

Editor's Note:

We asked Tony Morris, Co-Founder of the Father Bernard Youth and Retreat Center to tell us the story of the founding and development of this very unique place and the programs that are offered to inspire and encourage the youth in our greater area to seek Christ in all they do for themselves and others. Many thanks to Tony for sharing the story of how this youth ministry retreat center and its program found the way to Mt. Angel, Oregon.

The Story and the Vision

In 1978. Pope John Paul II offer the Church a “inspirational fire” to create a deeper presence to the youth of the world through ministry dedicated to them... particularly through retreats and treating these young people as Christ would serve them, ---with respect and with the sincerity and depth they deserve.

Tony Morris attended the Denver World Youth Day with a group of young adults. His experience with World Youth Day exploded the traditional possibilities to minister to young people.

The vision of Pope John Paul II to the youth of the world was to invite them to be loose in the world and become ministers to other youth. The very act of placing their want to minister into action would in turn help the youth to go deeper in knowing and thus bringing Christ to the world. Tony would say “If young

people can't bring Christ to the world, He is never going to get there. Tony would also be asking himself "How do we do something like that"? He wanted to find ways to help young people take their knowledge and commitment to Christ out to their peers. With this in mind the idea of a retreat center for Youth, their Mentors and Chaperones was born.

Fr. Bernard Sanders, OSB, a Benedictine priest serving as Director of the Mt. Angel Abbey Retreat Center was Tony's spiritual director at this time. Fr. Bernard gave Tony spiritual reading assignments from documents developed at Vatican II.

As Tony read from this lofty collection, he also met with Fr. Bernard and was posed with the question: "How do we bring these calls to ministry with Christ into the larger world?" He always saw Fr. Bernard as the incarnation of Vatican II and a man who understood the invitation to live in the wisdom of these documents.

In time, the vision developed and grew. Tony worked in construction and on weekends he found himself ministering with people on retreat. He remembers Fr. Bernard asking him following each retreat ..."who was the one soul that was touched most during this retreat? What was the story of the one would who benefitted and was most touch in the retreat"?

Fr. Bernard and Tony would meet and talk about the development of a physical retreat center, the specific requirements needed to prepare a place for ministry with youth. They considered confessionals, adoration space, breakout rooms, and dormitories and began to gathering a list of the materials each retreat leader would and asked themselves where in the world would we locate the needed retreat center? During one of their meetings, a prominent donor called Fr. Bernard. He had land near Portland that might be a good site for youth ministry. Even though in the end that property did not work out, Tony soon after discovered a building on the campus of the Benedictine Sister's Queen of Angels Monastery that appeared to be a perfect fit. A meeting

with the Prioress, lead to a lease Casey Commons and a wing of Marmion Hall, organizing a Board of Directors, setting things right with the IRS to function as a non-profit retreat center and finding people to “remodel” and create the needed space and environment. Another prominent local donor wrote a check and the needed renovations completed the center opened January 2005 and are still functioning today.

The center continues to grow and develop as we note that Fr. Bernard’s influence and connections were very significant and Tony’s vision for a youth center continues to this day and into the future.