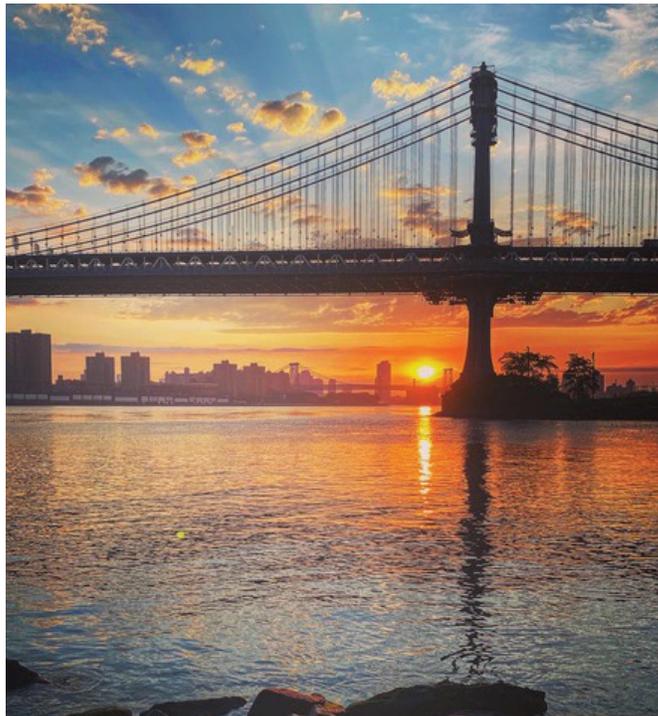
I hope that they can realize that I am walking on this journey of knowing Jesus with them. I am a disciple of Christ before I am a pastor—or anything else. I expect to be led by parishioners as much as I may be able to lead them. Only through listening and being pres-

ent to each and every person can I truly become a servant leader. I ask for your patience with me, since I will fail in being as attentive as I should. Ridding me of my ego is an ongoing process!

COR: What do you expect from the parishioners?

I simply expect them to accept the love that Jesus constantly offers. We spend so much time thinking that we need to earn love—from our families, friends, and even God. Jesus is a constant

It’s hard to be specific, since things in a COVID world seem to change daily, but I hope and pray that parishioners will be willing to “think outside of the box.” We are not going back to what we considered before to be normal, and I find this to be exciting. The Holy Spirit is constantly breathing life into the Church, and at this moment the parishioners of St. Augustine and St. Francis Xavier are being called to prophetic roles during this unique and challenging time.



Fr. John took this photo on his early morning runs around the city.

source of love and mercy in a very judgmental and unforgiving world. Letting go of trying to be anything except who we are—beloved sons and daughters of God—is what I expect each and every person who walks through the doors of St. Augustine and St. Francis Xavier to accept.

COR: How do you see engagement of parishioners moving forward in the ongoing presence of COVID in the community?

COR: During this very trying time of COVID, the changes in both parishes, and the societal upheaval that is occurring, could you please include some kind of statement of reassurance/support/comfort to the parishioners?

The fact that we are breathing means that we are meant to be alive and no matter what may change within or around us, the same loving God who willed us into existence in the first place will continue to sustain us and provide us with joy and purpose as we navigate through all of these changes. All we need to do is let go of our false sense of

control, because in reality none of us are in control of anything. We are participants in this universe, not orchestrators—and accepting that simple reality can free us from our many burdens.

COR: I can only imagine how busy you must be so I thank you so very, very much for participating in this interview.

I don’t like to think that I am busy; I like to think that my days are packed with opportunities. So thank you for giving me the opportunity to be interviewed!

Feeding Our Neighbors Strengthening the Community

St. Augustine has been operating the Helping Hands Food Pantry since 1992. The food pantry is located in the basement of the rectory on Park Place and distributes food every Saturday morning from 10am to 12 noon. Last year the pantry served about 550 people each month, of whom approximately 22% were senior citizens and 19% were children.

The pantry is open to anyone who lives in the surrounding area, defined as zip codes 11215, 11217, 11238. Clients must register at St. Monica Hall on Sterling Place and show Photo ID and proof of address (utility bill, for example). They must also indicate how many people reside in their household and their age. This is necessary in order to comply with funding agency rules that require the pantry to submit monthly statistics showing how many people, including seniors and children, are being served.

Once registered, clients can pick up food once every four weeks. The clients check in at St. Monica Hall and receive a card for either a small, medium or large bag, depending on the number of people in their household. They then bring the card to the rectory to receive their food bags which provide three meals for three days for each person in the household. Along with the bag of food, which consists of non-perishables, including canned fruit and vegetables, rice and pasta, cereal, milk, fruit juice, beans and canned fish, each client receives a bag of fresh produce seasonally available.



Bob Biegen and his partner Tom Wargo with nephews and godsons Riley and Dylan at the 5K Fun Run event fundraiser. Tom Wargo (pictured at center) is a board member and grant writer for the Helping Hands Pantry.



The pantry is staffed entirely by volunteers, who work on Saturday mornings registering the clients, bagging the non-perishables and produce, restocking the shelves, distributing the food, and cleaning up. Volunteers also work on Thursdays,

receiving food deliveries, stocking shelves, and setting up for open hours on Saturday.

There is a Board of Directors consisting of volunteers who place the food orders, submit applications to secure funding from federal, state and local sources, prepare the annual report, and attend periodic grant agency workshops for updates on food pantry practices and regulations.

Roughly two-thirds of the pantry's operating budget comes from government grants, and one-third comes from private donations. The major fundraiser is the annual 5K Fun Run/Walk/Bike held each year the Saturday before Thanksgiving in Prospect Park. Although many of the volunteers who work at the pantry or join in the Fun Run are parishioners of St. Augustine, a good number are also members of other faith communities, or those who simply want to lend a helping hand.

We are a lively community where interesting things happen. Please feel free to peruse our website, call with any questions and/or follow us on Facebook: @staugustinerpcparkslope; @stfxbrooklyn

**St. Augustine - St. Francis Xavier
Saturday Vigil Mass
5:00 PM at St. Francis Xavier
(225 6th Avenue)
Sunday Masses
9:30 AM at St. Francis Xavier
(225 6th Avenue)
12:00 Noon at St. Augustine
(116 6th Avenue)**

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