

Brother Joseph Calabrese

Personal Data *birth: 1/10/18; baptism: 2/18/45*
Ordinations *elder: 10/16/55; evangelist: 5/4/58; apostle: 4/23/89*
Leadership *GMBA Vice-President: 1950-55, 1957-60; Ohio District President: Quorum of Seventy Vice-President; Foreign Missions Chairman; India Coordinator; GC Correspondent*
Mission Work *India, Italy, and Kenya*
Publications *"Divine Continuity", "Questions and Answers", autobiography – "Missionary Endeavors at Home and Abroad"*

Joseph Calabrese was only four years old when his parents, Brother Antonio and Sister Theresa Calabrese, were baptized into the Church. They were charter members of the Lorain, Ohio Branch. His father asked for his baptism at a conference in Youngstown, Ohio and his mother was the first to request baptism in Lorain.

Young Joseph attended the Lorain Branch regularly as a young person, but became inactive in his teenage years. He married Victoria Thomas, sister of current president of the Church, Dominic Thomas, on April 6, 1937, and she was baptized in July of 1944. Their marriage has been blessed with five children: Bonnie, Dennis, Cheryl, Candace, and Joel.

Brother Joe asked for his baptism while in a hospital. In his own words:

I knew as a young person attending church that someday I wanted to be baptized; however, I wanted to do it at my convenience, and definitely before I would die. During World War II, I had a brother in the service in South Dakota who wanted me to be his best man at his wedding. I did make the trip, along with his fiancée, and was present at their marriage. Upon returning home to Lorain by train, I became very sick. When I arrived home, I was put into a hospital with acute appendicitis. It was then that I began to fear death; so, for the first time, I requested that my wife call an elder to anoint me. Soon Brother Alfred Dominico came into my room. I said to him, "make it good". He smiled and said it was up to God. While he was praying, my whole life came before me as a motion picture. What I saw was not good. I was sure I could not go to heaven on my past. As I was seeing this, the spirit of repentance fell upon me when his prayer (which seemed to take forever) was concluded. The first thing I said was, "I want to be baptized." The surgery was successful and 33 days later I was baptized on February 18, 1945.

A Man of Action

It didn't take Brother Joe long before he became very active in church activities, which initially focused on the young people. This eventually led to his election as vice president of the GMBA. Over the years he has been exemplary in his commitment to the Church and the Lord, involving himself at every level. He was ordained an elder on October 16, 1955, and an evangelist on May 4, 1958.

He has fulfilled many other responsibilities in the Church over the years – too many to record in this brief writing (some of which are listed above). As President of the General Church Board of Trustees, he helped coordinate the building of the World Conference Center in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. In addition to the above, he was responsible for establishing the office of General Church Correspondent, which he held for 15 years, and was also responsible for the printing of William Bickerton's Testimony.

Brother Joseph Calabrese

A New Pair of Shoes

Brother Joe has been blessed with many experiences over the years. In one dream, a man of God gave him a new pair of shoes, as well as his own shoes, which were battered and worn. He promised him he would try to do what he could with these shoes to spread love, kindness and goodness to all people. This prepared him for the calling he was to receive into the Quorum of Twelve at the April Conference of 1989. He, along with Brother Paul Benyola, was called before the apostles. While questioning them, the power of God came upon them so strongly that no one could utter a word. With this as a confirmation, the apostles voted unanimously to recommend them to the priesthood for ordination.

On April 23, at the World Conference Center, our brothers were set apart to be ordained. Brother Paul Palmieri washed Brother Joe's feet and Brother Dominic Thomas ordained him into the Quorum of Twelve. As Brother V. James Lovalvo was shaking Brother Joe's hand, he spoke the Word of the Lord pronouncing God's blessing upon him.

Trial By Fire

Brother Joe's faith has been severely tested over the years. One of those tests came by way of affliction, as Brother Joe recalls:

About the year of 1965, I began to have eye problems. With my eyesight gradually diminishing, it became necessary for me to change my lens more often than normal. I was in my 47th year, an age where vision normally begins to change, but my vision changes were too often. Finally, the optometrist said I should go to the Cleveland Clinic and have an ophthalmologist check me, which I did. The result was, "You are going blind." This shocked me terribly, but I trusted in God. The doctor said I had inward cataracts, which were very unusual at my age, and surgery could help but no promises for improvement. I refused to have surgery. I trusted in God and was anointed many times, but nothing changed. In fact, Brother Paul D'Amico came from Lockport, New York to anoint me, feeling that God directed him to come. He anointed me and God blessed him with a powerful prayer; but again, no immediate results. A young brother who was with him, Sal Azzinaro Jr., had a vision while Brother Paul prayed of a crown on my head with seven stars. While there was no clear interpretation, Brother Paul said that seven was a perfect number in scripture and that he felt in due time God would take care of me. Shortly afterwards, Sister Carmela D'Amico had a vision in which she saw me in the hospital, and then she saw Christ come in and perform the surgery on my eyes. Hearing this, I consented to the operation.

Early in 1967, I had surgery on my right eye. In those days they would put sandbags on each side of the head to prevent you from moving it. During the first day of recovery, I spoke to a patient who was in the same room with me about the Church, even though I could not move my head. In the evening, I was experiencing intense pain. When the doctor examined me, he found that my eye was hemorrhaging about 75% and feared I would lose it. In the morning, my wife came to see me, and I told her I needed an elder. Brother Dominic Thomas happened to come with her so he immediately anointed me and the hemorrhaging stopped, as did the pain. Praise God!

A couple of days later, I had preached the Gospel again to one of the patients in my room. That night, I began to have nightmares (no doubt the devil was angry with me for preaching the Gospel.) In one of the

Brother Joseph Calabrese

nightmares, I tore my bandages off and started to gouge my eyes with my knuckles. I screamed and cried. I thought surely I had done severe damage. Once again after being examined, the doctor said all was well. I was released after 10 days. The male nurse who was assigned to me said in 20 years he had never witnessed such a miraculous healing. I gave him my testimony as well.

One year later, I underwent surgery on my left eye. Once again the Lord came to my rescue. After surgery, I had hiccups that I could not stop. This was dangerous because it could break the stitches in my eye and cause hemorrhaging. Precisely at that time, Brother Rocco Biscotti came and anointed me and the hiccupping stopped.

For years, I wore very thick glasses. The work in India had already started. While I was able to be mobile and get around, I prayed I could do better. I had heard that progress was being made in the ophthalmology field by inserting implant lenses. The Lord led me to another ophthalmologist as the Cleveland Clinic refused to help me because of my bad history with the first surgeries. In 1985, I had implants put in both eyes, which were very successful. The doctor still to this day tells his nurses what a miracle I am. Since then, my vision has been 15/20 consistently. Praise God!

Years later, he would be tested again and, once again the source of the problem was his eyes, as Brother Joe explains:

In the year 1973, while in Church, I had a nosebleed that would not stop. I was taken to the hospital emergency room, but the doctor could not help even though he gave me medicine to stop it. I had an aneurysm over my left eye, which they could not reach even to cauterize it. While I was being cared for in my room by a doctor and nurse, another person, who I thought then was another doctor, came directly to me, passing the other two people. He began to speak to me, saying, "I understand you are a minister." My first thought was, "Don't worry who I am, just help me." I was polite and nodded my head yes. Again, he said, "If you are a minister, then you should know what is written in Romans 8:28."

Again, I wondered, "Why all the questions, just help me." But again I was polite and shrugged my shoulder, "No, I do not know." He persisted. He said, "It says all things will work together for good for those who love and serve God" and then told me not to worry. He then left the room the way he came in. Later, I was given to understand that he was a messenger of God.

I complained to God. Why? Why is all this happening to me? Suddenly, I either passed out from the medicine or fell asleep. The next thing I remember was that I was having an experience. I saw Jesus come into my room. He entered through the ceiling. Without saying anything, he took me by my hand and we went through the ceiling into the sky, leaving my body in the bed. We traveled, his hand in mine, side by side in the sky – like going through time. I could see the stars and galaxies. Finally, after a period of time, we landed on the ground, and I noticed it was at the beginning of time. I knew I was witnessing Cain killing Abel. Jesus spoke to me and said, "Did you see that?" I, of course, said, "Yes." I then received the answer to my question, "Why was all this affliction happening to me?" Jesus said, "The same spirit that did this is trying to do the same thing to you, and not only to you, but, from the beginning of time, to prophets, apostles, and all men of God." He further said, "I want to tell you more. Be careful of what people say are innocent games such as the Ouiga board, witchcraft, sorcery, and astrology." I then saw Joseph Smith shot to death. Jesus then put His hand on my shoulder and told me not to worry; He would be with me. I then awoke back in my

Brother Joseph Calabrese

bed in the hospital.

I realized I had received a most amazing "out of body" experience. I was also told that I didn't wake up until three days later and during that time several different elders had come to anoint me. I praise God for the great love He has bestowed upon my family and me.

More of his personal experiences can be read in the publication, *Missionary Work at Home and Abroad*. Undoubtedly, Brother Joe has been one of the most active missionaries this Church has had in recent years. In 1981, along with Brother Alvin Swanson, he organized the Church in India. He has also gone on missionary work to many parts of the United States, as well as to several foreign countries. He continues to be an active participant in the missionary work of the Church and made his tenth trip to India in January of 2000. God has surely used him to touch thousands of people throughout the world with love, kindness, and goodness. He will long be remembered for his unwavering commitment to fulfill Christ's great commission to take the Gospel to all nations.