





Comunità Cenacolo America

from the darkness to the Light A Hope Reborn

Comunità Cenacolo America, Inc. 1050 Talleyrand Ave, Jacksonville, FL 32206 www.hopereborn.org

*Our Lady of Hope Mary Immaculate
St. Maria Goretti Our Lady of Joyful Hope*

Our 20th Anniversary

Dear Family and Friends,

On the 20th anniversary of Comunita Cenacolo America, we can truly proclaim to the world that God's infinite and unfathomable mercy is greater than any weakness or sin of man. We have experienced the resurrection of many despairing, lacerated, and hopeless youth, who now experience the peace and joy of a life immersed in Jesus, our Savior and Healer! Families, spouses, and friends—whether churched or unchurched, believers or unbelievers—have been profoundly touched by this concrete experience of God's all-embracing joy and mercy!

OUR LADY OF HOPE *Journal entry - Albino*

REFLECTING ON OUR ARRIVAL TO FLORIDA, everything seems like a beautiful movie, in which the end doesn't seem possible because of how it began! The early times in Florida were difficult because we didn't understand American culture, we couldn't speak English, and we had a strict and rigid Community lifestyle. The American guys who entered just stayed a few days or weeks, and they left, calling us "crazy Italians." They couldn't understand why they couldn't watch TV, why we didn't have magazines and newspapers, why there wasn't ice in the Coca Cola, and why there wasn't a planned "recovery program." Even more, they definitely couldn't understand why we encouraged them to sacrifice, to develop discipline, and to pray! It was a never-ending battle!



OUR LADY OF HOPE TODAY



BEFORE

With strictly human thinking, we early missionaries—I the first among them—felt no hope to reach the Americans. We implored God in our moments of prayer, “Why did we come here?”

Experiencing constant disappointments in all our efforts, I remember several phone conversations with Mother Elvira. I continued to tell her that I wasn’t sure if Community Cenacolo was ready for America. She always told me, “The Lord wants us there, and you’ll stay there, even if only one guy remains in Community! We don’t measure results like the world does. It doesn’t matter to us how many guys we have in Community. What matters to us is life and your sacrifice and perseverance!”

Well, we persevered, because we spent endless hours praying the Rosary and adoring Jesus in our little chapel. Jesus, in His living and true presence in the Eucharist, was—and is—our greatest and true strength to press forward and persevere with God’s will!

MARY IMMACULATE *Journal entry*

TWO BUILDINGS SAT ON THE 37 ACRES, a trailer that was probably 20 years old and a house that was about 100 years old. The old house was uninhabited for years, except by homeless men, who lived there without electricity or running water—it was unimaginably disgusting inside!

The stench of the trailer, caked in filth, filled your nostrils when you entered. Inside and outside, garbage was everywhere, scattered all over the grounds even buried deep within the soil—just like the garbage within us, far deeper than anyone could imagine.

The physical conditions parallel our lives. Some of us have lived in disease and rat infested drug houses, or at least we visited them in search of the drugs. We didn’t care about living in filth and squalor, which mirrored—in only a small way—the evil in which our lives were immersed. Our inner mire was dirtier and deeper than our squalid surroundings. Some of us, however, still lived at home with all the comforts and conveniences that the family’s money could provide. Coming from affluence, we wore the latest styles and moved in upper class circles. Mother Elvira calls us “addicts of luxury.” Nonetheless, the interior stench of evil filled our nostrils, to the point that we were buried in the garbage of our own sin, trapped men, unable to escape.

The old house didn’t just need some cosmetic work; it needed to be redone from the inside out, just like us. The foundation of the house was weak, unable to support the house with the necessary stability and strength. It needed an enormous amount of work, and it was a slow, laborious, and arduous process to rebuild the foundation and the rest of the house. Something is missing for us at the very foundation,



MARY IMMACULATE BEFORE



MARY IMMACULATE CHAPEL TODAY

which is incapable of providing us with the security, courage, and strength to say “no” to the destructive forces that prey upon our fragile character.

The old house had holes in the walls and floor, going straight to the outside. One window frame, without a window, was covered with a mattress pad (top left). Holes were stuffed with papers and rags. We, too, tried to fill the holes, the emptiness within, with things that would never work: alcohol, drugs, sex, and materialism. Like the papers, rags, and mattress pad, they fell apart and decayed, and the gaping hole inside us remain, always growing in magnitude and severity. Substances and lust never can fill the interior void. They weren’t made to fill the heart of man. Only the merciful love of God can fill to abundance. Yes, just like the old house, we need to be made new, from the inside out. Our foundation has to be constructed on the Father’s compassionate love and infinite forgiveness. Our worth and identity must be built on the joyful reality that we are His children, cherished little ones of our tender Father.

Thanks be to God, the work of transformation began in us, not only in the old house and trailer! Because of its disastrous condition, we had to strip the trailer of its contents and clean, clean, clean, prior to moving in. We, too, need the deep cleansing of the Holy Spirit, not superficial work. Continual cleansing with truth, sacrifice, and self-denial, slowly removes the lies from our heart, the obsession with sensory pleasure, and the selfishness that consumed us.

For us to change from men who seek constant comfort and pleasure, spending our lives avoiding any effort or struggle, we have to learn to accept discomfort and difficulties. We must even learn to say “yes” to the suffering that God allows in our lives, accepting the Cross of Jesus Christ as a gift from a

Savior, whose love for us put no limits on His suffering. We are struggling to become men who authentically trust that the Cross yields interior freedom, generosity, and blessing. We want to become witnesses that the world’s promises bring death, but the gift of the Cross of Jesus Christ brings life!

When a new Community house is opened, the tradition is that the first room to be prepared is the chapel. The first person to be welcomed and the first one to welcome us is Jesus. Maybe the kitchen, dining room, and bedrooms are not yet ready, or even are in disrepair, but we must have the chapel. It is indispensable! You can be okay if you have to stand to eat, or if you have to sleep on the floor, but without Jesus you cannot have peace and joy in your heart. Now we have a beautiful little chapel, a home for the Eucharist, source of all life for each one of us. We welcome Jesus’ transforming love, as we pray, sing, and adore Him in the Blessed Sacrament.

We thank the Father who is truly “rich in mercy,” Jesus our Savior, whose heart always seeks the lost and desperate sinner, and the Holy Spirit who orchestrates miracles which man cannot imagine! We thank Bishop Robert Baker, whose heart and will determinedly sought God’s saving work for the most rejected in society! We thank our Mother Elvira, whose “yes” to the Father has given new life to countless desperate youth and their families!

We pray for you and all those you love!
Comunita Cenacolo America

Festival of Life St. Augustine, FL Oct. 25-27

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OUR LADY OF JOYFUL HOPE



ST. MARIA GORETTI

