

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

My name is Craig Meserole and I have been asked to write about the Christ Renews His Parish or CRHP (pronounced “chirp”) ministry. CRHP is a ministry for parishioners given by fellow parishioners. There are no special guest speakers, except for the ordinary men and women in our parish who want to share the love of God. Our goal is simply to improve the parish: one person at a time by reminding them of God’s love or helping them renew their love of God. It can even help them to be filled with the Spirit to the point that, they too, will want to share their love of God with others.

CRHP is a process that brings people closer to God by sharing our love of Him with fellow parishioners. The first step in the process is to attend a CRHP weekend. My first introduction to CRHP, was from my soulmate and wife, Claudia. She had already attended weekends at St. Williams and at SVdP.

I was baptized and confirmed at Easter in 1996--- here in Austin at St. Louis---the same year we were married. Since I am new to the Church and Claudia is a life-long Catholic, I have always turned to her when I had questions or I followed her example on how we should lead a Christian life. So when she returned home after her weekend at SVdP on fire with the Spirit, I knew it must have been a special weekend!

At this time, I was the type of Catholic who went to weekly Mass, put money in the collection basket, and tried to live a Christ-like life (or what I thought was a Christ-like life). Soon I began to notice how Claudia had changed, especially when it came to her involvement with SVdP. Before and after each Mass she would spend several minutes hugging and laughing with other women in our parish. She also started teaching RE. This was a big change, but what really got my attention was how she was handling everyday life. She was calmer, more at peace. She was turning her life over to Christ and it showed. I began to suspect I was missing something in my spiritual life.

The CRHP weekends are held every six months and as the next weekend was approaching, my wife began encouraging me to attend. Right away I started making excuses about why I did not want to go, but even to me, they did not make much sense. Two weeks before the next men's weekend I was on my way into SVdP to attend Mass, when a parishioner briefly caught my attention. He asked if I had heard of CRHP. I replied that I had so he asked me if I was ready to sign up. To get him to leave me alone, I said maybe after Mass with the intention of leaving through a different door so I could avoid him. The Holy Spirit had a different plan.

Mass for me is usually a great time and I always find myself at peace, but not this time. I could not concentrate and my mind was wandering. I could not sit still and could not understand why. So I began to pray for peace and this is when I heard the Spirit tell me it was time: "No more excuses---just sign up!" I remember very clearly to this day replying, "Fine, if that is what you want," very much the same way my children have responded to me when I am bugging them about something. As soon as I said this, I felt a great sense of peace. After Mass I signed up. It was one of the smartest things I have ever done and the weekend changed my life.

CRHP has reminded me of several things and has renewed my faith, not just in our Father, but also in my brothers and sisters of SVdP. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I have always known it takes many people to keep the parish running but I never understood WHY people do volunteer work. I suspected they may be trying to "earn" their way into Heaven, but now I know the truth: they love God and, because of that love, they also love their brothers and sisters. I had to experience this love firsthand before I could understand this very simple truth.

My CRHP weekend began at 7am at SVdP on a Saturday. I was greeted by a bunch of men and women I did not know but who were so joy-filled, I could not help but to wonder if someone had spiked the coffee! I was escorted into the church where a man I had never seen before hugged me with great enthusiasm and it was far from the last hug that weekend. I was spoiled the entire weekend. Everyone I ran

into asked me if I needed anything or how I was doing. I am not going to share any more details than I have already, because it is important for each person who is new to the CRHP process to experience God's love without preconceived ideas.

My life has changed because of my experiences with CRHP. I have learned to open my heart and to accept God's love. I am calmer and more at peace than any time in my life. My marriage has improved in ways I never expected. I have grown closer to my children and I have made many new friends. I have healed old wounds from my childhood and I no longer worry about anything (or at least I try not to) because I know, without a doubt, that God loves me, Christ is our Savior, and the Holy Spirit lives within me daily.

I can't and won't promise this will be the greatest weekend of YOUR life. Or I can't guarantee that it will be as life-changing for you as it has been for me. I WILL promise you that it can be very enjoyable. You will make some new friends and you will see the Holy Spirit do some amazing things.

By now you might have suspicions such as, "What do I have to do or give (up) or pay to go to one of these weekends?" Your time---we are asking for only 36 hours of your lifetime and an open heart. So, my brothers and sisters, if you like great food and you are willing to make new friends; or if you are wanting to make SVdP your parish; or if you would like to get away from the spouse and kids for the weekend, please come to connect or reconnect to the Holy Trinity; to experience God's love through others! I encourage you to sign up for a CRHP weekend. Many others and I are already praying for you. Claudia and I are in the directory so please call us if you want to hear more about our experiences, or stop by one of the sign-up tables after Mass if you have ANY questions.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to share with each of you, and may our Father give you the strength to say, "YES" to a possible life-changing opportunity.

Love, your brother in Christ,

Craig