

Director's Corner
***In Memoriam* Peter Rudegeair, R.I.P.**
Rev. John F. Harvey, OSFS

My dear friend and close associate in the Apostolate of Courage, Peter Rudegeair, died in an automobile accident in the early hours of Saturday, December 15, 2007. In my sermon at the Funeral Mass for Peter, I described how we worked together as a team at the annual Conferences of Courage and EnCourage, in various American cities, and also in Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Now I want to share my thoughts with Courage and EnCourage members who knew him well. Over the years we were able to integrate our theological and pastoral approaches to persons with same-sex attractions (SSA). It all began about 10 years ago at a Courage Conference. In responding to questions at a particular session, Peter made reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in helping persons with SSA. Courage and EnCourage members, however, were not accustomed to hearing a clinical psychologist speak about the Holy Spirit. But Peter was deeply involved in the Charismatic Movement, making use of his musical talent at meetings. He was also a leader in the St. Joseph Foundation in Wynnewood, PA. This organization helps families in financial straits, and is now helping Karen Rudegeair and her four children (who range in age from 5 to 16 years old).

In the past 5 annual Conferences, Courage presented a Theological Track for priests, deacons and lay persons who participate in catechetics, peace and justice seminars, and various spiritual systems, including Courage and EnCourage. In the Theological Track I would present the moral position of the Church and the dynamics of Courage and EnCourage; Peter would explore the psychological roots of same-sex attractions and some of the therapeutic approaches he used. I took care of the moral and pastoral, while Peter elaborated on the psychological aspects. We fielded questions together.

Peter had a firm grasp of theological principles and I had a thorough background of experience in psychological questions. I sent many persons to him, knowing he would bring to his therapy a spiritual perspective in complete accord with authentic Catholic Teaching. He also sent persons to me to.

Previous to meeting Peter Rudegeair, I had worked for many years with Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons. For some time Peter had also worked with Dr. Fitzgibbons before establishing his own office. All three of us presented Catholic Teaching in an integrated way. As I said in the Funeral homily, Peter's first concern was his family. On the last day of each of our annual Conferences, he rose in

the middle of the night to fly to Philadelphia so he would be with his family at Mass and the rest of the day. His wife, Karen, homeschools their children.

On the last day of his life, he came home late for supper, because he was on the phone with a couple who needed advice concerning one of their adult children. This I learned from someone close to Peter. In my sermon at Peter's Funeral, I mentioned how he spent many hours during Courage meetings talking with members of Courage and EnCourage. This was his annual gift to our Courage and EnCourage Conferences. I had regular discussions with him concerning his method of therapy. He took patients where they were; he did not try to change their tendencies, but he brought them to the point where they saw their need to be chaste. If they were Catholic, he reminded them of the Sacraments while he selected the kind of therapy which would be best for the person. He often brought other members of the patients' families into his sessions with beneficial results for each patient. In a gentle way he helped his patient to accept the truth about one's condition. He rejoiced with a patient who had gained insight into her past relationship with her mother and now knew she was not homosexual. She left her same-sex partner and began to date, eventually becoming married. Yet, Peter never demanded of her that she seek to be heterosexual; nevertheless, he helped her to see the profound emptiness of same-sex relationships, thereby helping the woman to begin dating and to eventually marry. He prepared her to make the insight that she was meant to marry.

Peter had a profound understanding of the forms of same-sex attractions combined with a prayerful attitude of helping the patient to make his decisions for his future. During our visitations of Singapore and Hong Kong in 2004 and 2006, Peter was asked by a number of people for telephone therapy, which he was already doing in the United States. Many emails and letters came to our office expressing deep sorrow upon the loss of a friend; those were sent on to his wife, Karen. Then she made a request of Courage: she wants to have the New York Office of Courage consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I will see to it that this takes place. The closing Mass at the Courage Conference in Boston on August 10th, 2008 will be in memory of Peter Rudegeair, a therapist with the heart of a priest and a father. May the angels lead you to paradise.