

= Richard Withers =

Brother Richard Scott Withers (born 1955) is an American consecrated hermit . In 1974 , Withers converted to Catholicism and was baptized ; shortly after , he started to live a religious life . In 1989 , Withers and Sister Margaret McKenna moved to inner city Philadelphia and founded New Jerusalem Laura , a drug treatment center . Withers petitioned the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to become a consecrated hermit several times but was rejected . In 2001 , Withers was consecrated as a hermit by Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua , the Archbishop of Philadelphia . He was the first hermit to be consecrated in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia . Withers lives in a hermitage , a converted rowhouse , in the city of Philadelphia where he spends most of his time in prayer .

= = Early life = =

Withers was born in California 's San Fernando Valley . He had seven siblings and his father was a mechanical engineer . Neither of his parents were practicing Catholics during his childhood . His father had been raised Catholic but then " lapsed " . Instead , he was raised culturally Jewish according to the faith of his mother . When Withers was eight , his family moved to Cherry Hill , New Jersey . In 1974 , he had an encounter with a group of Catholic activists at the bicycle repair shop where he worked , which caused him to convert to Catholicism and be baptized . The same year , Withers left home for nearby Camden , New Jersey , to live in and repair abandoned row houses .

= = Religious life = =

After his baptism , Withers lived in a loosely affiliated religious community . While there , Withers almost got married but decided that he wanted to live a religious life instead . In 1984 , he took private vows of " poverty , chastity , and obedience " and became a hermit . Before taking his vows , Withers had looked into several religious orders , but he could not find one that he felt compatible with . Passionate about the spirituality of the Desert Fathers , he and Sister Margaret McKenna debated about " Where is the desert today ? " Deciding it was in the abandoned inner cities , in 1989 they moved into an abandoned row house that they began restoring , continuing their work even when their tools were regularly stolen by drug addicts . There , they founded New Jerusalem Laura , a treatment center for drug addicts .

Two years later , in 1991 , Withers bought a derelict rowhouse from the city of Philadelphia for \$ 1 and parted ways with McKenna . This would become his hermitage . He fixed the building , which lacked doors , windows , or a working roof and then went on to build furniture for it by himself . After the 1983 revision of Canon 603 , the option of being a consecrated hermit while independent of the system of religious orders had been permitted . In 1995 , Withers attempted to be consecrated by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia but was rejected . In 2001 , Withers was finally approved and consecrated as a hermit by Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua and took his public vows . Withers was the first hermit to be consecrated by the Archdiocese .

= = = Life as a hermit = = =

As a hermit , Withers lives in solitude . He does not own a car or television ; he gets his news from the people around him and gets around on a bicycle that he found , broken , on the side of the road . Though he has an open @-@ door policy for people that come to visit him , he himself visits family only twice a year . He does have a computer , which he uses to keep in touch with other hermits via email . To earn his food and clothing allowance , which amounts to less than \$ 5 @, @ 500 per year , Withers makes pottery to sell and works one day a week for a scientific @-@ instrument company . At the end of each year , he donates any funds that remain to charity .

Withers wakes up at 5 AM and then fills his day with prayer and chores , following his rule of life . He prays for 4 ½ hours each day . Withers claims that " it 's in the solitude that I hear God best " .