

Community life inspires ‘miracle man’

Redemptorist Father John Murray is convinced he’s a walking miracle.

After suffering a fall that left him paralyzed from the chest down, the former pastor of St. Mary in Annapolis and St. Wenceslaus in Baltimore began praying for Blessed Francis X. Seelos – a former St. Mary’s pastor – to intercede on his behalf. As noted in this upcoming story in *The Catholic Review*, Father Murray is now walking on his own and will soon receive his first priestly assignment since the 2010 accident.

After spending a morning with Father Murray in preparation for the article, I was struck by how the priest was inspired by his fellow Redemptorists. As he underwent rehabilitation at Stella Maris nursing home in Timonium, the priest lived with infirm and elderly members of his religious order and, at 63, was the youngest priest among them at the St. John Neumann Residence – a wing for retired Redemptorists. “You are surrounded by your confreres,” Father Murray told me. “You get to pray together. You get to eat together. You get to just walk the corridors with them and sit down in our community room – and you get to celebrate Mass.”

It was quite different from a former facility in which Father Murray lived after the accident – one in which he could sometimes go a day without seeing another person besides the medical staff, he said.

There were 18 Redemptorists living at Stella Maris with Father Murray, 13 of whom spent most of their priesthood in foreign missions.

“They were in the Dominican Republic and Brazil eating rice and beans down there with no electricity large parts of the day,” Father Murray said. “To see how they sacrificed and now, at the age of 85 and 90, they are still going strong – it really touched me.”

Five Redemptorists died while Father Murray lived at Stella Maris. He watched his brother priests gather in the room of dying clerics, staying with them and praying with them before and after they died.

“It was just so touching,” he remembered.

Father Murray noted that the St. John Neumann Residence could not be more perfectly named. St. John Neumann had been a diocesan priest in New York in the 19th century. He became depressed because he was often alone, Father Murray said. The priest joined the Redemptorists because one of its great charisms is

community life.

“John Neuman realized he needed the support of a community,” Father Murray. “That was one of the things I most learned since my accident – the importance of community living and how community living for Redemptorists brings new life. It certainly brought me life.”