

**BLESSING OF  
OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP  
RETREAT AND SPIRITUALITY CENTER  
January 28, 1996 /**

Just the other day I found a prayer card in one of my books. On the reverse side was: FLORIDA WEST COAST LAYMEN'S RETREAT ASSOCIATION. HOLY YEAR RETREAT 1950. Retreat Masters - Rev. Philip Bardeck and Rev. Charles Mallen, C.Ss.R., 1950. I quickly looked in the mirror. I told myself, THAT WAS 45 years ago "When you and I were young, Maggie."

One of our American authors, HENRY DAVID THOREAU, once wrote: "If you have built castles in the air... THAT is where they should be. NOW put foundations under them!" Here at OLPH Retreat Center, we took his advice!

Ten years ago, a retreat facility was on the dream board. Ten years sounds like the other half of eternity.... BUT,- as another American novelist, Henry Van Dyke, wrote:

"TIME IS TOO SLOW FOR THOSE WHO WAIT,  
TOO SWIFT FOR THOSE WHO FEAR,  
TOO LONG FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE,  
TOO SHORT FOR THOSE WHO REJOICE,

BUT FOR THOSE WHO LOVE, TIME IS ETERNITY"... and I might add "in the complete sense of that word." If ever there was a work of LOVE, this is it. It is love for Our Lady of Perpetual Help that built this retreat. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "TOTUS TUUS."

When I first saw this land almost ten years ago it was after a bumpy ride over a washboard dirt road now the paved Border Road you drove in on. My friend of many years, Msgr. George Cummings, drove me along part of what is now the lovely shell road from the front gate through weeds and growth so high that I could not see out the front window. As the car bumped up and down, with my throat in my mouth I half gasped, "George, I hope YOU know where we are going. If you don't we'll NEVER find our way out of here." But as we passed open hammocks between it all I had a feeling that it was all the way God had prepared it from the time of creation. In my simple faith I still believe that Our Lady guided the whole project. I am convinced She had her own plans for HER retreat.

Now I have heard many words about OLPH Retreat and Spirituality Center... but few more perceptive than those of one of our Priests from Spain. He told me reassuringly and with vision, "YOU ARE BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE." More than once in those seemingly endless nine years when everything was at a silent standstill, I remarked to close friends, "IT LOOKS LIKE MOSES WILL NEVER ENTER THE PROMISED LAND." But here we are.

The work of building, sustaining and strengthening the Church continues with each new generation and will never be completed until the Second Coming of Jesus. In the earliest days of the first century there was an overwhelming challenge to the Twelve and to men like Paul, Timothy and Titus to whom Paul wrote letters of support. To Titus he wrote, "YOU SHOULD PUT IN ORDER WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE" (Titus 1:5). Those words of guidance were basic then, and are just as basic after two millennia. So we have carefully planned to do so right here in Venice at OLPH Retreat. We are INDEED "planning for the future" to help today's believers and generations to come to grow in holiness and to work for justice, peace and brotherhood. With that in mind, our facilities will be available to ALL who are searching for a closer relationship to our God.

On your way in, I hope you noted the sign beside the entrance road which reads "IANUA COELI," Latin for GATE OF HEAVEN. This is one of Our Blessed Mother's titles in the age-old Litany of Loreto. It is in Latin, the traditional language of our Church, as well as in the vernacular. I also hope you noted that our lake is "THE LAKE OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT." Since the Eucharist is the central doctrine of our Catholic faith, it is theologically accurate to name a central lake by so beautiful a name. The two existing Villas are named for the parishes which gave them. One is St. Bernard (Holmes Beach). The second is St. Francis Xavier (Ft.

Myers). A third will be built in the near future from donations by Our Lady of Lourdes Parish (Venice).

Now,- precisely WHAT are our future plans? Well, as far as physical building is concerned, the site plans for twelve buildings are completed at this moment. All we have to do is tie into underground links all set in place. Those buildings will one day include a beautiful Chapel in which Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament will dwell personally at every hour of the day and night. It will be erected on the opposite shore to the right of the bridge spanning the Lake of the Blessed Sacrament. We have architectural drawings completed for six more villas with a total over-night capacity of 64 retreatants. Adjacent to the Anne Mayer Conference Center in which we are gathered there will one day be a dining hall.

I know in my deepest heart that as Jesus said in response to the amazing faith of a Roman Centurion, "MANY WILL COME FROM THE EAST AND THE WEST AND WILL FIND A PLACE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD" (Matt 8:11), to which I shall add, "right here on the shores of the Myakka." OLPH will be an ecumenical facility. We invite all who reverence the house of the Lord and are seriously searching for a deeper relationship with God. Even as Jesus responded to the two disciples who asked, "RABBI (WHICH MEANS TEACHER), WHERE DO YOU LIVE?" "COME AND SEE," he told them (John 1:38-39). Yes! We welcome all... and in addition to our highly successful days of prayer on the FIRST WEDNESDAY

OF EACH MONTH, as soon as we can catch our breath, we will schedule events with the DCCW, the K of C, Marriage Encounter, Engaged Encounter, Cursillo, Charismatic Prayer Groups, etc. We will also be sending out information to other denominations in the area as time and scheduling permits.

We like to recall that just as it is an oft' repeated proverb that it was FAITH AND THE NICKELS AND DIMES OF THE SERVANT GIRLS that built the world renowned St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, so it is the strong faith and amazing generosity of many that has built this retreat center here on the Myakka River. This is a retreat BY the people and FOR the people. We still have a long road to travel. And we are counting on the generous response of all to flesh out the remainder of our dream. TOGETHER WE CAN DO IT. Immensely grateful for all that you have done, I ask you to go a step further. Recall the challenge of Pope John Paul II to all Americans on the occasion of his recent visit to our country: NO HAND IS TOO POOR TO GIVE AND NONE IS TOO POOR TO RECEIVE. We will happily continue to GIVE you God's word and His Sacraments. May we ask you to continue to GIVE joyfully of your means. Again,- thank you to ALL of you for your faith in this project,- your hope for the future,- and your obvious love for God and the things of God which has made this day possible.