

THE **New Wine** PRESS

Volume 26 No. 4 • December 2017





Let us serve God with holy joy.

-St. Gaspar del Bufalo, founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood

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The Society of the Precious Blood is a fraternal community of priests and brothers founded by St. Gaspar in 1815. Bonded through charity by a promise of fidelity, we are prayerfully motivated by the spirituality of the precious blood of Jesus Christ to serve the needs of the Church as discerned through the signs of the times and in the light of the Gospel.

The Kansas City Province—incorporated members, covenanted companions, and candidates—united in prayer, service and mutual support, characterized by the tradition of its American predecessors, are missionaries of these times with diverse gifts and ministries. In a spirit of joy, we strive to serve all people—especially the poor—with care and compassion, hope and hospitality.

The New Wine Press seeks to remain faithful to the charism of our founder, St. Gaspar, and the spirituality of the Blood of Christ with its emphasis on reconciliation, renewal and refounding. We accept and encourage unsolicited manuscripts and letters to the editor.

THE New Wine PRESS

Missionaries of the Precious Blood
Kansas City Province

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The Price of Freedom

by Fr. Richard Bayuk, C.P.P.S., Editor

The United States is flooded with guns. Perhaps over 300 million. We are free to stockpile firearms of almost any type. Reasonable steps to address the violence caused by guns are vigorously fought against by powerful lobbies for gun manufacturers. It's the Second Amendment. One of our "freedoms." In fact, after the slaughter in Las Vegas one prominent talking head stated, "This is the price of freedom." Just 34 days later, 26 people were murdered in church in Texas. Again, the price of freedom. But I fear it has become the freedom to not give a darn. A few tweets about prayers for the victims and then on with life. Really caring about this would require a commitment to solve the problem. A very serious problem we have with gun violence. (One definition of "mass shooting" is an event where at least four people are shot, and that happens every single day in our country.)

In the Kansas City Province's *Corporate Stance Against Gun Violence* we state: "Present laws making it possible for uncontrolled and unlimited access to weapons and ammunition of any amount and any type to not foster a culture of life. Local, state and national legislators must pass reasonable laws which will curb the culture of violence tearing apart the fabric of our nation."

A Quinnipiac poll in early November showed that by 95-4%, Americans favor universal background checks. The highest percentage ever. It indicated broad support for other gun reforms too. This poll was taken right after the Texas church massacre. So far it has been mostly crickets in Washington, as always. At times, it feels like a lost cause to me. We have a crazed love affair with guns, and there are many who will absolutely resist even a conversation about measures that might—in their mind—restrict what they see as an unrestricted right to bear arms.

Last year, the Missouri Legislature passed a law (overriding the veto of the governor) that makes it legal for state residents to carry concealed weapons, in public, without a permit, criminal background check or firearms training. I guess things like permits, background checks, and training restrict our freedom. In my home state of Wisconsin, a law was passed recently that allows children of any age to hunt with a firearm while accompanied by an adult. (However, you can't operate a boat until age 12, with adult supervision, and you need to be 15-and-a-half to get a driver's permit.) The NRA encouraged support of this bill without any amendments.

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New Life

by Fr. Mark Miller, C.P.P.S.

The Season of Advent is a time of anticipation, of cleaning house, so as to make room for a Savior. This “cleansing” takes on many different forms, from receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation to ending a habit which we know is not healthy or life-giving. It is also a time of introspection, to become aware of any obstacles that constantly get in the way of deepening our relationship with the Lord. It is a time of preparation for something or someone “new.”

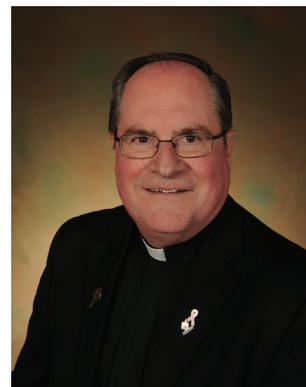
There are several images which have been used to describe the “spirit” of Advent. One is that of a bird making a nest to lay its eggs. The bird goes about its work with a determination but also a diligence to make sure the nest is suitable for the “new life” to be born in it. Another image is that of parents who are expecting a child and the many different aspects which go into their preparation, knowing that this “new life” is going to change their whole world. No matter what image one uses, the season of Advent is indeed about “new life” waiting to be born within us.

We as a missionary community have committed ourselves to be “re-created” so as to embrace our mission of hospitality, reconciliation, and renewal for the sake of the Kingdom in a way that will speak more clearly to our world of today. How this “re-creation” will take place has not yet been revealed, but it will be revealed if we are open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As in any re-creation, there will be changes, there will need for new structures, there will be an invitation to look at our mission in a new way while at the same time being faithful to our charism and spirituality. We will have to deal with our fears, but also allow our hopes and dreams to move us forward into whatever this “new life” will be.

However, this will not be done in a vacuum. We have our history, we have the witness of those who have brought “new life” in the past, and we have our spirituality and charism to guide us. There may be perceived obstacles along the way, but they do not need to deter us from pursuing a more vibrant and energized direction.

There has been a desire and even some conscious work on creating Mission Houses, recognizing that they will likely take new forms. There seems to be a desire to live in community, but how that would be expressed is not so clear. There seems to be a desire to enter into new ministries, especially ministering to those on the margins of society and sometimes even the margins of the Church. The “cry of the blood” seems to be heard on many levels in our world. Within our younger members,

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A Holy Visitation – the God-Bearer & Cousin Elizabeth

by *Amicus Tren Meyers*

*Remembering Companion Mary Meyer Bockelman
(1929-2017)*

Can't you just picture the pregnant teenaged Blessed Mary being welcomed by her older cousin Elizabeth? As the "God-Bearer," she not only carried our Savior within her but also a bundle of questions, fears, and excitement. At this most critical time she sought out a dear cousin-friend to spill forth her heart and be enfolded into a home of unconditional love. She stayed there for three months.

I too was blessed to have such a cousin in Mary Bockelman. Her dad and my grandpa were brothers. Her mom and my grandma were cousins. Great Aunt Maggie, her mother, had a very deep, humble, and welcoming spirituality. The Precious Blood priests who came to serve the parish in Bahner, Missouri would often walk over to the simple Meyer farm home just across the field from the church. They fed and hugged on many a community member, offering a space for "holy visitation."

So many times, I traveled the hill country to see this dear cousin-friend in her home, and more recently, in nursing homes. We talked long and often over the phone. I have cherished memories of sitting on her and John's couch and at their dinner table. A number of you have done the same. Mary, who had a lot of Martha from the scriptures in her, would run around making sure you had everything you needed. She would dart around with her questions and her energy, forever interested in how you were doing. She also had amazing Mary (Martha's sister) and Elizabeth qualities—capable of listening carefully and deeply, always sensing and supporting your soul.

All my memories of Mary involve laughing, eating, hugging, praying, and crying. How she loved to laugh! And she was someone you could trust and confide in. When I was Mary and John's pastor in the 1980s, I would sometimes drag into their home weary, trying not to let on that I was concerned about anything. Yet I knew she could read my energy. Without prying, she cared for my soul as she served food and affection while teasing out laughter sprinkled with seeds of encouragement and acceptance. There were times after I left the community

that I called her grieving or lonely. Mary could hold a tearful heart in the most tender and healing way. She would say "Just hand it over to Jesus, Tren," and I would say "How do you just do that Mary? You make it sound so simple!" That ability to trust Christ was so woven into her being. Like a very patient spiritual director, she prayed with me and loved me into it. A holy visitation.



When her husband died a few years back, I wrote in the *New Wine Press* that in his presence I often experienced "God with skin on." I am obviously biased, but I have known few people in my life who had that "God with skin on" presence more than dear Mary. I know she has been that for some of our members and Companions—and so many others who traveled to her home to lay out their heart, or just visit.

It seems rare to grow up in our country without some racial bias, yet I detected very little in my cousin. At one point, she fell in love with an immigrant family from Central America and later sold the old Meyer home place farm to them. Mary was completely shocked and saddened by the reaction of some of the locals. She was focused on Christ in the other, not their country of origin or skin color.

Mary would mail to us blessed palms, Lourdes water, and photocopied prayer cards. We sent her boxes of rosaries to give away. When non-Catholics showed curiosity, she gifted them as well and then taught them to pray the rosary—as only she could! She loved to send holiday gifts. After the singing Santa Billie Bass, there was the red stuffed animal that danced while singing "I can't get enough of your love, baby" with a deep Barry White-like voice! Now that's a typical "Mary" Christmas gift you never forget!

Not everyone seemed to understand or "get" who Mary was. Her smoky tinted eyeglass lens attempted to conceal her crossed eyes. She might "invade your space," offering more than ample affection. Not everyone felt comfortable with her kind of warmth or manner of fast speaking. Some were not sure how

to be around her. If you engaged her or she engaged you, you had to be prepared to be loved and loved on, plain and simple. Sometimes I wasn't able to take it all in either. Over time, I learned to relax into her unique ways of being a God-Bearer and Elizabeth-like, a lover of souls, a person intent on offering the "home" of generative care and joy. She believed in you, even when you weren't sure how to believe. Her sole focus was to love.

Many of you know that Mary loved the C.P.P.S. with all her heart and soul. She had an uncanny way of sensing things among the members and was often right on target. She prayed for the community as one prays for blood relation. Incredibly proud to be a Companion, she held a deep devotion to St. Gaspar, praying all the C.P.P.S. prayers daily. Whenever we talked, she would inquire about a great many members—"How is such and such? How is their cancer treatment? Do you think he likes his new assignment? I just really love Fr. or Br. or Companion such and such, don't you just love them?"...and on and on. She loved you. She loved us.

Mary, the God-Bearer, was pregnant and generous with Divine energy. Like the pregnant Elizabeth, she provided a safe and trusting space in a simple but never flashy way. To use the scriptural words, I think she was one whose soul glorified the Lord and had a spirit that rejoiced in God our Savior. Christ manifested mercy and loving care through her and mighty were His deeds performed through her. Mary was not attached to things, but she was very attached to people. She did what she did and was who she was completely anchored in fervent prayer. How she loved to pray and lived to pray! The fruit of that prayer spilled out and took root all over the place. Though she and John had no children, her life and home was a "spiritual way station" for so many relatives and friends. Perhaps Mary has some things to teach us all about being a good friend, community member, companion, amicus—or even someone's actual cousin or relative.

Thank you, dear Mary, for living up to your name-sake. It does not surprise me you died on her feast day of Assumption. I now imagine cousin Mary at a big kitchen table, easily tickling out a hearty laugh from Jesus, Gaspar, Mary, Elizabeth and more than a few of our deceased members and Companions. "Blessed is she who has believed the Lord would fulfill His promises in her!" (Luke 1) We miss you, dear Mary.

Please visit us often and help guide our Community forward—as we carry the Divine within! ✦

Leadership, continued from page 3

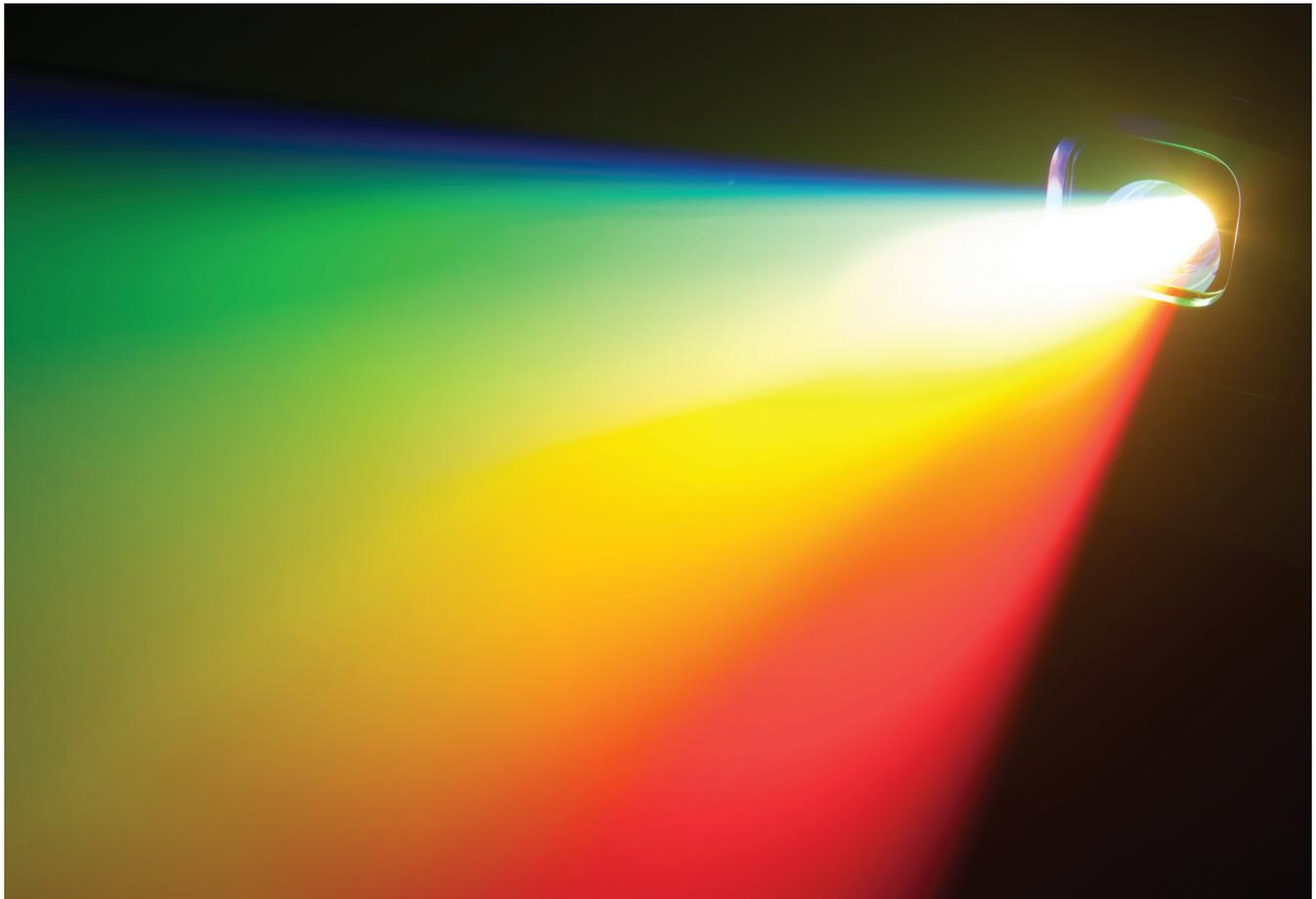
there seems to exist new hopes and dreams for the future. How do we foster and encourage them to follow these hopes and dreams without stifling them with past commitments?

And then, we have today the reality of our Companions who desire to participate not only in our spirituality but also in our ministries. How do we empower them to realize that they are indeed co-workers with us in the vineyard of the Lord? Many of them are trained and skilled in diverse professions and ministries. They are seeking ways to use those gifts for the sake of the Kingdom under the banner of the Precious Blood.

In addition, we have our Volunteers who share in our spirituality and mission, but only in a temporary commitment. Is it possible to have this variety of involvement and recognize that not all who live our charism and spirituality need to be permanently committed to the mission? The Amici [former members] have been asking many questions over the years as to how they are seen as co-workers in the vineyard. Many of their questions have never been answered to their satisfaction. Some of them have walked with us many years in formation and community life and ministry.

As we move forward, we are talking about how to include all those who are motivated by the Precious Blood. They are all voices of the thousand tongues that Gaspar dreamed of. These various groups are mentioned in our General Statutes and we are encouraged to include them in our spirituality. Could they also share more deeply in our ministries? Or as Pope John Paul II wrote, "Many Institutes have come to the conclusion that their charism can be shared with the laity. The laity are therefore invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes."

There will be many questions along the way, and Advent is the season for questions. "How can this be?" asked Mary. We may even think we are the voice "crying in the wilderness." May this Season of Advent be a time for a new awareness as we move into this "new creation." ✦



Higher Resolution

by Br. Juan Acuña, C.P.P.S., PBMR

(Presentation given at the gathering of the two provinces in September)

I am very glad being here in Techny sharing these days with all of you. This is the first time for me to have the opportunity to be in the same room with so many members of the Cincinnati and the Kansas City Province together and it feels wonderful. I was invited today to share a reflection about my hopes and dreams for the future of the C.P.P.S. in the United States.

I would like to begin by telling you something about myself and something that I enjoy, that I hope it will help me illustrate what I want to say today. Most of you know that I am an engineer and I like computers and technology and I am also very passionate about digital photography. So, I would like to begin my presentation explaining to you briefly something I use in digital photography which I find interesting—and which I believe relates to what I am trying to say. I am talking about the RGB color mode.

The RGB color mode is a system that is the foundation of all your computer screens, flat screen TVs, and smartphone devices. RGB stands for Red, Green, and Blue colors.

Every screen is built with tiny units of 3 lights—red, green, and blue working together—called pixels. You can control the intensity of each color individually in a scale from 0 to 255. 0 means the light is off and 255 the light is at its maximum intensity. The interesting thing is because the way your eyes perceive light, by adjusting the intensity of these 3 lights you can create all the colors you see in your screen. You don't see red, green, and blue individually, but you begin seeing yellow, purple, orange—about 16.8 million colors. I find that to be pretty amazing.

To create a picture on your computer or TV screen you need to put together these pixels. The more pixels you have in your screen, the better resolution of an image you can create in your computer.

So, I would like you to keep in mind these three concepts for the rest of my presentation: RGB system, pixel, and resolution.

I was asked to organize my presentation around the three pillars of the C.P.P.S.—Spirituality, Community, and Mission—and how I see myself in each one of these three pillars in the future. I found it very hard, because I don't see these three dimensions of our community as pillars, but rather as beams of light that work together; they are interconnected and they are inseparable.

Going to the analogy of the RGB system, suppose Spirituality is the color Red, Community is the color Green, Mission is the color Blue, and I am a pixel. I took my RGB app and I moved the sliders to where I think I am in these three dimensions and I found out that I am projecting a light green color. I asked myself, "What kind of light would I like to project in the future?" A pure white is probably the ideal—where spirituality, community, and mission are shining at their maximum levels—but I know I am not there yet.

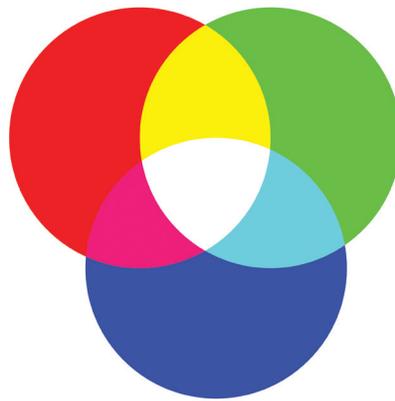
I thought also about the C.P.P.S. community as a whole, and I did the same experiment. I think as community we tend to emphasize the mission most, then spirituality, and then community life—and that results in a purple color. I would like to see us move to a brighter light.

In respect to resolution, when I think about where we are and what we do in the U.S., I think we are a bit scattered and we are not representing a well-defined picture of what we say we are as C.P.P.S. community in the United States.

Something I particularly like about my current ministry at the Precious Blood Center in Chicago is that we have five Precious Blood people working together: two priests, two sisters, and one brother—along with several lay people who have been inspired by our mission and spirituality and are also working with us. In that way, we can project a higher resolution picture of who we are as Precious Blood people instead of working separately, by ourselves.

I like pixels and I like high resolution images. In the Cincinnati Province, we have 98 pixels—some brighter than others—in the Kansas City province you have 42 pixels. So together we can be 150 pixels. We also have our many Companions. Together, we could project a better picture of who we are. In the future, I would like to see us working closer together, either becoming one province or collaborating more closely.

I would also like to see us being more intentional, strategic, and focused in the apostolate we have in the future. As I said, if we have more pixels working together we can have a clearer image of who we are. If we focus in ministries where we can live our community life, our mission, and spirituality more fully we will be able to keep members energized, happy, and also attract new members in the future.



We usually talk about ministering in the margins, at the edge, hearing the call of the blood, working for reconciliation. So why not make commitments with fewer apostolates that more deeply embrace our mission, spirituality, and community life and try to make an impact in those places or those situations.

In summary, I would like to see more Precious Blood people working together in fewer and more focused apostolates that foster and respond to our mission, spirituality, and community life. That way I think we will have a brighter future as C.P.P.S. in the United States. ✦

Editor, continued from page 2

More than 33,000 people die from gun violence in this country each year. This will continue. As will the hand-wringing and the unwillingness to address the problem. People with a history of domestic violence should not have guns. Every gun sale should be subject to a background check. Nobody needs assault-style weapons and high-capacity magazines. There should be a federal database to track gun sales and a waiting period to buy guns legally. But I don't expect anything to happen soon, if ever. Until it does, we will witness more of the same carnage. And tweets about "thoughts and prayers" and the "price of freedom." ✦



you are
invited

Invitation to Envision

by Rita McNally, Kansas City, Missouri Companion

We all receive invitations, and our free will allows us the option of choice in our response to each invitation. Acceptance of an invitation is a commitment to attend and participate in the event. As a Companion Council member of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, I was invited to attend and participate in the inter-provincial gathering this past September. The inclusion of the Companion Council members was both encouraging and exciting.

This was unlike my first invitation to attend a Kansas City Province Assembly over 20 years ago, where Companions could observe, but not truly participate in the gathering. I remember feeling accepted by some of the members, but a sense of exclusion from others. This was the beginning of the Companions movement journey to a more in-depth involvement with the community.

As I reflect on the recent meetings at Techny Towers, my thoughts today are a big "WOW!" How far Companions have come in their short 20 plus

years of existence. Acceptance and welcoming by all the members in attendance was extraordinary and Companion participation was strongly encouraged and accepted throughout the entire gathering.

All members from both provinces were invited to attend. Over 60 incorporated members accepted, and for much of the conference round table discussions were directed. Each table mixture consisted of a variety of Kansas City and Cincinnati Province members, both young and old, along with five female Companion Council representatives incorporated into various tables. The atmosphere was a safe place to say what was on your mind. There was encouragement for honesty in stating concerns and fears, opportunity for expressing visions and dreams, and reflections on accomplishments and ministries currently being served. The meticulously planned conference created an atmosphere for both negative and positive thoughts to be heard, and the participants truly listened respectfully and thoughtfully to each other.

Yes, every one of the Missionaries came with questions, few answers, bits of excitement, some apprehensions, doubts, and confusion, hopes for resolution, fears of differences, thoughts of collaboration, memories of the past, living the present, dealing with death—but an overall abundance of positive energy slowly began to emerge. Bubbling in the atmosphere was a realization that bringing a consensus to fruition for all the years of discussions would be necessary to continue the dreams and breathe life into new visions.

What excited me from the moment the conference began was witnessing a moment in history for the United States provinces and experiencing firsthand the communion of their members. The members in the first few days stated to one another and to the group how they did not really know each other very well and expressed the differences and their concerns, especially for those not able to be heard because they were not in attendance. As the conference continued, the realization of renewal and deepening of old friendships and the possibilities of creating new relationships seemed to fill the gathering with a new energy. Precious Blood mission, spirituality, charism and bond shouted commonality, not differences. As Companions, we too are in communion as lay Missionaries of the Precious Blood and have an open invitation of inclusion in creating the future.

I silently stepped back to watch and experience the interactions taking place in the various gatherings and prayer worships presented during the week. Meals and social time not only nourished our bodies, but also our hearts, minds, and souls with opportunities for greeting new faces or renewing old friendships. The storytelling among former classmates, the discovery of similar interests, the acknowledgement of all our Precious Blood rich giftedness through face to face conversations was an eye-opening reward for the community. As Companions, our monthly gatherings and yearly retreats already allow us the avenues for ongoing interaction, storytelling, prayer, and visioning.

We are invited to be heard in the development of something new. We are being given the opportunity to form the clay, to create our dream. Such an invitation can be received very differently by each recipient. One might approach the event with much apprehension and fear of the unknown. Another will approach the opportunity with excitement and a

sense of adventure in great anticipation of a new opportunity. We have all been given unique and special gifts—for some easy to share and recognize, for others difficult to acknowledge, and perhaps fear of the unknown and possible failure by taking a chance and stepping out!

Companions have been invited to the table of a “New Creation.” The subject title for this year’s Companions retreat was “The New Creation: A World waits in the Womb.” Much like a mother awaiting the much-anticipated birth of her new child, it takes much work of the body, mind, and soul, lots of patience and learning through mistakes, to create the perfect new being with the grace of God. We as Companions continue to experience growth and change in our own Companion Movement, and our involvement and gifts will be accepted with open hearts and minds for the “New Creation.” Each of us are valuable assets in the formation of the clay. Reflect on how you might participate in and commit to the “New Creation.” Remind yourselves of our Companion mission statement to “step out, stand up and speak clearly.” Now is the time to be heard and welcomed; accept the invitation! ✠

*In a Dark Time...
Eyes Begin to See*

Led by Fr. Joseph Nassal, C.P.P.S.

A Celebration of the Winter Solstice

As we gather to celebrate the Winter Solstice, we pause in the midst of a most beautiful but busy season to reflect on the darkness of our times captured in the longest of nights. But the natural world holds great lessons about the renewal of the human spirit and how in the darkest of times we begin to see how we are deeply connected to one another and to the earth. Our gathering will include a meditative walk to the Reconciliation Labyrinth and will conclude with a simple soup supper.

Thursday Evening, December 21, 5:30 PM

**Suggested donation: \$20.00
Scholarship Funds Available**

**Register by December 19th
at info@pbrenewalcenter.org or 816.415.3745**



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Radical Listening

by Fr. Steve Dos Santos, C.P.P.S., Cincinnati Province Vocation Director

The Precious Blood is first and foremost incarnational. Jesus took on flesh and blood and lived among us. It was a messy choice that Jesus made, one that colors how we as Precious Blood people see the world and enter into ministry. We are willing to stand in the muck and the mess with people, knowing that sometimes the only thing we have to offer is a listening heart.

Learning to listen was an important part of my formation. During Special Formation, I attended the Kansas City Province Assembly, and I remember a workshop on reflective listening. In that workshop, I learned skills that I have tried to hone over the years. I strive to listen not just for the facts and the details, but for the emotions and the values that lie just below the surface or in the background of the story. As one practices listening, you discover that sometimes important information is buried in a comment that is tossed out as an aside, or is sometimes left out entirely. Active and reflective listening means you learn to check back with the speaker to make sure you are hearing them correctly and to ask questions that help you understand what they are sharing on a deeper level.

Listening is an important pastoral skill in any ministry, but I find it particularly important in my ministry as a director of vocation ministry. Each new inquirer brings with him a new story. Some vocation stories are clear, direct, and easily understandable. Other vocation stories are still developing and need to be coaxed out of the inquirer so that we both can better understand it. There is no single story. Each story is unique.

Listening takes time. It is an investment in the person before you. Vocation directors listen because we are engaged in discernment and not simply recruitment. We listen because we want to hear this man's story and help him to better understand God's call in his life. In that relationship, I represent the C.P.P.S. and the Church, and am listening for signs of God's call, fitness for ministry, resonance with our charism and spirituality, and the ability to be successful in formation, among other things. I am listening so as to help him make a better choice, even if that choice is to not fill out an application for formation.

Yes, there is a whole lot going on during those conversations. I am constantly evaluating what I hear and making judgments about it. In doing so I have to draw on another hallmark of our Precious Blood approach to ministry, and that's openness. Openness means letting the story unfold and not jumping ahead. Openness means letting the person surprise you.

Openness is a radical idea for us human beings, maybe even more so today than in years past. Our human tendency is to put people in a box as quickly as possible. We slap a convenient label on someone and let that label tell us everything we need to know about them. Such over simplifications don't work for vocation directors and they really don't work for Precious Blood people. In a homily before he died, Fr. Greg Comella reminded us in the assembly that when we hold people captive in boxes with labels, we deny their complexity and their humanity and deny the possibility of growth in that person.

One time at a vocation fair, one of the first questions a young man asked me was whether our community celebrated the Extraordinary Form [liturgy of the 1962 Roman Missal, widely referred to as the Tridentine Mass]. For some that would have been a red flag and would have ended the conversation, but I opted to remain engaged and tell him the truth, that at that time there was really only one member who did so regularly. Our conversation went on for several minutes before he moved on to another community's table. As far as I know, that young man has never contacted us, but I do know that we had a good conversation about liturgy, our charism, and our style of life.

It would be easy for me, and for all of us to rely on labels and snap judgments about individuals, but we do so at our own peril. We've heard the stories of the middle school troublemaker who grew up to be a wonderful priest and merciful confessor. Or the inarticulate high school senior who grew up to be an eloquent preacher or speaker. None of us exited formation the same man we were when we entered. Formation helps us to become the man we were made to be.

I assume that the young man sitting in front of me will grow and change over the years of formation—in

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A Celebration of Remembrance

by Fr. Dave Kelly, C.P.P.S., PBMR Director

We had a large gathering of folks here for the celebration of All Souls Day or, in many cultures, “Dia de los Muertos.” It is a celebration of remembrance. We remembered all those who have passed on, who were so much a part of our lives.

Hundreds gathered here at PBMR, creating small altars of remembrance. There was a procession through the streets, rituals and blessings. People came with pictures of their loved ones; mothers clutched the image of their sons/daughters who were killed by violence.

As Catholics, we have a long and deep tradition of rituals that allow us to tell our story of loss and suffering in the context of our faith story. Rituals allow us to bring near and touch that which is hard to express in words. In trauma work, we often use rituals and storytelling, poetry and art, to help express and share

what so often is hard to verbalize. So often, youth who have been victims of violence and abuse find it difficult to talk about their emotions, but in poetry or art these feelings are more accessible and more easily shared.

It is probably no surprise to most that I know many who are locked up in our jails and prisons. I keep in contact with as many as I can through visits, phone calls, and letters. But it is hard to maintain relationships with so many, especially as they are sent downstate to a prison or detention facility. I struggle with a sense of powerlessness, because I lose contact with so many who are locked in our prisons.

Yesterday, Joe called from Cook County Jail. He is twenty years old and has been locked up for almost a year now. Joe was a constant at PBMR. He would

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PBMR, continued from page 11

go often with me to give talks. He had an outgoing personality that allowed people to come to know what we see in so many of youth: a deep respect and a desire for a better life.

When you receive a collect call from jail or prison, you have to wait for a long and repetitive recording to tell you that it is a collect call from an “inmate.” The recording is even more annoying because it takes away from the short amount of time allowed for the phone call from the “inmate.”

As soon as the recording ended, Joe blurted, “Fr. Kelly, are you ok?” I responded that I was fine, tired, but fine. He went on to say he had been trying to reach me, and because there were so many failed attempts at connecting via phone, he thought something happened to me. While I appreciated his concern, I knew that much of his concern was that PBMR is his only connection to the outside world. Phone calls are expensive and most family members cannot afford to “keep money on their phone.”

After talking a bit, he asked about everybody at the Center: Fr. Denny, Sr. Donna, Jonathan, Pamela, Sr. Carolyn, etc. He asked about everyone at PBMR, as though he had a list and was checking off the names. Since I was at the Center, I asked him if he wanted to talk to some of them. One by one, people got on the phone and spoke with Joe. You could hear laughter, words of encouragement, and expressions of love.

As the time drew near for the phone call to be terminated, I got back on the phone. Joe’s voice was so full of life; you could hear the joy of being reconnected. “Man, Fr. Kelly,” he said, “I feel so much better. I was wondering if people were thinking of me or if everybody had forgotten me.” I assured him that we thought of him regularly, and that he was still very much a part of the Precious Blood Center.

The phone call abruptly terminated.

In many ways, that phone call was a ritual of remembrance. We didn’t create an altar, but we celebrated Joe’s connection to his community, and in that connection, he came alive. Moreover, it was not just Joe who came alive; each of us at the Center came alive as well.

Loss is a familiar feeling here; we lose so many to death, jail, mental illness, and the streets. It can take its toll. These simple rituals are important moments to celebrate.

“But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2: 13). ✠

Radical Listening, continued from page 10

fact I’m planning on it and looking for those places where I see opportunities for him to grow. In fact, if the possibility for growth wasn’t there, there would be no reason to enter formation. Because of that I strive to listen with openness to an inquirer’s whole story, not allowing myself to be distracted by any particular detail. I try not to apply labels, and when I do it’s only tentatively, hoping that I will discover the complexity of the man before me that render that label insufficient.

To be a Missionary of the Precious Blood is to listen with an open heart, and that comes in handy as a vocations director. It helps me to pay attention to the man before me, and not a series of categories. It allows me to hear his whole story. It invites me to look not only for men who can stand in the center of our community, but on our fringes as well. ✠



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- St. Gaspar del Bufalo



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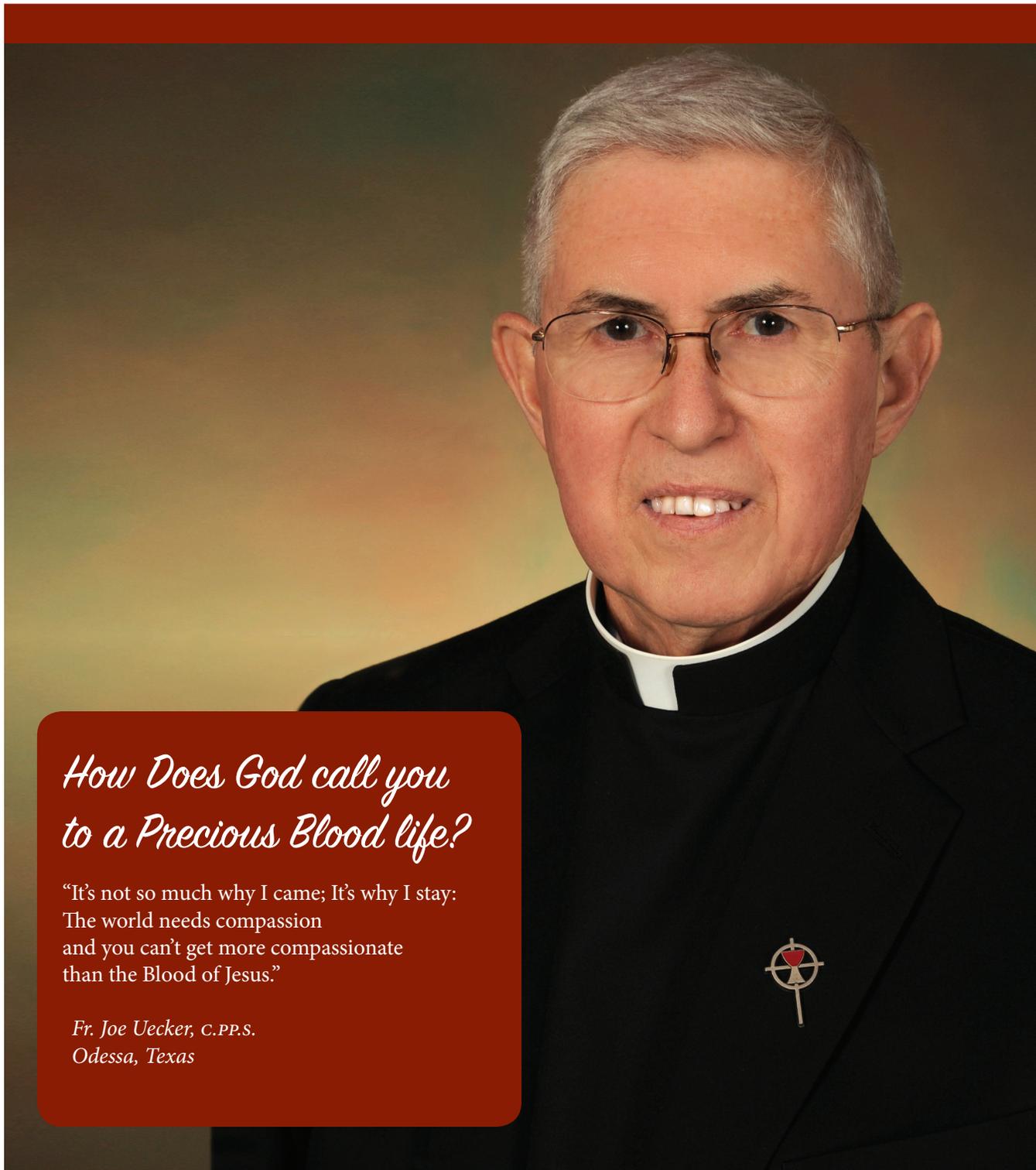
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*How Does God call you
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“It’s not so much why I came; It’s why I stay:
The world needs compassion
and you can’t get more compassionate
than the Blood of Jesus.”

*Fr. Joe Uecker, C.P.P.S.
Odessa, Texas*

