

SALUTE TO RELIGIOUS

They pray... they serve... they love...



But do we offer them thanks?

He's not heavy; he's my brother

JEAN GONZALEZ
of the Florida Catholic staff

Not every man seeking a religious vocation feels a call to the priesthood.

And for Brothers Stephen Quense and Jason Zink, that is not a bad thing.

"I never felt called to the ordained ministry to the priesthood," said Brother Quense, 49, who has lived in the Brotherhood of Hope for 28 years. "I felt called to imitate Jesus with my whole life. My life doesn't make sense apart from Jesus. ... As a brother, I feel I am living out more radically our baptismal calling; fully living out the life of the kingdom."

The two religious brothers are members of the Brotherhood of Hope, a community of Catholic brothers fully consecrated to Jesus Christ by vows of chastity, poverty and obedience in fraternal common life and work in Tallahassee with the Catholic Student Union of Florida State University.

Founded by Father Philip Merdinger in 1980 as a group of laymen, the Brotherhood of Hope includes about 20 men in apostolates, services and studies in the Archdiocese of Boston, the Diocese of Metuchen, N.J., and the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee.

According to Brother Quense, at the time when the Brotherhood of Hope was established, the church experienced a sense of renewal, especially in family life. According to Brother Quense, Father Merdinger said there should also be a renewal of the celibate life, which sparked the Brotherhood of Hope to become a lay association of brothers. The brotherhood developed a constitution and established life within the canon law of the church. At this point, the brotherhood is a public association of the faithful, which is one step removed from a religious institute of diocesan rite.

A unique aspect of the order is the age of its members. While many communities are continually aging, the average age of Brotherhood of Hope members is 44 and, with the exception of its founder, the members are all younger than 54.

"We feel like we are an encouraging sign of hope to other religious orders," said Brother Quense, who serves as the local superior of the Tallahassee-based community.

Brother Zink is 33 and a full-time campus minister. He came to the order soon after he converted to Catholicism from the Methodist faith in 1997. He is one of five converts among the community and received final vows in 2005.

He said he felt God calling him to a consecrated vocation and while he said the priesthood is "awesome," something about the brotherhood struck him spiritually.

FYI
To find out more about the Brotherhood of Hope music CDs or to purchase, visit www.brohope.net/music/music.htm.

ers struck him spiritually.

"As a Methodist, there was always the (discernment) of, 'Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus as your savior?' And as a Catholic, I not only could have that relationship with Jesus, but also touch him in the Eucharist and receive him. ... God called me to be a brother and I love it," Brother Zink said. "Jesus gave his life for us on the cross, and I felt like I should give my life back to him in a relationship of love. I said, 'Lord, you are enough. You fulfill all my needs. You are the one I love and need.' And I try to live that out the best way possible."

"There are no doubts in my mind that this is where God wanted me to be and it is such a blessing and such a joy," Brother Zink continued. "As a brother, I can offer the students of Catholic Student Union my prayer life. I walk with them in their own prayer life and keep pushing them ahead."

Brother Quense also came into the brotherhood after a personal spiritual renewal. He said the apostolic nature of community, with a commitment to both service and prayer, attracted him to the vocation. But, he added, he never could have gone through it alone.

"I wouldn't have attempted it without the support of others," he said. "We are a spiritual family — comrades in arms."

The mission of the Brotherhood of Hope is to bring the new evangelization proclaimed by Pope John Paul II primarily to college students at secular universities. While reaching out to inactive and uncommitted Catholics, members encourage conversion to Christ and his church, and train students to empower others with this liberating hope. Along with a presence at Florida State University, brothers serve at Boston University, Rutgers University Catholic Center and Northeastern University Catholic Center in Boston. Two other brothers teach at St. John Seminary in Boston, where the brotherhood is headquartered.

Through Bible study, retreats and a ministry of presence, the brothers serve the students and focus on discerning not only religious vocations, but also a calling to the married vocation. Brother Zink said the students are never pushed toward one vocation over another, but they are encouraged to discern both a married vocation and a celibate vocation with open arms.

"It is freeing to be open to all pos-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BROTHER ALLEN MARQUEZ, BROTHERHOOD OF HOPE

sibilities and it changes your perspective of what does God want," Brother Quense said. "By encouraging them to be open to the Lord, we have had beautiful vocations, some to married life."

During a Catholic Student Union alumni retreat, both brothers remarked how, along with the adults, some 40 kids were running around, all younger than 6. Brother Quense said there have been 25 religious vocations that have emerged from the Catholic Student Union, including 12 priests, seven religious sisters and six religious men and some 36 lay ministers, who serve in various parish ministries such as youth, religious education, parish life and diocesan services. And that doesn't even count the number of alumni who serve on a volunteer basis.

"We see these young people as a successful generation of successful Catholics who have stepped up for their faith," Brother Zink said. "It is so exciting to see that. ... And now we see students in the union who are second generation, in which their youth ministers are alumni of the Catholic Student Union and so these members are already fired up with a love for the church and they can't wait to grow deeper in their faith. It is so encouraging."

Financially, the brothers depend on donations and stipends to be self-sustaining. One ongoing fundraiser is the selling of a music CD composed by the brothers. "A Season of Hope" is an Advent CD, and "Into the Deep" is a collection of hymns, chants, Spanish, Irish and contemporary music that has been approved by Vatican Radio.

Neither brother frets about expenses, relying both on their modest and frugal standard of living, and the faith that God will provide. For them, their mission and focus is on imitating the life of Christ and serving others. And Brother Quense added the symbol of the order — an anchor — speaks volumes about the brotherhood's mission.

"The anchor is a symbol of hope in the Bible," he said. "We wish to be a witness to the church." ■

Brother Ted Psemeneke, of the Brotherhood of Hope, second from right, participates in a small group with students of Florida State University's Catholic Student Union.



Brother Jason Zink, left, talks with students of Florida State University's Catholic Student Union.

NINE ELEMENTS TO DESCRIBE A BROTHER

Below are nine elements describing the nature of a brother.

• An intensification of baptismal consecration

A religious brother shares with all Christians the common dignity of baptism, whereby one is joined to Christ and summoned to holiness and the church's mission. However, a brother's consecration is a fuller manifestation of baptismal consecration.

• A total self-gift to God through the evangelical counsels

The evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience are the means of this self-donation, and they foster the perfection of the love of God and neighbor in an outstanding manner. They are "a triple expression of a single 'yes' to the one relationship of total consecration."

• A fraternal life in common

As a sign of the Trinity's unity, brothers share a communal life in charity. This fraternity, a visible manifestation of the church's communion, "has always appeared as a radical expression" of Christian unity, and is a prophecy of heaven's unity.

• A separation from the world

• A life of prophetic witness to the kingdom of God

The virtue of hope enables a brother to reveal the mystery of God's kingdom — present already, but completed in heaven.

• A life of service to the church

A brother's life itself is a mission, following the example of his Lord.

• A mission undertaken in common

Even though brothers do not always work together, each one's work is directly related to the common mission approved by the church.

• An identity and spirituality as brothers

Brothers are called to be brothers of Christ, deeply united with him — "brothers to one another, in mutual love and working together in the church in the same service of what is good; brothers to everyone, in their witness to Christ's love for all, especially the lowliest, the neediest; brothers for a greater brotherhood in the church" (Pope John Paul II, general audience, Feb. 22, 1995).

• A complete vocation encouraged by the church

Source: *The Brotherhood of Hope*