

He traded the green grass of Berks County for the concrete and grit of New York City. At home, he was used to an occasional car, but more likely, tractors and farm equipment.

Now he deals with traffic congestion and never sees anything related to agriculture. He makes absolutely no money and he couldn't be happier. Serenity is reflected in his seemingly persistent smile and quiet voice despite acknowledging, "literally, New York City was the very last place I wanted to go."

For Br. Jeremiah Myriam, formerly John Shryock and a 1997 Boyertown Area High School graduate, changing his address from Barto to Harlem required a leap of faith after following a long and winding road that led him to join the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal five years ago. He took his final vows July 29.

"It's like a wedding day. I vowed to live my life this way, emulating St. Francis of Assisi. It's the icing on the cake. The days of discernment are over. It's a very joyous and humbling time," Br. Jeremiah said. However, his journey isn't completely over: he has started studying for the priesthood and will spend four years in the Franciscan seminary.

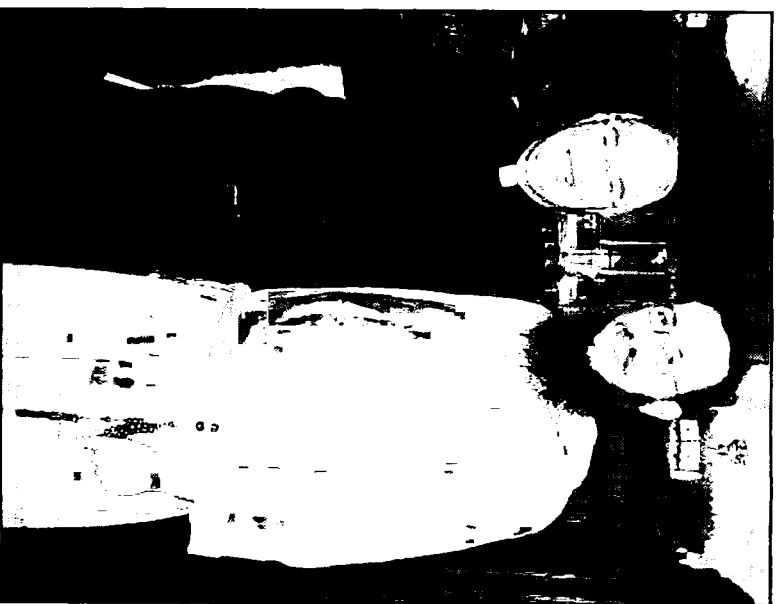
In retrospect, he believes his journey to the religious life started when he was an altar boy. "I remember sitting up there on the altar with the priest and thinking how cool everything was and wondering about the saints whose pictures are in church. But I fought it," he said.

Br. Jeremiah took a year off after high school before attending Kutztown University, where he received a bachelor of arts degree in philosophy and professional writing. During that year off he said he realized he wasn't living the faith, he was distracted.

"I was involved in bands, I played bass and guitar, and there were a lot of parties. This created a deep emptiness and I felt it," he said.

That year two things impacted his life — his mother, Kathy Shryock, developed Alzheimer's Disease and he took a cross-country trip with two friends. "We were all searching for meaning in our lives, for truth. During that trip I had a moral awakening. I realized I needed to change. I had an interior awakening and it was the beginning of my conversion to God," he said.

After the trip he began classes at Kutztown University and started going to church when no one else was in church. Br. Jeremiah recalled, "I started to read Scripture and pray. I devoured books on the faith. It was during that time that I had the real experience of Jesus. Jesus became real for me and I knew He was everything I was searching for."



Br. Jeremiah Myriam with his pastor, the Rev. Msgr. Edward J. Coyle.

sary daily and living the faith. "This became the most important part of my life."

All the time he remained focused on and excelled in his college courses. During his junior year the idea of a religious vocation surfaced. "It was kind of scary," he said. "I felt unworthy of such a vocation but I started to actively discern."

He spent time at Franciscan and Trappist monasteries. "Ever since I was little I was attracted to the poor and underprivileged. I wanted to live with them and help them," he said. These lifelong desires steered him toward the Franciscans.

"I remember the day, it was three weeks after 9/11. I was surfing the Web looking for information on Franciscans and I found it by accident," he said. "The first Web site on the list was for the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. It was everything I was looking for. They were visible with the habit and very faithful. They lived

poverty seriously and had a deep, prayerful life...

The Franciscan Friars of the Renewal have two main focuses: hands-on working with the poor and evangelization. They run soup kitchens, take food and clothing to the poor, and work with kids in gangs. They also preach around the world, such as at youth retreats, schools and parish missions.

They also go to abortion clinics every Saturday and remind people of the dignity of life. Those days are hard as well as fulfilling, said Br. Jeremiah. Usually they have a couple of women change their mind about having an abortion, but they are also harassed.

"One of the things I love the most is speaking to people about how much God loves them and calling people back to Him," Br. Jeremiah said.

The 28-year-old took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. He lives a simple, austere life emulating St. Francis of Assisi while being obedient to the Church and not distracted by female companionship.

His day typically starts at 5 a.m. and includes 4 to 4.5 hours of prayer, such as praying the Liturgy of the Hours, Mass, Eucharistic adoration, Rosary, Scripture and spiritual reading, and personal/private meditation before the Eucharist. The rest of his day is spent studying in the seminary.

When Br. Jeremiah became a novice in the order, he had the option of keeping his name or changing it. He chose to be known as Jeremiah Myriam. He chose Jeremiah after the prophet who as a young man tried to run away from God's call to lead a prophet's life and because it reflects Br. Jeremiah's desire to preach the word of God. He selected Myriam, which is the Hebrew spelling for Mary, because of the Blessed Mother's impact on his life.

"I'm convinced she brought me to this vocation," he said. Plus, with his mother being sick, Mary knows all about suffering, and his father, John Shryock, has a devotion to Mary. "There were pictures of Mary everywhere in the house when we were growing up."

He also credits the Rev. Msgr. Edward J. Coyle, his Pastor at Most Blessed Sacrament, Bally, with helping him make his decision to become a Friar. "He has such a joyful, humble spirit about him and he's been very supportive," said Br. Jeremiah. He also feels blessed to have the complete support of his family. "Not all brothers have the support of their families."

The Franciscan Friars of the Renewal was started in 1987. It has 110 members and is growing. More information about the group can be found at www.franciscanfriars.com. Br. Jeremiah can be reached at St. Leopold Friary, 259 Nepperhan Ave., Yonkers, NY 10701.