



# The New Wine Press

*Motivated by the Spirituality of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ*

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Volume 24 No. 5  
January 2015



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*Last Assembly of the American Province*

## *Celebrating 50 Years: Sowing the Seeds for a New Province*

*by Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S., Provincial Director*

*2015 marks the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and the 50th anniversary of the Kansas City Province. This year, the New Wine Press will trace some of the significant events that have shaped the first fifty years of the province.*

We can trace the beginning of the Kansas City Province to a Business Chapter of the American Province on April 17, 1963 at St. Charles Seminary in Carthagena, Ohio. There were several other items on the agenda for this meeting, including a revision of the *Manual of Prayers* and the admission of lay students to the new high school seminary being opened that fall in Liberty, Missouri, but the division of the American Province was no doubt what Father John Byrne, provincial director, had in mind when he told the delegates in his opening address, "What is decided here today will affect the course of the American Province. Truly, this is an historical meeting as well as a momentous one."

By 1963, the American Province had grown to 650 members. From casual conversation over coffee or the pinochle table, to official district meetings,

*continued on next page*



members had discussed the division for several years. But on April 17, 1963, the 52 delegates elected by districts and including the provincial and his council and the superiors of the major houses, voted to “give the provincial and his board the required consent to make a proposal of a division of the province to the proper ecclesiastical authority.”

In reviewing the minutes of the discussion, it appears there was an overwhelming consensus that it was time to divide the American Province. “Division of the province is a most important move,” said Father Neidert, representing the Falls Church, Virginia district. “It is the only way we can take up the challenge given us by the Holy Father to carry devotion of the Precious Blood further.” Father Aloys Selhorst, a Precious Blood missionary “from the new frontier of the west coast” representing the San

Francisco district, said “the burden of distance placed upon the provincial superior in visiting outlying districts...makes division of the province mandatory.”

Following the affirmative vote, the provincial council appointed a Commission for the Division of the American Province. In announcing the commission, Father Byrne wrote that the commission would be responsible “to study, poll the members and make recommendations to the provincial council concerning division. The provincial council would then review these recommendations, approve or refine them, and make the formal proposal to the General Curia.” Father Byrne indicated that the process could take two years.

During the work of the commission, several suggestions surfaced on how to divide the American Province,

including placing all the educational institutions in a separate province and dividing the province according to ministries. But in the end, the most practical way to divide the province into three was geographically. The Kansas City Province included the Midwest, from Illinois and Wisconsin in the east to Colorado and New Mexico in the west. There was some debate that the division between the Cincinnati and Kansas City Provinces should be the natural boundary of the Mississippi River, rather than include both Illinois and Wisconsin in the Kansas City Province. Among the reasons the commission outlined for their decision were a more equitable distribution of personnel; better vocational sources; and balancing the “preponderant rural elements” while assuring “better financial support.”

The commission also discussed at length whether the division of the American Province should be two provinces or three. According to the commission’s report, “The arguments adduced for further division of the territory beyond Cincinnati and Kansas City to the Pacific” include “distances are not reduced appreciably with simple division East-West; not only do the Rocky Mountains afford a natural geographic barrier, but there is a very different mentality, progressive spirit, and vitality that is unique; and opportunities for growth are unlimited.” The commission concluded that “if only Kansas City, emphasis naturally will be directed to the West Coast” and this “would mean stagnation for the Kansas City Province.”

These boundaries held until 2006 when the 29th Provincial Assembly of the Kansas City Province voted unanimously to “petition the Moderator General, his council, and the major superiors of the Congregation to enlarge the boundaries of the Kansas City Province to include the geographical region of the Continental United States lying in the States of Wisconsin and Illinois and in the area lying west of the Mississippi River.”

On the Feast of St. Gaspar del Bufalo, October 21, 1964, after extensive surveys of the members, the Commission for the Division of the American Province proposed dividing the existing Province “into three distinct provinces with an additional Parent Corporation to stabilize the financial situation of the three new Provinces.” The Provincial Council approved the proposal. On December 31, 1964, the Provincial Council petitioned the Moderator General and General Curia to divide the existing American Province into the Cincinnati Province, the Kansas City Province, and the Province of the Pacific. The General Curia approved the motion on January 22, 1965, and on February 5, 1965, the Sacred Congregation for the Affairs of Religious authorized the division. In a letter dated February 25, 1965, Fr. Byrne called the announcement of the division of the American Province “the most historical news report to hit our Community since Father Brunner sailed up the Mississippi.”

The date for the official division of the American Province was set for April 20, 1965.

Next month: *The Birth of a Province*.

## The New Wine Press

*Missionaries of the Precious Blood*  
Kansas City Province  
[www.kcprovince.org](http://www.kcprovince.org)

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 re-founding. We accept and encourage unsolicited manuscripts and letters to the editor.

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## *Diaconate Ordination*

*by Fr. Dick Bayuk, C.P.P.S., Vice Provincial Director*

On Sunday afternoon, December 14, St. Henry Church on Chicago's far north side was filled with great joy and promise during Advent. A large number of the Chicago Vietnamese community joined Diocesan Vietnamese priests, representatives of several religious congregations and Precious Blood priests, brothers, and sisters to celebrate the ordination of Loi Huu (John Vianney) Nguyen and Truc Minh (Joseph) Vu to the Diaconate. Both men are in their final stages of study and formation at Catholic Theological Union, and will be returning to Vietnam following their ordination to the Priesthood, where they will join the other members of the Vietnam Mission in service to the Church.

Bishop Joseph Charron, C.P.P.S. referred to the readings that were proclaimed for the Third Sunday of Advent in his instruction to Loi and Truc during his homily. He emphasized that the words of Isaiah the prophet are a call to service as Deacons as well: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. The Lord has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God." Paul's exhortation in the second reading was a call to "Rejoice always and to pray without ceasing." In the Gospel, John the Baptist made it clear that his (and our) call is to point the way to Jesus, not call attention to ourselves.

Congratulations, Loi and Truc. Welcome to the ministry of the Diaconate. May you be blessed with many fruitful years of service to the Church as Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

*Pictures by Fr. Dick Bayuk, C.P.P.S.: top-Truc Vu and Loi Nguyen during ordination with Bishop Joseph Charron, C.P.P.S. and Provincial Director Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.*

*middle: Loi and Truc sing with community members from St. Henry Church.*

*bottom: Truc Vu, Ryan Cornelissen and Loi Nguyen at the reception that followed the ordination.*



# Interesting Differences

by Tam Hoang, C.P.P.S., Vietnam Mission

A difference is a normal thing in life. For me, differences make me interested in understanding the language, culture, people, and world around me.

Differences interest me when I discover them. I went to the United States in the last days of summer of 2010. The sun was still very beautiful, the leaves of trees were green, and the weather was cool, for summer was beginning to move into the fall. My first impression about Chicago was that it was a city with many trees and animals, such as squirrels and birds. It made me remember my childhood in my hometown in Vietnam.

When I came to the United States, my formators as well as other candidates and companions helped me very much, so I felt excited to live in a new city and in the love of community who is like my second family.

Confronting the difference are opportunities to understand myself and others better. When I have to speak other language, contact with other culture, and live in another environment, I discover the need to transform myself to adapt to new things. For example, I have to speak English everyday, so I cannot think in Vietnamese to speak English, I have to practice thinking in English to speak English. Therefore, I have to transform my thinking to English when I speak English. Also, I have to transform my cultural point of reference when I am in contact your culture. I have to keep my point of reference, but I have to adapt to yours. However, I have to discern what is good and bad in my cultural reference and translate them to your culture in order to decide to keep them or give them up. I have to open my heart and mind to receive them. Finally, I have to adapt to a new environment when I live in a country where there are four seasons. Each season has its interest and harshness. Through the many differences, I need to transform myself in order to understand myself and others better. This is an opportunity to spend my life in diversity of culture, religiousness, and ideas.

However, I have never stopped thanking to God because He gives me the opportunity to live in another country and environment. I thank all you for your open hearts to receive me, the opportunity to learn more about the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and my

mission in the future. Through the new environment, I understand more than about other languages or cultures. I believe God put me in a new environment in order to learn, feel, and recognize what God is doing in my life. In particular, it helps me continue discerning my vocation in the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and do everything I need to for my mission in Vietnam. Although I still believe that God is always with me, I also feel afraid as Moses afraid to face Pharaoh: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Ex 3: 11).

I still know that difference is normal in life, but in order to overcome it, I need to have courage, belief, and trust in God. I also thank you all for respecting the difference in me and being patient with me. I believe God invites us to welcome difference in each other.

## Important Dates to Save

### Provincial Electoral Assembly

April 13-16, 2015

Church of the Annunciation

701 North Jefferson Street, Kearney, MO 64060

### Provincial Banquet

Celebrating the Installation of the Provincial Council (to be elected April 2015)

June 1, 2015

Savior of the World Pastoral Center

12601 Parallel Parkway, Kansas City, KS 66109

All Members and Companions Welcome

### Members Retreat

June 1-5, 2015

Savior of the World Pastoral Center

*More information on these events will be sent to members and companions via email in the coming months.*



## Companion New Year

by Kathy Keary and Vicky Otto, Precious Blood Companions Co-Directors

The inventor Charles Kettering wrote, “Every time you tear a leaf off a calendar you present a new place for new ideas and progress.” As we begin this New Year, we believe no truer words could be spoken. But before we look to the future, we also believe it is important to honor the past. We are excited and humbled to assume the roles of Co-Directors of Companions. We are grateful for the many people who came before us; we stand on their shoulders of and benefit from the wisdom and expertise they offered. Their work and efforts on behalf of all Companions are a treasure of the Precious Blood Community. As we look to the future, we begin with a sense of gratitude to the Companion Council and the Provincial Councils of both Provinces for the trust they have given us and for bringing to life our vision statement, *Gather, Send*. This document reflects not only our roots and values but also our hopes and aspirations. While our ambitions reflect the spirit that motivates us, the statement speaks strongly of who we want to become.

We gather as a Precious Blood family sealed by our covenants to gain strength and nourishment from one another as we are sent out to participate in the ministry God is calling us to. Our gifts are as diverse as the people we serve and endeavor to include in our circle of love. We value that all blood is precious, which sends us to

the margins of a wounded world as ambassadors of Christ’s hope and reconciliation. We are not isolated. We are a global community enjoying the bond that unites us with one another and with the priests and brothers of the Community.

We are blessed to be Companions. Rooted in Precious Blood spirituality, our joy motivates us to invite others to experience the Good News we share. We reach out to all generations, races, and cultures to widen the diversity we celebrate. *Gather, Send* concludes with the bold statement, “We step out, stand up and speak clearly about the Precious Blood of Jesus.”

Our focus in the coming years will be about bringing our dreams to fruition. What tools do we need to help us mirror who we strive to be? How do we live out this message that reflects our desires? How do we draw others into our vision? We are honored to be walking with you as we explore the many questions that arise as we endeavor to live into *Gather, Send*. We will all be called to find that new place for new ideas and progress to grow Charles Kettering spoke about if we allow ourselves to be open to the cry of the blood we speak about in our vision statement. It was the cry which propelled Saint Gaspar forward and propels us forward into this New Year as well.

## Potholes

by Patricia Wood, Precious Blood Volunteer

I rushed all Saturday morning to make it to the Crownpoint, New Mexico Post Office before 11:00AM the weekend before the weekend before Christmas. Having been away from my family and friends in Kentucky for the past four months, I was excited to send packages containing wonderful Native American arts and crafts from this area. I pulled into the mostly unpaved dirt parking lot, which until recent grading was full of potholes that could have been the result of cannon fire! Another lady was just pulling away and saw me with my arms full of the brown boxes. "It's just so aggravating", she said. "They are not even open for the morning. Oh well, what do you expect, it's the Reservation." I considered the woman's remark.

She was a white person like me, whom the Navajo call a "Bilagaana." She obviously meant that things here in Navajo Land are not the same as the rest of the Country. I wondered though, did she feel that places like this get the short end of the stick from government services, or did she mean that nothing in general seems to follow the same rules? Does she consider this area substandard because of the people who live and work here, or the Powers That Be? Is she here because she married a Native American man, or did the wind send her this way for a temporary stay as it has me? I wished I'd taken a moment to ask.

The evening before I did some last minute shopping at the famous Crownpoint rug auction. After I visited jewelry and craft booths, the rug auction began. One Navajo lady waited almost breathlessly while months of her weaving effort was held up to mostly non-native customers. Although her work was very beautiful and bidding started at \$900, it did not sell that night. She looked so sad, as if fighting back tears. I wondered what that money was needed for this month.

Things here are both very simple and more complex than elsewhere. Most people agree things run differently

because of a backlog of agendas, "Indian Time," and priorities that are different from mainstream America. Even the recent Tribal campaign and elections became so contested and complicated that many of the people were left embarrassed at the inefficiency.

Although I also once lived for five years adjacent to a Reservation in South Dakota and worked with Lakota children, I do not presume to know the answers. I am simply a Precious Blood volunteer spending a year in this beautiful land of mesas and warm hearted people who often lack basic needs and things other Americans think they can't live without. I am absorbing all that I can and feeling grateful for being accepted here. Hopefully, I can offer some assistance where it is wanted. I know I will leave a more enriched person, even if I hit a lot of potholes while here.

Call for Manuscripts

### THE WINE CELLAR

Topic: **Mercy.**

Deadline for submissions: April 15, 2015.

Article length: 2500 words in Word format.

Poems, prayers and artwork are also welcome.

Please include a brief bio and four reflection questions with article submissions. Any member or lay associate of a Precious Blood community is invited to contribute.

Contact:

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## *Waiting for Superman*

by Michael Donovan, PBMR

*“He who opens a school door, closes a prison.” Victor Hugo*

On my November visit to the Shawnee Correctional Center in Vienna, Illinois, I stayed in Metropolis, Illinois, about 30 miles from nowhere. If there are any hotels in Vienna, I didn't find them, so off to Metropolis I drove, which proudly proclaims itself the home of Superman. After checking in, I visited the big statue of the Man of Steel in the town square, the Superman Museum, and another statue paying homage to Lois Lane. The Superman celebrated here is the 1950's black and white television version starring George Reeves and Noel Neill, so it was fun reliving my youth. Great Caesar's Ghost!

I don't know why, but while I was touring this depressed town, I kept thinking of the 2010 award winning documentary *Waiting for Superman*, a film about the failing public school system in the United States. The film's title is based on an interview with educator Geoffrey Canada, who grew up in poverty, where he recounts being told as a child that Superman was not real, and how he was frightened because there was nobody to save him. Investigating the failures of inner city public schools, it chronicles the stories of 5 students and their families from Harlem, in their quest to get a better education by entering a lottery for slots in a successful charter school. They are waiting for Superman.

It is at Shawnee the next day that I visited Derrion, who is also waiting for Superman. A victim of poverty and a poor Chicago public school system education, he is like many of the youth I meet who end up in prison. Fr. David Link, a Catholic Chaplain for the Department of Corrections in Indiana, said he meets so many incarcerated individuals who are there “not because they fell into the cracks of society. These people were born in the cracks.”

Derrion was locked up at age 15, tried as an adult, and eventually pled out to 14 years. While at the Juvenile Detention Center and the Illinois youth prisons at St. Charles and Kewanee, he came within one credit of attaining his high school diploma. Since residents can stay at youth prisons until they're 21, he could have completed high school at St. Charles. Instead, Derrion was transferred at age 18 to an adult prison, Shawnee Correctional Center, where he has to settle for a GED, not a high school diploma.

He's been at Shawnee for over a year and he is still on the wait list for GED classes. At prisons in Illinois, priority is given to inmates with the least amount of time to serve. Although this makes sense when only a small

*continued on next page*

# Offering and Maintaining Hope

by Vicki Otto, Precious Blood Companions Co-Director, LGBT Ministry Committee

Every now and then a random lyric from a song pops in my head. When I was in Kansas City in November, a song from the 1980s struck that chord. I don't know who sang the song, but the chorus was, "The future is so bright, I have to wear shades." Over the last several weeks we have seen and heard words of division and anger while watching the news or reading the local papers. It almost feels like there is more bad news than there is good news. Words of anger and division seem commonplace and almost normal simply because we hear them so often. So how do we as Precious Blood people maintain hope? I believe when we courageously share our faith and offer places to speak truth, those moments of hope and brightness are possible.

The LGBT Ministry Committee has been working on and developing a process to help groups in our Precious Blood family discuss what it means to be more welcoming, not only for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, but for others who also might not feel welcomed in the Church. Using a model developed by Fr. Joe Nassal, five areas are highlighted during the process: How does a community open the door to welcome others, how do we seek the lost? How can we develop an environment that fosters telling the truth? How do we create a safe space where people can speak the truth? How do we comfortably stand in the breach when division in a community occurs? We also determined that the best way to foster dialogue was to clearly state that we were not advocating for changing Church policies or defying Church policy but simply offering the forum for groups to discuss what welcoming meant for them.

In November, our Committee was invited to offer this presentation at Saint Francis Xavier Parish in St. Joseph, Missouri. Sister Diana Rawlings, A.S.C. and Companion Cathy Pankiewicz from our committee joined me for our gathering. After we gathered and shared scripture and prayer, the community was eager to discuss the different areas of the presentation and what it meant specifically for them as a community. There were many interesting conversations about how individuals can reach out to others who they might not know and how challenging it was to step out of one's comfort zone to reach out. One of

the most powerful moments came after Cathy shared her story as a parent whose daughter is lesbian. She touched many people in her own parish community when she shared the challenges she and her family faced regarding the Church. One woman remarked at the end of the presentation, "We have more rules to keep people out of the Church than we do to welcome them in. We need to change that." There was a beautiful transgender person named Jade who was also part of the gathering for the evening. She lives in California and was visiting her family in Saint Joseph. She was baptized and received her sacraments at Saint Francis. After the presentation was done, she told me never in her wildest imagination did she believe she would ever hear the words of welcoming and hospitality being shared that evening. Hearing the words of welcome and hospitality made a difference and gave her hope.

Saint Gaspar challenged the community of his time and continues to challenge us as a Precious Blood community to look outside the gate for those who stand at the edge. We are called to be a people of hospitality, to ensure that no one is left outside. On that evening in November, the people of Saint Francis Xavier answered the challenge Saint Gaspar gave us. Our hope as a committee is that more groups will begin this dialogue. In these times when we hear of division and anger in our world, that evening filled me with hope. I look forward to more of these opportunities because I want to believe that the future can be bright.

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*Waiting for Superman, continued from page 8*

fraction of those wanting a prison education can be accommodated, why not put more of our corrections tax dollars into education programs rather than on prison buildings and other programs designed to punish inmates? Every inmate who wants to be educated should be afforded that opportunity, which gives them a far better chance at succeeding on the outside.

In the meantime, Derrion attempts to educate himself by reading and writing poetry, which he shares with his pen pal Joan, a retired teacher. He's still waiting for Superman.

# Living Beyond the End of the World

by Pam Demassi, Liberty, Missouri Companion

This fall, I participated with a small community at Precious Blood Center studying *Living Beyond the “End of the World,” A Spirituality of Hope* by Margaret Swedish. We talked about the many ways the ecology of our communities is changing and even breaking down—toxins in our air, water, and food; extinction rates unseen since the end of the dinosaur age; changes in weather patterns; diseases impacting our forests; the rise in human diseases like cancer, asthma, and diabetes. There were participants who had cancer, participants who challenge our country’s involvement with nuclear proliferation and participants who worked for the Environmental Protection Agency.

Our reading identified ways in which we are already living beyond the biocapacity of the planet and challenged us to identify elements of a spirituality for living through the ecological crisis. We viewed several films and listened to guest speakers. We did not identify many ways to live beyond the end of this world with a rich and vibrant Earth community still intact and still able to support life. We learned that climate change has already made impact around the globe and will undoubtedly impact the quality of life for future generations. As we faced the magnitude of the impacts of global warming, we began to examine the suffering of human and non-human beings.

We used the teachings of scripture that value stewardship for God’s creation and justice for the poor. One film we watched inspired reflection on our place in and responsibility to God’s creation. We were reminded of the



natural world around us being threatened by the ecological crisis.

One of our guest speakers, as well as our book, reminded us that humans are the cause of our ecosystems becoming altered. We contrasted this with the gift of creation we read about in the Scripture. Currently there is little debate among the scientific community about the fact of climate change. However, little of this clarity has reached the public through the mass media.

Our group talked about our carbon footprint, the damage caused by our use of fossil fuels. We looked at how the poor and marginalized are directly impacted, especially poor communities of color and poor communities in Appalachia.

The book talked about the American Dream of affluence and our ever-increasing standards of living. This is proving to be unsustainable and impossible to continue. Growing scarcities of water, food, and energy will increase the threat of violent conflict, including war. We face hard questions. Do our values support this consumer society?

Human beings are living beyond the means of the Earth to support our consumption and waste. Industrialization has been fueled by the exploitation of coal, oil, and natural gas at the cost of environmental devastation. The era of cheap sources of energy is coming to a rapid end. To what extent is our depletion of the planet’s ecosystems stealing from future generations? We must calculate our ecological footprint and ask the question, “Who is my neighbor and must I love them as myself?”

When we reflected on this in the light of faith, we began to envision a new American Dream based on a quote by Mahatmas Gandhi: “Living simply so that others may simply live.”

Despite everything, no matter how stark the news, our faith challenges us to continue to give reason for hope. Our gospel narratives have much to offer on this journey. These narratives resonate as never before as they are broken open to address the crises of a new age, a new moment in history.



# DEAD MAN WALKING: The Journey Continues...

**March 7, 2015**

**St. Francis Xavier Church  
2618 Seneca Street  
Saint Joseph, MO 64507**

9am to 3pm

Luncheon included

Contact: Br. Daryl Charron, C.P.P.S.,  
daryl.charron@yahoo.com or 816-835-0344

Sr. Helen is a southern storyteller. She brings you on a journey during her talk about how she got involved with the Ministry Against the Death Penalty. Her stories are about many special people she has met along the way. She is passionate about the mission of getting rid of the Death Penalty because she has witnessed and accompanied 6 men to their execution. There is no dignity or justice in this punishment

Sister Helen is a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph. She spent her first years with the Sisters teaching religion to junior high school students. Realizing that being on the side of poor people is an essential part of the Gospel she moved into the St. Thomas Housing Project in New Orleans and began working at Hope House from 1981 – 1984.

She is the author of **Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty** in the United States. It became a movie, an opera and a play for high schools and colleges.

Since 1984, Sister Helen has divided her time between educating citizens about the death penalty and counseling individual death row prisoners. She has accompanied six men to their deaths. In doing so, she began to suspect that some of those executed were not guilty. This realization inspired her second book, *The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions*, which was released by Random House in December of 2004.

Sr. Helen is presently at work on another book - **River of Fire: My Spiritual Journey**



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Celebrating 200 Years

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## The New Wine Press

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*Change Service Requested*

*The New Wine Press is committed to dialogue within the Church and charity toward all. Readers who wish to respond to the ideas shared in any issue is welcome to respond and continue the dialogue via an article or a Letter to the Editor.*



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### Editor's Notes

## *Mission for a New Year*

*by Fr. Keith Branson, C.P.P.S., Publications Editor*

There's a lot of change with a New Year. It's an exciting time of new opportunities and adjustments. It used to be a time of getting used to writing a new number on our checks, but since they're fewer, that will fade as a problem.

Seeing where we stand at the start of the new year, there's some signs of the times to read as we celebrate our anniversary and look ahead. There is a lot of bias against organized religion in our culture. Church attendance is down, religions communities have a dearth of new members (even the new conservative ones), and religious awareness is decreasing dramatically. On the extreme, critics such as Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris trumpet that civilization would be better off if religion were eradicated.

There is also a longing in many hearts for an encounter with God, an encounter with Christ, that can't be met elsewhere. They may see Church as judgmental and oppressive, but long for what faith alone can give. To say organized religion is a lost cause is similar to saying

government is a lost cause, for any human institution is flawed by power seekers, and any group of people needs structure of some sort to be in relationship. The evil of human society is based on the basic evil in the human soul, so no human institution will ever be free of it.

Nothing can change what Christ did on the Cross, or what God is for the world. Human evil does not disprove God. To say the Church will disappear, or its mission fail is to say that God can fail. A god that could fail wouldn't be God as we know Him.

This is one thing we can hold onto in 2015 with both hands: God's Mission cannot fail. If God's Mission cannot fail, we will not be orphaned; we won't be left without work, a reason to be, or each other. Pope Francis has reassured us that charisms are a gift from God. If Precious Blood spirituality is a charism from God, it will not go away. As we begin a New Year, we need to hang on to this thought if there are going to be 200 more years of Precious Blood community.