

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. ✚