

# THE New Wine PRESS

Volume 26 No. 5 • January 2018





*Let us serve God with holy joy.*

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

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*Wednesday evening prayer at St. Agnes Parish, Los Angel*

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

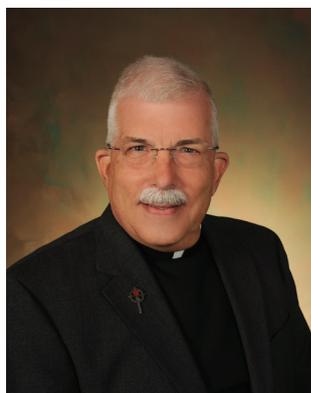
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## Can You See Me Now?

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

Companion Trish Frazer writes in this issue, “As Companions, St. Gaspar challenges us to include those who are on the fringes of what we call community and to do so with compassion. I often forget that seeing through the lens of Precious Blood Spirituality is omni-directional. I can see the homeless on the street but miss seeing the lonely person in the nursing home. I gather food for the food pantry but don’t see the child in the children’s home starving for attention.” Many people and categories of people are invisible because we fail to see them.

This issue arrives during the first week of the new year, as we prepare to celebrate Epiphany, and the Advent-Christmas season is coming to a close. Back in late November, a week before the start of Advent, the gospel reading was from the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew (“I was hungry and you gave me food...”), where Jesus directly identifies himself with the poor, the immigrant, the marginalized. If we are looking for Jesus, that is where we will see him. We are called to see the poor and those on the margins through a uniquely Christian and Precious Blood lens. To tolerate the inequities and injustices among the hungry and poor, the displaced and marginalized—to see them and do nothing—is to see Jesus himself and not be moved. Or worse, to not see them at all.

We speak about our call to minister to those on the margins, i.e., the “marginalized.” This word can be applied to those who are underserved, disregarded, sidelined, ostracized, and unseen. These are the “invisible” people—including (but not limited to) the homeless, mentally ill, physically limited, runaway teens, ex-offenders, immigrants, refugees, the incarcerated, the unemployed, and even the elderly.

It’s not always obvious who the invisible people are. For example, we have all had the experience of walking or driving past someone on the sidewalk or at an intersection holding up a sign asking for help. Most of these folks will tell you that they feel invisible much of the time because passersby don’t even look at them, don’t “see” them. But another group we might not immediately think of as invisible are the elderly, and especially the elderly who look to be infirm.

Frank Bruni, in the *New York Times* this past weekend, described a recent experience of an 82-year-old friend of his. She remembers it as “when she vanished.” He writes: “She went shopping for a mattress... Because the mall was so big and her legs were so weak, she used a wheelchair, which was new to her, and had a friend push her. Their wait for service was

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## Reconciliation: A Never-Ending Ministry

by Fr. Tom Welk, C.P.P.S.

Before the story aired on NPR's *Morning Edition* on December 8<sup>th</sup>, the reporter made an editorial comment: "This story may be hard for some listeners to hear." I wondered if the story was going to have some salacious content that could be seen as offensive. But as I soon discovered, the story may have been difficult for some listeners because it narrated a challenging situation: a father forgiving the killer of his son 25 years ago.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the order of the day in our time and place when an evil deed is perpetrated our society is more prone toward responding with hatred and vindictiveness than with forgiveness and reconciliation.

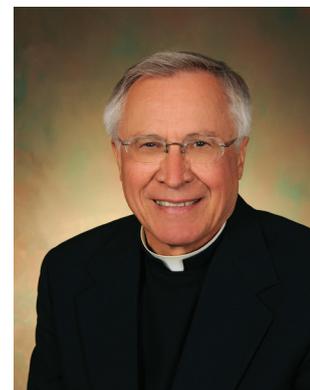
Greg Gibson shared a counter-cultural response to his son's killing in the NPR StoryCorps narrative. Michael Garafolo introduced the program by giving this background for the story: "On Dec. 14, 1992 Wayne Lo, then a student at Simon's Park College in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, stalked the campus with a semiautomatic rifle, firing at random using ammunition ordered over the phone and delivered to him at school. At that time, Lo said he was receiving commands from God. Lo wounded four people and killed two, including Galen (Greg's son)."

Greg Gibson acknowledged that he could easily have become embittered by this. He took another route: "Almost since that first moment, it has been my constant prayer to take this most awful of things that could possibly happen and turn it into something good, so that it's not all pure waste and loss." He set up a fund to assist organizations working to support victims of gun violence. He had many conversations with other victims and their families. These conversations led to the publication of a book, *Gone Boy*. This book was read by Wayne Lo, which eventually led to a meeting between the two. Their meeting led to reconciliation.

Several members of Greg Gibson's family are not in agreement with him that this was the right thing to do. That includes one of his sons: "He just doesn't want anything to do with it. He doesn't want to talk about it." Greg acknowledges that according to the standards and expectations of our society he can understand this reaction: "So yeah, I think they think I'm a little crazy."

As a Community, we have made it clear that our charism is to continue the work of Gaspar, to continue the ministry of reconciliation. There may also be many who look at what we are doing and think that we are

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*Leadership, continued from page 3*

“a little crazy.” Our corporate statements on the death penalty, gun violence, and immigration are a few examples of our willingness to continue this work in our time and place.

Wayne Lo describes how easy it was to get access to guns and ammunition for him to carry out his rampage 25 years ago in Massachusetts. “I was able to just take a taxi and go to the gun store. I said, ‘I want this sks rifle.’ And it’s incredible how easy it was. The people on the phone where I ordered the ammunition from said, ‘Thank you very much for your purchase. We’ll get it out as soon as we can to you.’”

Not a whole lot has changed on this issue in the last 25 years. The means to perpetrate hatred and violence in our world are readily available. Finding and implementing ways that lead to forgiveness and peace are more difficult to come by.

It looks like we still have a lot of work to do. No wonder the reporter had to issue a warning before the program aired: “This story may be hard for some listeners to hear.” There are difficult challenges for us to address.

Our discussions the past several months have centered on the theme of establishing a “New Creation.” This is not to be understood as coming up with a new purpose for our Community. Rather it must be seen as a way of organizing and utilizing our resources as a Precious Blood family to continue the work of renewal and reconciliation.

Questions have been raised as to whether we have a viable future. There definitely is a future for us in terms of the opportunity for continuing to engage in the ministry Gaspar envisioned. The work and the challenges to work for justice, peace, and reconciliation are there. No need for us to worry about ever being unemployed! The more difficult question confronting us is whether we are willing to do what is necessary for us to organize ourselves to be involved as fully as possible in this ministry.

I am encouraged by what has taken place over the course of the last several months. The willingness of the various aspects of our Precious Blood family to do what is necessary to move forward is encouraging. ✠

*Editor, continued from page 3*

unusually long, and later, as she used the wheelchair more and more, she understood why. In the chair, she became invisible.... People looked over her, around her, through her. They withdrew. It was the craziest thing. She had the same keen mind, the same quick wit. But most new acquaintances didn’t notice, because most no longer bothered to.” She said she was sure that people saw the wheel chair and assumed she was mentally incapacitated. “‘Doctors’ offices are the worst,’ she added, describing how she is not acknowledged when receptionists address whoever’s pushing her. ‘Does this lady have an appointment?’ ‘Does this lady have her medical card?’”

So many invisible people, marginalized in so many ways. And as the above example illustrates, some are not as obvious or immediately apparent as others. Another article in this issue is by Alia Sisson, one of our current group of volunteers. She works at Legal Aid of Western Missouri, an outreach to underserved people in need of legal help. As she explains, this includes victims of domestic violence—often another category of “invisibles.” All of our volunteers are by design placed in sites where the marginalized are served—Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation, Cristo Rey High School, Bishop Sullivan Center, KC Care Clinic. This is our charism and mission statement in action.

Pope Francis, in his Christmas Midnight Mass homily last year, alluded to other “invisibles” when he said: “Let us allow the Child in the manger to challenge us, but let us also allow ourselves to be challenged by the children of today’s world, who are not lying in a cot caressed with the affection of a mother and father, but rather suffer the squalid ‘mangers that devour dignity’: hiding underground to escape bombardment, on the pavements of a large city, at the bottom of a boat overladen with immigrants. Let us allow ourselves to be challenged by the children who are not allowed to be born, by those who cry because no one satiates their hunger, by those who do have not toys in their hands, but rather weapons.”

He went on to say, “He is born in Bethlehem, which means ‘house of bread.’ In this way, he seems to tell us that he is born as bread for us; he enters life to give us his life; he comes into our world to give us his love.... Thus, there is a direct thread joining the manger

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# Father Lawrence Cyr, C.P.P.S., March 10, 1918 – December 4, 2017

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

When Father Larry Cyr celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of priesthood in 1995, Sacred Heart Parish in Coleman, Texas—the place where he famously went to substitute for the weekend and stayed for 26 years—honored his service to the parish, the Precious Blood community, and the church. At the banquet following the Mass, Fr. Larry said, “People have forgotten why they need priests—not to be parish administrators, but to be spiritual leaders. Priests need time, and support, and encouragement to pursue the spiritual journey. If we are people continually striving to remember Jesus Christ, just by remembering him, we make him present wherever we are.”

For almost a century, Fr. Larry sought to remember Jesus and to make him present to all he met along the way of life. When we consider the longevity of his life—99 years old, 80 years as a Missionary of the Precious Blood, and 73 years as a priest, several images from the gospels come to mind. Certainly, the images from the Last Supper, and especially when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples in John’s Gospel, capture eloquently how Fr. Larry responded to the call of priestly service.

But the story of the disciples walking on the road to Emmaus and being joined by Jesus though “their eyes were prevented from recognizing him,” captures the spirit of a servant leader that guided Fr. Larry’s life as a priest. Like Jesus on the road to Emmaus, Fr. Larry spent much of his priesthood accompanying others on the journey of life. He broke open the Word and traced the traditions of our faith.

As a professor and spiritual director at St. Charles in the 1950s, Fr. Larry accompanied those who were in formation to be missionaries of the Precious Blood. In the early 1960s, he traveled west to Wichita, Kansas, where he accompanied students at Sacred Heart College (now Newman University). And then, in 1964, he became chaplain and accompanied the Adorers of the Blood of Christ at their motherhouse in Wichita.

When the Kansas City Province was born in 1965, he became provincial secretary and his accompaniment of the members of the newly-formed province was through correspondence and letters as he kept everyone



informed of what was happening. And later, in 1971, he was elected vice-provincial and became provincial when Fr. Danny Schaefer was elected Moderator General.

For the rest of the 1970s, Fr. Larry’s servant leadership of accompaniment was stretched and tested as he traveled extensively to visit our members from North Dakota to New Mexico, from Wisconsin to Western Kansas and Colorado, from Minnesota to Texas. Through the highways and byways of Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri, Fr. Larry accompanied and challenged our members to embrace the call to servant leadership in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

## *A Pioneer Spirit*

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?” the two disciples on the road to Emmaus reflected after Jesus disappeared from their midst. Fr. Larry’s servant leadership was saturated with his love for the Word of God. His deep appreciation of Precious Blood spirituality and his understanding of the charism of our

founder St. Gaspar—that we are a community dedicated to renewal of the Church and the reconciliation of all peoples through the blood of the cross and the ministry of the Word—gave him a clear insight to call forth from us in our parishes and apostolates to be people of hope and promise in a world so often conflicted with chaos, confusion, and carelessness.

It was this hope which Paul writes in the second reading from Romans, “does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” This is the message Fr. Larry preached, taught, and most importantly, lived. He knew in his bones what Paul meant when he writes, “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. How much more then, since we are now justified by his blood, will we be saved through him.”

I was a student in the seventies when Fr. Larry was provincial, but two stories from those years surface and continue to inspire because they reflect the hope that does not disappoint but rather dares us to be missionaries who move to the margins where the blood of reconciliation and renewal calls us. The first has to do with mission; the second with community.

Though our mission in Texas was begun when Fr. Schaefer was provincial, Fr. Larry dramatically expanded the number of missionaries serving in Texas. He called on members to learn Spanish and to serve those who yearned to hear the Word of God in their own language and experience. But rather than simply fill slots with Spanish-speaking missionaries, Fr. Larry was also attentive to the need for community, so he worked with the bishop of the Diocese of San Angelo to cluster our priests and brothers in parishes where they could gather regularly for fellowship and faith-sharing. For many years, our members serving in Texas were a symbol to the rest of the province that we can go to the margins but still be committed to nurturing community life through regular gatherings.

The second story reflects the hard part of community life. In the late 1970s, Fr. Larry wrote a letter to the province about alcoholism. He named it as a disease and called forth from the community an awareness of those among us who might be afflicted with this disease. With compassion and care, he called us to strengthen the bond of charity by paying attention to

those who were struggling with alcoholism. One of our former members who was working at the time in the treatment field wrote Fr. Larry a letter thanking him for raising awareness about the disease of alcoholism and said it was one of the finest letters he had ever read from a religious leader. In helping members who were struggling with alcoholism into treatment, Fr. Larry gave them a new lease on life to continue to serve in ministry.

### *A Pastoral Spirit*

When I would visit Fr. Larry the last few years here at St. Charles, he would often reflect on how much he enjoyed travelling when he was provincial. He spoke of visiting most of the countries in Europe and of several trips to Rome for meetings—he, of course, studied in Rome as a young priest. But one of his favorite memories was his trip to the Holy Land and to Egypt where he saw the Pyramids and rode a camel.

So, given his spirit of adventure, both personally and as provincial, it is somewhat surprising that that he settled down in one parish for 26 years! But even though it may look on the surface like the pioneer became a settler, in his 26 years as pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Coleman, he sparked a renewal of spirit, of love, and of service that the people of the parish remember vividly. When I called the parish the morning after Fr. Larry died, they had already heard the news of their beloved former pastor's death. Fr. Larry was deeply loved by the people of Coleman.

As he explained in an interview in our province's *New Wine Press* in 2007, “I just loved it there. What I treasure the most is the closeness to the people. They were my family. Closeness to all the members of the parish, not just a few. In some of the other places...I only got to know a few of the people. But in Coleman, I knew everybody.”

And everyone, Catholic or not, loved Fr. Larry. He was very active in the ministerial alliance and brought the same quality of servant leadership he showed as spiritual director, professor, and provincial to the role of pastor. He sought to bring that spirit of reconciliation to the parish and the people of Coleman. As he said in that interview in 2007, “One of my aims in Coleman was to get the Anglos and Hispanics working together, and today they are.

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# New Creation 1844

by Fr. Keith Branson, C.P.P.S., Avila University

The Missionaries of the Precious Blood became a new creation in 1844 when Francis de Sales Brunner and his companions came to serve the German Catholic community of northern Ohio. Brunner was a relatively old man at the time: he was 49 years old, and he led a group of 15 men young enough to be his children. Brunner himself already had an interesting history, and his preparation for mission began with his childhood.

He was born on January 10, 1795 in Mümliswil-Ramiswil, Canton Solothurn, Switzerland. He came from a family of prosperous farmers, and his mother, born Maria Anna Probst, was especially devout. Her son wrote of her:

“Although she had lived in the fear of God from childhood, she had to thank the parish missions for her exceptional piety and zealous devotion. While still very young she attended the missions which the Fathers of the Society of Jesus conducted in the eighties [1780s]. The seed fell upon good ground, for since that time she gave herself constantly and unreservedly up to the service of God. Even in her 70<sup>th</sup> year she knew how to recount most of these mission sermons. She directed the education of her children and the management of her household according to the lessons she had absorbed in that time. Frequently she said to those of her household: ‘we must not forget what the missionary said’; or, ‘The Missionaries said this and you must obey them.’ She placed a high value on missions and frequently was heard to say: ‘until missions are again conducted everywhere, we will not experience better times.’”

There were several qualities he inherited from his mother: her devotion to the Blessed Mother (toward the end of her life she would pray between 9-12 Rosaries daily), her mission of praying for the Holy Souls in Purgatory, her devotion to the Passion, and her esteem for parish missions. Two of these are reflected in his motto: “Obey the Rule/Love the Mother of God/Pray for the Poor Souls.” This may have also been motivation for taking up the un-monastic ministry of preaching missions.

In 1825, Brunner started preaching missions in northwest Switzerland and Alsace, and was known as

the “Missionary Father from Mariastein.” He also took care of vacant parishes for extended periods. This brought him into conflict with his monastery due to frequent absences, which the novices in his care complained about. There was a great internal divide within him: the desire

to live as an exemplary Benedictine in cloister, and the call to undertake mission preaching. He thought the call to go preach exposed him to worldly things too much, yet it always pulled him outside the walls. A common Benedictine saying is “A monk outside of the monastery is not a monk,” so Brunner frequently stretched this maxim. However, he was held in great regard by his community and was assigned important tasks. The dichotomy in his life was not resolved for many years.

He grew dissatisfied with his monastic life, and moved to a Trappist monastery in Oelenberg, Alsace in search of a more pure and holy lifestyle. Trappist life was a struggle for him, and after a little over a year there, the French government expelled foreign religious, which was a blessing in disguise. Over the next few years he tried many things: establishing a Benedictine community dedicated to mission preaching, running a boy’s school, gathering missionaries for service in the Congo, and seeking appointment as a Papal missionary. He was supporting his mother in her last years, who gathered a small community of young women around her for prayer and service.

After his mother’s death, an 1838 visit to a Precious Blood Mission house in Cesena gave him



the vision of his future. After a short probation, he was received into the community and sent back to Switzerland to expand the community there. He wanted to go to America, but the optimistic Moderator General at the time, Biagio Valentini, thought he would prosper in his home country. Over the next five years, he was able to recruit and organize a community that included the young women drawn to his mother as well as his own recruits, however his audience in Switzerland was diminishing: local pastors were becoming reluctant to have him for mission, and his local reputation as an unreliable renegade worked against him.

He could have given up. He had purchased Löwenberg Castle, and could have stayed with his little community, living a cloistered existence under his complete control, until his time on earth was done. But the appeal of preaching missions and fulfilling his life-long dream of foreign missions led him to seek an invitation from then Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati to come to America.

Brunner has been called a failure in Europe, and a success in America. Perhaps life at the edge of civilization was the garden meant for him, although success may have come partly from filling a desperate need. His community in America was the same as in Europe: the houses were cloisters, strictly segregated between the sexes, with minimal contact with the outside world.

Life in his houses was tough. Brunner was a charismatic man, a prolific recruiter, and a spellbinding preacher, however there seemed to be few people with lukewarm opinions of him. Other German-speaking pastors in Ohio wanted little to do with him. Some of his followers may have thought him a tyrant, especially since acting as the doorkeeper in his houses meant he controlled access to the outside world. A major difference between Gaspar's houses and Brunner's is Brunner left no time for recreation in his daily schedule. He believed in hard work and strict silence, complaining of any boisterous celebration he ran across.

Yet in his own way, Francis de Sales Brunner was adaptable, and did not express disappointment when his suggestion for vows was rejected by the community in 1852. The first posting in America was an impossible parish, full of personal rivalries

and discord, however he quickly shifted his focus to other places on the fringe where they could cultivate peaceful communities.

Perhaps the most important lesson I value from Francis de Sales Brunner is his willingness to venture into an unknown country with a group of young people he hardly knew, in spite of questionable health. He had a vision of a better world, he never let the dream die, and he didn't let anything keep him from it, even his own aging body. Even though most of us would not be able to live in one of his houses, we can learn from him. As we look at new creations today, perhaps we should not focus our attention on our own personal mortality, or a history of recent disappointment, but on the vision of the kingdom of God. Tending the garden together, faithful to the hope of harvest, even if we have to move the garden to more fertile territory, can bring new life to anyone. ✠

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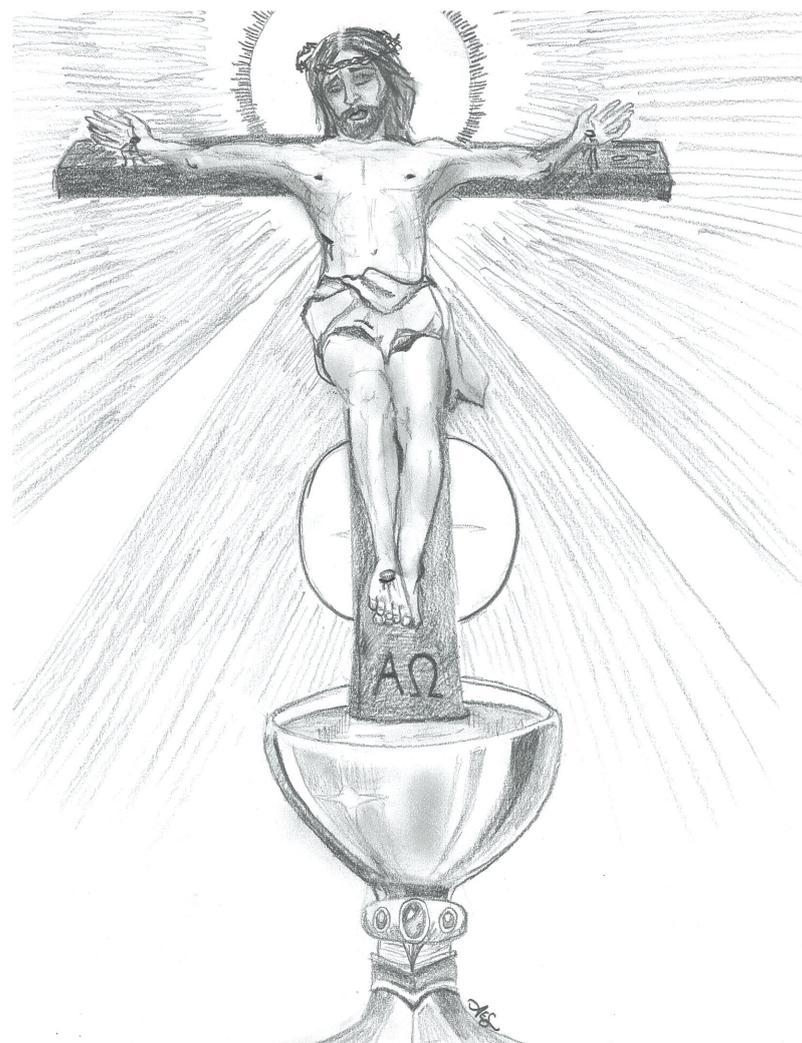
*Fr. Cyr, continued from page 7*

I liked everywhere I was, but I was most at home in Coleman.”

At the conclusion of that interview, Fr. Larry was asked how he would like people to remember him and he said simply, “That I loved them and they loved me.” We did love Fr. Larry Cyr and he loved us. He loved his family, he loved the Missionaries and Companions of the Precious Blood, and he loved the people of Coleman and Wichita and Kansas City and St. Charles and every place where he lived as a servant of the blood of Christ through these remarkable 99 years of life.

Now, we commend Fr. Larry to the Lord, as he arrives on God's holy mountain that the prophet Isaiah describes in today's first reading, the place that God provides for all people, the place where “God will wipe away the tears from all faces.” We thank God for the gift of Fr. Larry's life as we echo Isaiah's prophecy: “Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! This is the Lord for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!”

Were not our hearts burning with love within us as he journeyed with us on this road of life? Rest in peace, Fr. Larry, and enjoy the feast of God's eternal love. ✠



*Artwork by Alia Sisson*

## My Year of Miracles

*by Alia Sisson, Precious Blood Volunteer*

2017 was a year of immense and tremendous change for me. It stands as a testament, not to my own strength, but to the power of God to work through broken people. He writes straight with crooked lines. At the beginning of this year, I was underemployed, fighting depression, and feeling directionless. I had lost my spark.

Little did I know that one choice would end up changing my entire life for the better. I started going to Mass on a regular basis. For Catholics, this is standard operating procedure. But this was pretty radical for a Presbyterian! Having attended two years of Catholic grade school and three years at the Marianist University of Dayton, I still had never pictured myself going to Mass by choice.

A candlelit midnight Christmas Mass at St. Joseph Cathedral in Columbus, Ohio inspired me to keep coming back. Slowly learning the ancient Mass opened my eyes to the sacredness contained in everyday living. During Lent, I grew more devout and began going to daily Mass and praying the rosary. I also gave up alcohol, which—for someone who adored wine as much as I did—felt like a big sacrifice. As distractions fell away throughout those 40 days, I developed a real relationship with God.

By the time Easter arrived, I knew I was ready to convert. As much as I loved attending Mass, I yearned to be in full communion with the church and receive the Eucharist at Christ's table with my brothers and sisters. Rather than feel like an outsider,

I wanted to experience the sacramental graces as a full-fledged Roman Catholic. Nonetheless, I had to wait until September until RCIA classes began.

Although I could not partake in Holy Communion, I grew closer to God in adoration every week. One hot summer evening, still unsuccessful at finding a good job, I prostrated myself on the floor of my favorite adoration chapel and begged God to open a door for me. I prayed over and over, “Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders / Let me walk upon the water / Wherever you would call me.”

I did not expect God to take my request so literally. The next morning I received an email from Tim Deveney, the Director of Precious Blood Volunteers, inviting me to apply to be a volunteer in Kansas City, Missouri. I finally had an opportunity to grow “where my trust is without borders.” After a quick Google search to make sure Kansas City wasn’t totally lame, I called back with a surge of joy. I applied, interviewed, and was accepted into the volunteer program the next month.

In September, I packed two suitcases and flew to Kansas City to start my year of service with the Precious Blood Volunteers. More than a few times the thought crossed my mind, “What on earth am I doing, picking up and moving to the middle of the country where I don’t know a soul?” Despite momentary flashes of doubt, my overall feeling was a deep sense of peace. Once I met Tim and my fellow volunteers, I knew I was right where I belonged.

Community living with three great volunteers and two amazing priests in an eight-bedroom Tudor home is absolutely as fantastic as it sounds. But even more perfect is my volunteer position at Legal Aid of Western Missouri (LAWMO). Having invested three years of blood, sweat, and tears in law school, this gave me the perfect opportunity to use the skills I have and gain indispensable knowledge for my future practice.

I consider myself so privileged to be the first Precious Blood Volunteer placed at LAWMO. My job now is to assist the Domestic Team in obtaining full orders of protection, child custody, and dissolution of marriage for domestic violence victims who cannot afford a private attorney. This position has given me a new sense of purpose in helping those

who have been victimized by society transform into powerful survivors. Talk about redemption!

Sometimes being a volunteer isn’t easy. We do not have a lot of spending money, but that has turned into a blessing itself. Instead of buying things to be happy, we share our time, talent, and stories—and that is more than enough. Especially interacting with the clients I serve, I have never been more appreciative of a home cooked meal, a roof over my head, and knowing I live in a safe place. I also just celebrated my ninth month of sobriety.

I am thrilled to be welcomed into full communion with the Catholic Church on Epiphany Sunday, January 7, 2018. This day is especially meaningful to me, not only as the day before my birthday, but also as the day after the birthday of Saint Gaspar! There is no better present than being welcomed home into the church that awakened my soul.

Over the last year, the Lord has performed nothing less than a miracle in my life. Through His mercy, I went from hopeless to hopeful, purposeless to purpose-driven, from bondage to freedom. I will continue to keep an open mind and heart as the next chapter of God’s plan unfolds. Through Him all things are possible. ✠

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*Editor, continued from page 5*

and the cross, where Jesus will become bread that is broken: it is the direct thread of love which is given and which saves us, which brings light to our lives, and peace to our hearts. The shepherds grasped this in that night. They were among the marginalized of those times. But no one is marginalized in the sight of God and it was precisely they who were invited to the Nativity. Those who felt sure of themselves, self-sufficient, were at home with their possessions; the shepherds instead ‘went with haste.’ Let us allow ourselves also to be challenged and called tonight by Jesus. Let us go to him with trust, from that area in us we feel to be marginalized, from our own limitations. Let us touch the tenderness which saves.”

As Advent was prefaced by the challenge of Jesus to “see” the unseen, so our Christmas season ends with the hope of a new birth and then the “showing” of Jesus to all with the feasts of Epiphany and Baptism of the Lord. With that we have no excuse to “not see.” No one should be invisible. ✠

# Community Makes Us Better

by Ruth Mather, *Mid-Missouri Companion*

Even before I made my first covenant as a Precious Blood Companion, I found myself wondering how I would be able to give back. After I retired from my civil service job and moved back to Missouri, I was looking for intellectual conversation, something to spark my interest, challenge me, give me a sense of purpose. I have found those things with my association with the members and Companions of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

It began with conversations and getting to know the Precious Blood priests at my parish and then grew with the inquiry and formation process of becoming a Companion with the Central Missouri Companions and the Kansas City Province. Over the past few years, I have grown personally through my relationships with the members and Companions of the Kansas City Province and have met some members and Companions from other provinces through retreats, pilgrimages, and other gatherings.

I am profoundly grateful to have found this Precious Blood family, and have spent a great deal of time trying to find ways to give back. Because of the time I spend with members and Companions, the relationships I have developed, they make me want to be a better person. How could I ever give back to that degree? I felt as if I am receiving all this grace and giving nothing in return. I have no special talents, I can't sing, have no artistic abilities, am an expert at nothing.

Precious Blood members and Companions have given me opportunities to debate difficult subjects, ask questions (many questions), express my views on any topic, and have supported everyone's right to do so. At times, there is validation; other times, a new perspective or better appreciation for a different one. I always come away with a confidence and understanding that makes me want to do better.

I know I am living my life with more conviction, living what I believe, sharing, taking a stand. Here is an example. After Mass at coffee and donuts, some members of my parish were discussing the fact that there always seems to be Hispanic names in the police reports of the local paper. They naturally equated this to immigrants and criminal activity. I pointed out the offenses related to these reports were non-violent

offenses, and most were related to driving without a valid drivers' license. I shared that it is legal for an undocumented immigrant to own a car in this country, but they cannot obtain a valid drivers' license. And documented immigrants have difficulty obtaining drivers' licenses because they must take the tests in English. It is more difficult to read and write in a second language than it is to communicate verbally. They agreed that there were almost no violent criminal offenses related to those reports. And they had not realized the difficulties immigrants experience obtaining legal driving status.

I feel my life has more purpose. I have been somewhat surprised to realize that people notice that I am comfortable in my own skin, in my beliefs. I have actually had friends and family tell me that they have noticed an energy and a joy. They attribute it to my faith. While my Catholic faith has an important role, it is much more. It is the community that I have within the Precious Blood. It is knowing that I can make mistakes or missteps and be supported while I get back on track.

Being a part of this community is so special to me, has brought about such wonderful change in my life, and it has caused me to worry about how I can ever give back. I am always looking for ways to do more, to do better. At times, I have really agonized over this question. And then at the Companion Retreat this past October, I had an "a-ha moment." It was when Fr. Joe Nassal, who was giving this year's retreat, said (and I paraphrase here), "...we members need you companions, without you, what would we talk about? Our conversations would mainly consist of How about those Chiefs? and the weather."

That was when I realized that those conversations and relationships that I have with members and Companions go both ways! We are a community and community makes us all better. Each one of us is unique. Sharing that uniqueness helps us to grow. While we have a common spirituality as part of the Precious Blood community, we bring different experiences, knowledge, and perspectives. Our backgrounds are widely different, but we have common goals. Sharing with each other gives us unique growth opportunities. Together we are better. Community is a blessing. ✚



*Precious Blood Prayer Group, St. Agnes Parish, Los Angeles*

## Wednesday Evening Oratory in L.A.

*by Fr. Timothy Guthridge, C.P.P.S., St. Agnes Parish, Los Angeles, California*

On October 23, 1808, newly ordained Gaspar del Buffalo, with the help of Fr. Gaetano Bonnanni and two other priests, began the evening oratory of Santa Maria in Vincis in Rome.

The oratory was a place of nightly preaching and catechism. Each night had different themes. One evening would be the “Way of the Cross.” Another night would be Eucharistic Adoration. Saturday evenings were for Marian devotions. Sunday nights were either some type of moral discourse or a presentation on Christianity.

The oratory was popular. People came out of religious devotion. People also came because it gave them something inexpensive to do during an evening. People with little money in Rome had limited entertainment options. Gaspar wrote that the oratory would be a better alternative than drinking, gambling, and lewd drama.

People came to the oratory for a variety of reasons. What they received was an opportunity to encounter and experience the presence of Christ

through the preaching of the word and the practice of religious devotion. There was also the experience of community and comradeship.

Every Wednesday night at St. Agnes Parish in Los Angeles where I currently serve, hundreds of people come to enjoy and encounter Christ in what could be described as an oratory of word, worship, and praise. From 7:00–9:00 p.m., Spanish speaking people from the south-central neighborhoods come to participate in what is called the Precious Blood Prayer Group. It is a weekly experience that I believe would make St. Gaspar proud.

The first hour begins with Charismatic music and prayer. God is praised at a very high and emotional volume. The music is joyful and loud. Loved ones are prayed for and all types of petitions are brought before God. The main emphasis, however, is praise and thanksgiving.

The attitude is always joyful. This is not a time for mourning and lamentation. People joyfully bring  
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# Changing Narratives

by Sr. Donna Liette, C.P.P.S., PBMR

Do you remember December 31, 1999 when we all waited with fear and expectation of what could be? Some prepared for the worst—would the world come to an end? Well it didn't, and as the new millennium began, four Missionaries of the Precious Blood felt challenged to change the narrative of priests and their relationship to community, so they moved beyond their work in parishes to the streets of Back of the Yards in Chicago. They opened a safe place and Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation was born!

January is a great time to sit by the fireplace and remember what was and what is becoming, and yesterday I did just that. 2017 was an amazing year of transformation at PBMR. The dream of purchasing and renovating an abandoned house in the neighborhood became a reality, and so Mother Brunner (MB) House was opened. A few days ago, my heart was just bursting with joy as I walked through this beautiful new home—take a walk with me. There in the first room was Allyson, our social work intern, with a mother searching for affordable housing. In the next room, another mother was working with a volunteer on possibilities for furthering her education; this mother received her high school diploma months ago in our newly created Education Lab with the support of Sr. Janet. In the two Mother Brunner kitchens, pizzas were being prepared; in the family circle room, Leah, one of our Precious Blood Volunteers, was preparing for a Young Women's Circle, and Francis (Fr. Denny's dog) was checking out the activities, hoping a morsel of food would fall for his consumption. Then I stopped by Julie's office, one of four in the MB House. Julie and I celebrated the achievements of her advocacy group, CRIC; because of their work, Julie and other mothers and fathers now know that their sons—who had originally been sentenced to life without the possibility of parole as juveniles—will not die in prison. In fact, some are already free! So, if anyone should think that our "Back of the Yards" neighborhood is just an ugly, violent, inactive community—come and see, the narratives are changing!

On a warm day several weeks ago, Raheem, one of the four young men who helped renovate the MB House, and I planted tulip bulbs around the house (a new experience for him). As he was digging the holes and placing the bulbs point up, we talked about how these bulbs need to be in the dark earth for the winter

but then we will see new life pop up all over – and we will delight the whole neighborhood. We compared that to our own lives and to our community: out of the dark, new life has been popping up.

Of course, you have all heard of our community garden. Once in this community, there were no fresh, affordable vegetables—a real food desert—but Sr. Carolyn and her team (Mary, Sharrow, several youths, and our friends from St. John of the Cross) have transformed a parking lot into a luscious vegetable garden which produced over 3000 lbs. of food for the community this year.

With the constant coaching of Patrick, we have youth, mothers, and fathers out in the workforce delighted to have a job and the support of PBMR – another changing narrative!

Yesterday, Mr. Lewis from Coldwell Bankers delivered our \$12,000 check for the startup of our next building, and he was amazed when he saw all the activity, and was especially impressed by the youth in the woodworking shop—so engaged in their projects, yet so hospitable and proud of their work under the guidance of Mike.

As always, Restorative Justice plays a major role at the Center. There have been circles of reconciliation, celebration, training with young women, young men, and mothers throughout the year. Pamela has facilitated many of these and introduced circles into the schools and community, along with introducing our young people to pumpkin carving!

I would be remiss if I did not mention the transformative ministry in our jails and prisons. Every Tuesday and Thursday, Frs. Denny and Dave along with Sara and Mike and other volunteers visit our incarcerated children at the Juvenile Detention Center. Mike Donovan goes from one Illinois prison to another, week after week, visiting young men who have been sentenced, offering them support and love. Many have no other visitors but him. More of our staff, including Artrice and Orlando, also provide services for people re-entering society after incarceration. We walk with these people through a very difficult transition.

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# Dog is Love

by Trish Frazer, Lake Mary, Florida Companion

In July of 2016 my husband John and I decided to get a puppy. It had been 5 years since our dog passed away and John spoke of retirement. This was my way of getting a puppy for Christmas, because I wouldn't have to do any of the training since John was retiring! Famous last words.

Our puppy was born September 11, 2016 and on October 15, 2016 we picked out our baby girl. From that moment, I knew I was in trouble. She licked and played with John, bouncing between his feet, but when it was my turn to hold her, she looked into my eyes and decided it was time to go potty—in my lap.

On November 5, 2016, we brought home our beautiful baby girl and named her Sylvie VI. And John didn't retire. Sylvie and I had a rough couple of months. She scratched and nibbled me every chance she got. Each day I would go home during my lunch hour and let her out—returning to work bloody with new “war wounds.”

When Sylvie turned 12 weeks it was time to begin structured puppy classes. I just knew this would calm her down and save my arms and face from future scars. We learned the basics and many tricks. Sylvie excelled so quickly that we decided to join an obedience and agility class. That's when our life began to change.

Before class we would gather in a large, fenced-in area to wait our turn before entering the larger training area. Owners with their dogs of all ages would congregate and the dogs would greet one another excitedly. Like all the other humans, we would talk to the excited dogs saying, “What's your name?” and “Good dog.”

As time went on, John and I would talk to other owners about our dogs, the weather, and the class. We would arrive early just to be able to catch up and share the progress of training. We spent time laughing and sharing stories of our latest adventure or the challenges of raising an energetic puppy. Our circle was widening.

I once read that hospitality means to “reach to strangers.” I suppose that John and I have always done that by opening our home to anyone who needed a place to stay or wanted a hearty meal or a cup of



coffee. Surprisingly, our puppy was about to teach us to reach out in a very different way.

After class one day, we were approached by one of the trainers who saw something in our puppy and perhaps in us. We were asked if we would be interested in teaching Sylvie to become a therapy dog. We discovered that a therapy dog is often confused with a service or emotional support dog. A therapy dog's “job” is to visit nursing homes, children's homes, retirement homes, hospitals, hospices, schools, prisons, and any other place where their love is needed. Therapy dogs partner with their owners to share their unconditional love and support with seniors, sick people, the disabled, and others who can benefit from the special spirit-lifting attention of a dog. John and I didn't hesitate, and with our resounding “yes” we began our six-month training.

As Companions, St. Gaspar challenges us to include those who are on the fringes of what we call community and to do so with compassion. I often forget that seeing through the lens of Precious Blood Spirituality is omni-directional. I can see the homeless on the street but miss seeing the lonely person in the nursing home. I gather food for the food pantry but don't see the child in the children's home starving for attention.

As Companions, we are all called to bring the presence of Christ to those who may feel forgotten.

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*John & Trish Fraiser, and Sylvie*

*Dog is Love, continued from page 15*

Because of our commitment to the therapy dog program, we now sit and visit with someone in a wheelchair or bed. They eagerly pat Sylvie on the head and share stories of their own pet long gone. Through this listening and sharing, perhaps we give them a sense of self-worth and dignity.

After our long journey through training, John, Sylvie and I graduated. There were ups and downs, but everyone we've visited remains engraved in our hearts. From the repeated stories we hear in nursing homes to the giggles of children, we are blessed to realize we make a difference all because of a little puppy named Sylvie. †

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Our Restorative Justice Café (RJ Café – Art Center) has also transformed and been transformed by the art displays and the many visitors: ministers, police officers, Latino families, and guests from our Fall Barbeque fundraiser. Speaking of that wonderful October event, our community joined in prayer and celebration with friends from the north, south, east, and west and suddenly people who were far off were brought close at the table of Eucharist and roasted pork!

Yes, our staff has rapidly increased and so has our presence in the neighborhood. We have a very eager and energetic group of young volunteers who—along with Jonathan, Lamonte and Phillip—really change narratives and keep the older ones of us on our toes—even Fr. Kelly!

It is a New Year. May we continue to work together, allowing God to transform us and our communities, churches, and families so the old narratives are changed and new life springs up out of the dark. †

*Wednesday Evening, continued from page 13*

praise and petitions to a joyful and loving God. I doubt if any of the people who come have read Pope Francis' "Joy of the Gospel." Perhaps a few have. But the joy of the gospel seems to come naturally these folks, even among the handicapped and mentally challenged who attend with other family members.

The second hour is normally an hour of teaching and Scripture. There are, however, no dry lectures. Often there is a lay evangelist or catechist. In addition to their teaching abilities, many of these people are trained musicians and singers. Many of the teachings are done in the context of music and dance. There is a fair amount of dancing in the pews, though movement is limited. A lot of the evangelists are quite creative in the use of hand and arm gesture in the use of song and get the people very involved.

I asked one person, who had been coming to this prayer meeting for more than twenty years, why this weekly event was so important to her, and she told me this prayer community was an extended family to her. This was a place of love and support. Another person told me this was a place of education and formation. One gentleman, who gave me an incredulous look after I asked why this prayer meeting was important to him, told me, "to give glory and praise to God."

People come to pray and have a good time. In the process, they learn about their Catholic faith and the Word of God. I am quite sure that Gaspar's oratory at Santa Maria in Vincis was very different, but goal was the same, namely, to enable people to encounter the presence of Christ through prayer and preaching. The Precious Blood Prayer Group has been going on for more than twenty years. It is a gift from God than enables people to encounter God. This is what makes a good oratory, and St. Agnes Parish in Los Angeles has a great one. †



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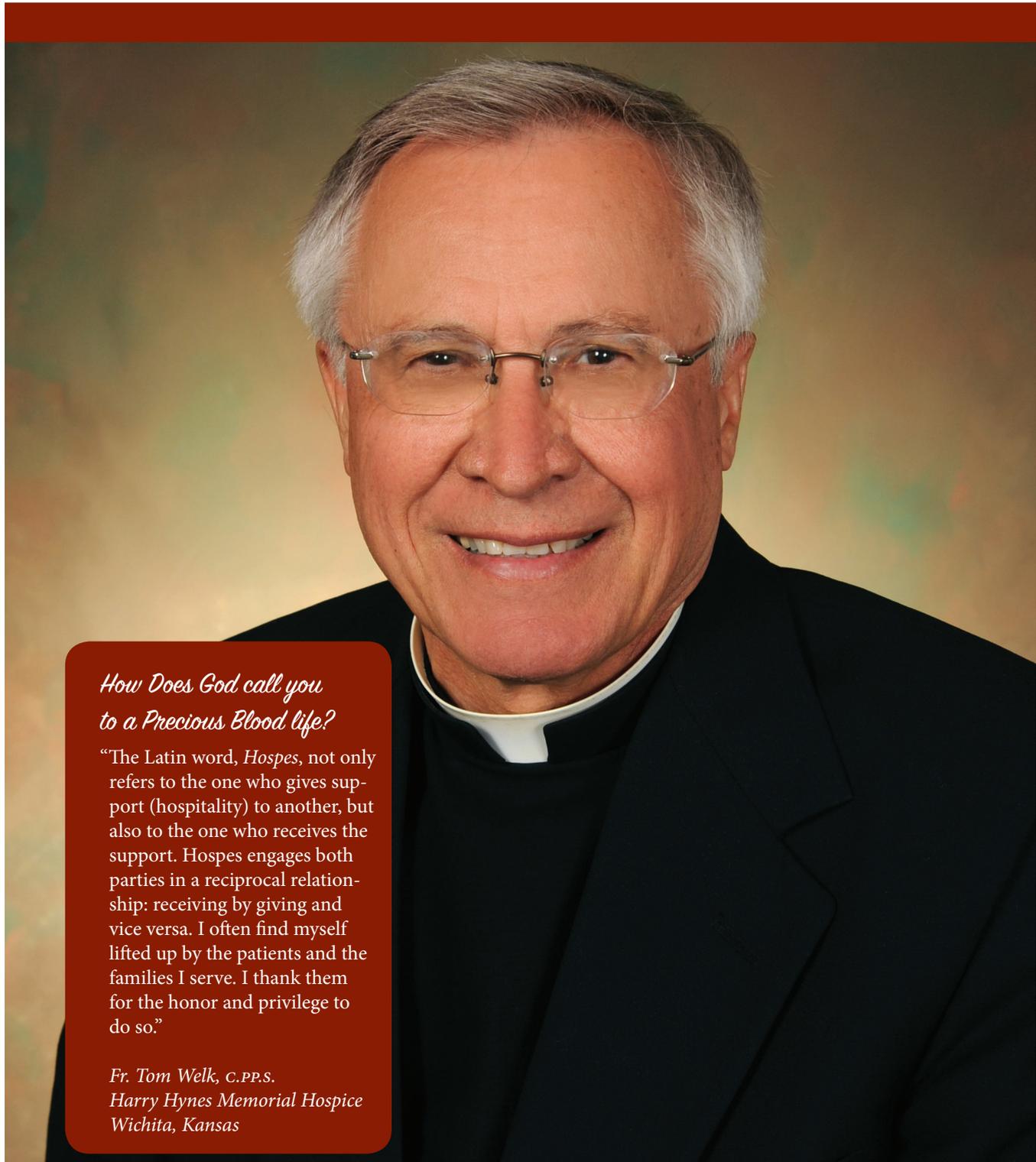
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“The Latin word, *Hospes*, not only refers to the one who gives support (hospitality) to another, but also to the one who receives the support. *Hospes* engages both parties in a reciprocal relationship: receiving by giving and vice versa. I often find myself lifted up by the patients and the families I serve. I thank them for the honor and privilege to do so.”

*Fr. Tom Welk, C.P.P.S.  
Harry Hynes Memorial Hospice  
Wichita, Kansas*