

Paul and Eileen Blaine – Early Lay Associates in the East

Among the second group to make a commitment as Lay Salvatorians (Associates, at the time), were Paul and Eileen Blaine. Their son, Steve, is an active Lay Salvatorian and he shared these remembrances of his parents as well as the other Lay Salvatorians in Lanham, Maryland in the early 1970's.

Eileen and Paul were very active in their Parish. The time period was significant because the North American Province of the Society was in the throes of declaring bankruptcy. Paul and Eileen were one of several couples who were living near the Seminary and were parishioners at St. Mary's parish in Landover, MD where Sisters from the Congregation ran the grade school while the Priests and Brothers ran the CCD program. Many of the men were completing their theological studies at Catholic University prior to ordination. Eileen was involved in the CCD program and Paul served on the Parish Council and had been a CYO coach for baseball and football.

In this immediate post Vatican II period, lay involvement was coming to the fore and the Society – like all Orders and religious communities - were evaluating the charism of the Society, zeroing in on Fr. Jordan's vision of full lay participation. With the huge ramifications of the bankruptcy beginning to become apparent, the parishioners who had started going to the Seminary for Sunday Masses decided to help raise funds to "Save Our Seminary" (SOS) and over time this became the group who became Lay Associates. It was a very "heady" experience since every aspect of the program/relationship with the Society needed to be identified, developed and organized. What was the Lay Associates purpose? What would be the relationship between the laity and the religious members ... formal, informal, committed, etc.? It was all new and exciting but to say it was 'challenging' would be a gross understatement.

The Blaine home was one of the gathering places where "the guys" would come over – eating and drinking several evenings during the week and on weekends – staying often into the early morning hours. Theology and community living were discussed. The roots of becoming like a "family" started to be seen as a future goal.

Paul and Eileen also had a large biological family. There were seven children. Eileen cared for her family as well as being the consummate hostess and not only cooked and served all the food, but also typed – and probably edited – the final dissertations for many of the men finishing at Catholic University. They still had Cana Groups (married couples discussion groups) they attended and hosted – yes, they were very busy!

On December 17, 1972, ten associates made their Commitment at the Chapel of Holy Trinity Mission Seminary in Silver Spring, MD. Included in this group along with Paul and Eileen Blaine were Ed and Ann Griffin, Frances and John Renehan, Gerri and Robert Newton, and Peg and John Grambling. Although some have died, a few from this group are still very active as they are able. For example, Ed and Ann Griffin moved to Florida and started Project Light, a learning center teaching English Learning Skills in Bradenton. Although Ed is no longer with us, Ann continues to support this ministry.

Steve Blaine reports that his father was a man of action and the number of meetings and discussion groups trying to define what it meant to be a Lay Associate wore on him. He wanted more direct ministerial activity than the group was able to develop at that time, so he decided to leave the Associate program and enter into the first class for Permanent Deacons in the Washington, D.C. Archdiocese. This, of course, also required Eileen's commitment to this program – she had to attend the classes, retreats, etc. along with Paul. They did give a formal letter of resignation to the Associate Program. In 1975, Paul and another man from the parish were ordained with a small group of other men from across the Archdiocese.

Paul served as a Deacon at St. Mary's until his death in 2004. Eileen died unexpectedly on the morning December 8, 2017 - a significant Salvatorian day. Steve's wife, Clare, and he were hosting the East's Christmas and Foundation Day Mass and celebration that evening and Eileen had planned to be there. They thought it appropriate to honor her by having the gathering that evening as planned.

The stories of these early Lay Salvatorians in the East of the USA are an example of how out of difficulty (the troubles with the Society) wonderful new life can develop. These dedicated people never gave up, grew in the spirit, asked the difficult questions and persevered to become Lay Associates.



What an amazing childhood experience it must have been for Steve to grow up in a home filled with love and Salvatorians. Steve and his wife, Clare, continue their Salvatorian lives of service and love.

Paul and Eileen Blaine

Thank you, Steve, for sharing your stories with us and for all the early "pioneer" Lay Salvatorians.