The First Courage Meeting

An excerpt from Chapter 3, “Cardinal Cooke’s Dream Becomes a Reality”
from *Courage: A Ministry of Hope* by James A. Beers

In the fall of 1980, some clergy and laymen in a small church at the southern tip of Manhattan were planning a meeting to usher in a unique new organization to assist Catholic homosexual men and women in their quest to remain chaste.

Their pastor, Monsignor Robert Brown, was a humble man who asked everyone to call him Father Brown. He made sure that everything was ready for the first meeting on Friday, September 26. Father Harvey arrived in New York on Thursday and stayed at the rectory as Monsignor Brown's guest. Father Harvey recalled that there were more chiefs than Indians present. In addition to himself and Father O'Brien, there were Fr. Groeschel, Dr. Wapnick, and a few other priests who arrived early for the eight o'clock meeting. Father Harvey has always stated that there were just five men at that first meeting. But Graveline and two other participants insist that there were at least ten men present that night. One group of four mean from New Jersey arrived together but never attended another meeting.

Most of the men had learned about the group through the Village Voice. Gary H., a 24-year-old art student, was an exception. Gary was living with his parents in a Westchester suburb and had received a letter from the Archdiocese of New York informing him of a group being organized for homosexual men striving to lead chaste lives. He had replied to the Chelsea post office box and received a response from Harvey G. (as Graveline would thereafter be known), dated July 20, 1980. The two men agreed to meet underneath the clock at Grand Central Station for the screening interview.

Gary recalled his train trip into the city was very stressful. He had butterflies in his stomach, and he was apprehensive. He kept asking himself, “What am I doing? I'm only twenty-four, and I'm never going to have sex again? I think that I should go back home." But he is still active with us today, and his artwork has enhanced our newsletters and flyers for years.

Gary calmed down when he met Harvey G. The two men talked during the twenty minute subway ride downtown to the Bowling Green station and the short walk to the church for the group's first meeting.

Many of the details of that first meeting are quite fuzzy. No minutes were taken, an important rule Courage continues to strictly enforce.

There was no formal agenda. When the men entered the rectory, they were invited to visit the upper church where they could pray before the Blessed Sacrament. Thus, a long standing tradition was begun. Many times at our annual conferences or bi-annual days of recollection, members will spend time before the tabernacle.

The men then proceeded to the conference room and took seats around the long table. Father Harvey briefly raised the points he would emphasize in future weekly meetings; namely, the Catholic Church's teachings on the truths of the faith, moral law, and the sacraments.

The busy commercial neighborhood surrounding the Seton shrine was deserted at that time of night. The few restaurants in the area were closed. After the meeting some of the men shared a subway ride uptown to Greenwich Village where they continued their fellowship over pizza at Emilio's and discussed the unique meeting that they had just attended. This post meeting gathering became another tradition.

The new group met again the following Friday, October 3, 1980. Not everyone returned but those who did were committed to the group. Additional traditions began at this second meeting. It was a First Friday, and Father Harvey celebrated Mass. For the next fourteen years, Mass was celebrated on the First Friday of every month for the New York group. Those who desired the sacrament of reconciliation were given the opportunity before the Mass began.

There was a short meeting before the Mass. Father Harvey continued the presentation of Catholic teaching. He distributed copies of *A Spiritual Plan to Redirect One's Life* which they read and discussed at the meetings. They would usually close with night prayer and join in singing "Salve Regina" before the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the main sanctuary.

These men were strangers who became friends and confidants. They could have gone to the gay bar that Friday evening, but they chose something different. They were impressed but was with what was being offered to them.

Read the rest of the story by ordering the book,
***Courage: A Ministry of Hope* by James A. Beers at Amazon.com.**