

The NEW WINE PRESS

Motivated by the Spirituality of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ

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MERLAP II

More than fifty lay associates and members gathered in Rome for the second *Meeting of Representatives of Lay Associates Programs* (“MERLAP II”), held at the Collegio Preziosissimo Sangue—the central house of the Italian Province—June 13-21.

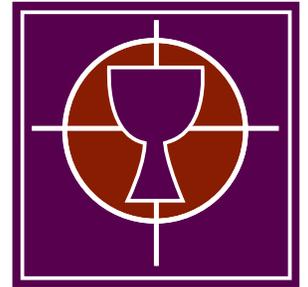
During the nine days of meetings and excursions, participants from sixteen countries prayed together, shared the stories of their journeys in faith and ministry, and were able to visit some of the sites significant for our founder, St. Gaspar del Bufalo.

On the final day, there was time for the small groups to meet and discuss what they had learned and what they hoped the future would bring. Among many suggestions, there was a strong desire for more frequent meetings like *MERLAP* at international or regional levels. Other suggestions that were repeated by two or more groups were to have someone at the level of the general curia to support and coordinate the lay associates, more emphasis on attracting young people, and more lay involvement with *The Cup of the New Covenant*.

In the late afternoon of June 21 the participants celebrated the Eucharist together, at which they were given a remembrance in the form of an image of Mary with a chalice at the foot of the cross. 🍷



Representatives of the Companions at the MERLAP gathering. Front row: Gretchen Bailey, Dave Matz, Jean Giesige, Marie Trout; center: Mark Giesige; back: Rita McNally, Sharry Robinson, Frank Niemas, Tom Pankiewicz, Bill Nordenbrock, Nick Renner.



NEW
WINESKINS
page 2

BECOMING
REAL
page 3

IMMIGRANT
CHURCH
page 4

PREACHING
THE CUP
page 6

LIVING
ON THE
EDGE
page 8

SEARCH FOR
GOOD SOIL
page 9

TRANSITIONS
page 11

NEW WINESKINS

Garry Richmeier, C.P.P.S.

The term “Fundamental Extremists” is common today. Often it has been used to describe Islamic terrorists and their supporters. We easily connect this term with violence, fear, suicide, war, hate, and death.

When pushed to the extreme, fundamentalism of any kind devolves into polarization, mistrust, and conflict. At its core is the belief that some people have “the truth,” totally and completely, and everyone else is wrong. In religious fundamentalism the “in” group often uses phrases like “God says so” in order to verify their version of the truth. Thus the Catholic Church could promote the killing of non-Christians during the Inquisition because “God” said they couldn’t be saved anyway unless they converted. And Islamic terrorists today can justify killing people in order to follow an interpretation of the Koran calling for *jihad*, a holy war against infidels.

In a 1993 document entitled “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”, the Vatican warned against a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible. It said “The fundamentalist approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life. . . instead of telling them that the Bible does not necessarily contain an immediate answer to each and every problem. . . Fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide. It injects into life a false certitude, for it unwittingly confuses the divine substance of the biblical message with what are in fact its human limitations.”

Part of the wisdom of this statement lies in its recognition of possible human error in interpreting what God is saying through scripture. It cautions us to be very careful about speaking for God because we can easily slip into speaking for our own biases and prejudices. We need to be especially

careful when we interpret scripture (God) as saying something about killing, condemning, ostracizing, hating, or marginalizing others in some way.

In a recent column, James Carroll points out that “Catholic fundamentalists are more likely to be called ‘traditionalists,’ and today the Vatican is their sponsor.” He asserts that these traditionalists do not read the Bible uncritically, looking for answers to problems, but rather they read papal statements that way, finding there the “false certitude” that the Vatican warns biblical literalists against. For example, Pope Benedict’s *Apostolic Exhortation*, issued in early March, begins as a “contemplative appreciation of the Eucharist” and “ends up as a manifesto designed to keep many Catholics from receiving Communion at Mass.”

Carroll writes further: “The ticket to Communion is an uncritical acceptance of what the pope calls, in a striking echo, ‘fundamental values,’ which include defense of human life ‘from conception to natural death.’ The key declaration is that ‘these values are not negotiable.’ But culture consists precisely in negotiation of values, and change in how values are understood is part of life. Moral reasoning is not mere obedience, but lively interaction among principles, situations, and the ‘human limitations’ referred to in the 1993 Vatican statement. Take ‘conception.’ The great Thomas Aquinas depended on 13th-century notions of biology, and did not believe that human life began at conception. Negotiation followed. Take ‘natural death.’ Disagreements over its meaning (including among Catholic bishops) were made vivid not long ago in the case of Terri Schiavo. Negotiation followed. The pope affirms universal and unchanging ‘values grounded inhuman nature,’ as if human nature is fixed, instead of evolving. One detects

See *Wineskins*, continued on page 5. . .

THE NEW WINE PRESS

Kansas City Province

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, 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, together with Precious Blood Companions, 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* is published monthly. The submission deadline is the 15th of the month.

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“BECOMING REAL”—REFLECTIONS ON MERLAP

Marie Trout

More than fifty lay associates and members from the world wide Precious Blood family gathered from June 13-22 in Rome for the second *MERLAP* (*Meeting of Representatives of Lay Associate Programs*).

Fr. Barry Fischer opened the meeting by telling us we would experience Precious Blood in many different ways during our time together. He said we would experience a “communion of diversity,” and he invited us to be open to that experience.

The diversity was apparent in many different ways during our meeting. It does not take one long to realize “we are not in Kansas anymore” after being greeted in several different languages! We listened to presentations in many different tongues through the expertise of translators.

Lay associate groups from around the world shared much information with the group—everything from basic information about their countries to what formation looked like for their group and what ministries they were involved in. Technology helped as some talks were accompanied by a power point presentation to liven up the communication.

As I listened to the many reports, I learned the variety of ways in which Precious Blood spirituality is lived out in these many lay groups. Italy shared about “twinning” with an orphanage in another country. Peru told of their solidarity parishes, three parishes who work together with a common focus. All groups spoke of how they study and learn about Precious Blood spirituality, and more importantly, the ways in which they try to live out the spirituality in which they have found a home. The representatives from Poland noted that their formation is seven years long. Some groups shared the difficulty they have trying to find materials that are translated into their native language.

Listening to these groups reminded me of Fr. Barry’s words that we would experience Precious Blood in many ways, and his challenge to be open to the differences of diversity. As I listened, there were so many different ways

in which the laity were invited and encouraged to be in relationship with the community. I was always impressed with the spirit and energy that animated the sharing of the different groups. However, I never heard any group talk about inviting people to explore the possibility of being called to Precious Blood spirituality. Call is such a major focus for Companions here in the United States. Once again, I was reminded to be open to the diversity.

Fr. Francesco Bartoloni in his presentation shared that pilgrimage is part of our experience and it certainly was at *MERLAP*. We experienced Gaspar’s Rome in a three-hour walking tour lead by Fr. Jerry Stack. We visited Giano, Acuto and Albano. We experienced Precious Blood in a variety of ways as we walked the paths that Gaspar walked and heard stories of the events in his life that led him to follow Precious Blood spirituality. We experienced Acuto, the root of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, through the heart of Sr. Bernardica Kesak, ASC of the Teutonic Province—who was visiting Acuto for the very first time. Sister shared at our liturgy what was in her heart as she visited for the first time the place where her community was founded. I experienced Precious Blood in a new way through the humbleness and joy with which she shared her experience.

At a later presentation, Fr. Barry shared a saying with us from a mission house: “No one becomes real to us until they are real to us—including God.”

After ten days of experiencing the many lay people around the world who are living out Precious Blood spirituality in their lives, they are now real to me. After sharing at the table at Eucharist and in the dining hall, praying together, laughing and singing and going for gelato together, they are real to me. There are men and women around the world who are living their lives through this spirituality and they are inviting God to become real for them and for others. 🍷



Marianella Castaneda, Rita Milagros Risco Luyo, Aurelia Cristina Bustamante Inga, Lay Associates from Peru after sharing a dance in native costume.



Participants are shown here taking part in an ancient ritual from the United States known as the “Bunny Hop.”

IMMIGRANT CHURCH

[Editor's note: This article is excerpted from "Catholic Online," April 20, 2007. It seems all the more timely now, given the latest failure to pass legislation addressing the immigration issue.]

Too many Catholics believe myths surrounding immigration and immigrants based on misinformation and misconceptions requiring the Catholic Church to respond with a comprehensive fight against ignorance, said a U.S. bishops' official.

In an April 17 presentation kicking off a three-day Justice for Immigrants campaign conference here, Mark Franken, executive director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services, stressed that if the Catholic Church is ever going to "change hearts and minds" it must "relearn what it means to be an immigrant church" and to engage the faithful through education. "Our biggest challenge is not the attacks from the immigration restrictionists, the racists, or the xenophobes," he said. "Our biggest challenge is ignorance!"

"Too many of our fellow Catholics believe the myths: immigrants are criminals; immigrants don't pay taxes; immigrants are a drain on public resources; immigrants don't want to integrate within our society; immigrants are taking our jobs. None of these perceptions are real," Franken said, adding that for "many, many people perception is fact."

"We've got to debunk the myths. We've got to create empathy with our newest sisters and brothers. We've got to answer the question: "What would Jesus do?," he said.

More than 100 Catholic social-justice leaders, diocesan directors and others active in the USCCB Justice for Immigrants campaign gathered for the April 17-19 event, which included going to Capitol Hill and urging lawmakers to pass comprehensive immigration reform. The theme of the convening, which drew participants from more than 65 U.S. dioceses and more than 35 states, was "Offering Hope, Promoting Justice."

Launched in 2005, the Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope campaign was created to unite and mobilize Catholic institutions and individuals in support of a broad legalization program and comprehensive immigration reform. Its goal is to maximize the church's influence on the issue toward passage of legislative and administrative governmental reforms and to organize Catholic networks to assist qualified immigrants to obtain the benefits received from those reforms. About 80 U.S. Catholic dioceses have formally launched the campaign locally, with most of the others actively engaged in its promotion.

Retracing some of the history of immigration in the United States, Franken said that 150 years ago, in the midst of the "first great wave of immigrants," the earliest Catholics to the country's shores faced "discrimination and hardship, much like today's immigrants." He noted that then there was the Know Nothing Party, which were strongly against immigration and Catholics. But "today, look around," he said, "we again have a presidential candidate running on an immigration restrictionist platform."

Those earliest immigrants saw in the Catholic Church a "voice" to speak on their behalf and a "place one could find solace and feel safe," he said. "The church provided the welcome, helped educate the children and tended to the sick and elderly among the immigrants."

Yet, despite this history and the fact that the vast majority of Catholics are descendants of those earlier immigrants, many can no longer relate to the migration experience, Franken said.

"I dare say that many Catholics in this country today are hostile toward immigrants, especially the so-called 'illegals,'" he said. Most "represent the center of society. They hold positions of power and wealth. Thus they no longer have empathy with today's immigrants."

Catholics, like others in the general U.S. population, are split on the issue of immigration, especially as it concerns those in the country "without proper authorization." "Catholics' negative attitudes about immigration," Franken said, is "based on misinformation and misperceptions" and "considerable misunderstandings."

He stated that the Justice for Immigrants campaign has been responsible for influencing the nation's "debate and has created a climate in which the prospects of achieving the kinds of comprehensive reforms envisioned by the bishops are possible."

The fact that bishops and other church leaders have faced hostile audiences and backlashes from those opposed to comprehensive immigration reforms has "demonstrated to the immigrant communities that the church is a voice for them," the migration and refugee director said.

"I am convinced that were there not this campaign, we would be facing nothing but 'get tougher' enforcement policies and further erosion of hospitality toward immigrants," he said.

Yet, unless the church reaches through education the average U.S. Catholic in the pew with a message about welcoming the stranger, he said, "we risk becoming a church divided: the growing immigrant population within the church and the others."

An educational effort in the church must be a top priority, infusing “into the educational curricula of our school systems, our adult education programs, and religious formation studies the church’s teachings on migration.”

“We’ve got to win hearts and minds.” It is key to engage U.S. Catholics more broadly as well to impress upon the nation the need for more just immigration policies, Franken said.

“Our adversaries, though small in numbers, are extremely vocal with their elected representatives. They are well financed and extremely well organized,” he said. “We cannot continue to allow members of Congress and the President to think that most Americans want to see more restrictive policies. We’ve got to raise our voices louder and multiply the number of voices.”

Relearning what it means to be an immigrant church means, he said, reawakening “among our people a sense of solidarity with the ‘least of our brothers and sisters.’”

“How vibrant would our Church be if we became a more welcoming people? I can tell you this, if we Catholics in this country do not adopt more welcoming attitudes, we risk losing many people who will find this welcome elsewhere,” Franken stressed.

He urged those involved in social action, peace and justice, legal, social and pastoral service providers and other leaders in the church to continue their efforts on behalf of immigrants that “can revitalize the church, whose heritage is rooted in the immigrant experience.”

“By committing ourselves to helping all Catholics understand our faith imperatives toward migrants, we are offering them an opportunity to live out their faith,” he said. “I can think of no greater gift.” 🙏

Wineskins, continued from page 2...

here, too, a suspicion of Darwin, an invitation to ‘intellectual suicide.’ The various fundamentalisms are all concerned with ‘fortifying borders,’ and that is a purpose of today’s Vatican. The pope’s exhortation concludes by referring to the Catholic people as the ‘flock’ entrusted to bishops. Sheep stay inside the fence. But what happens when Catholics stop thinking of themselves as sheep?”
(*Boston Globe*, March 19, 2007)

It’s true that biblical fundamentalism is not widespread in the church today, with the exception of using scripture to condemn homosexuality. Rather, Church leadership is requiring a strict fundamentalist adherence to papal documents and pronouncements,

liturgical laws, and the hierarchical chain of command. There is little room for disagreement or dissent, and any request for dialogue seems to be equated with unfaithfulness. This situation is devolving into a divisive war, with “orthodox” Catholics on one side, and “unorthodox” Catholics on the other. Weapons being used include excommunication, refusal of communion at mass, public condemnation and criticism, being fired from jobs in the Church, social ostracizing, withholding financial contributions, and absence from the pews. People are getting hurt.

Where do we as a religious community stand with this? Ideally in the middle as a reconciling agent. But in the worldview of fundamentalism, there is only black and white, right and wrong, faithful and unfaithful, and “middle ground” is only another term for “unfaithful.”

It seems to me that we need to do two things. The first is minister to those who are deemed unworthy or unfaithful by those who think in fundamentalist terms. We need to assure them that they are God’s children too, to listen to their needs in trying to be loving, faithful people, and to tend to those needs if we can. This has little to do with our agreeing or disagreeing with them, and it has everything to do with ministering to them as Jesus ministered to the outcasts. This may very well appear to some in the Church that we are unfaithful too, but that didn’t stop Jesus and it shouldn’t stop us.

The second thing we need to do is to continually challenge fundamentalist behavior and thinking in the Church by saying exactly what the Vatican document quoted above says, but apply it to whatever is being touted as unquestionable truth or what is considered above critique. Again, this is not about agreement or disagreement, but about the process of becoming more and more clear about what God is saying to us instead of settling for the limited understanding we have now. And again, this may appear to some that we are unfaithful, and if those “some” are the powers that be in the Church, we will undoubtedly pay a price for our actions.

At our Provincial Assembly last Spring there seemed to be a dissatisfaction with simply maintaining the status quo as a community, which has had the flavor of stagnation. It seemed people were calling for us to be more creative, imaginative, and prophetic in our ministry in the Church. How serious are we about that? 🙏

A FIRE IN THE BLOOD: PREACHING THE CUP

Nathan Mitchell

[Nathan Mitchell is associate director for research at the Center for Pastoral Liturgy and concurrent professor of liturgy in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. This article appeared in "Preach," May/June 2005, pp. 21–23.]

The Life You Save May Be Your Own, the title of Paul Elie's fascinating study of twentieth century American Catholic writers, borrows its title from a short story by the *grande dame* of "Southern Catholic Gothic," Flannery O'Connor. Much of O'Connor's fiction focuses on violence in all its forms—public and private, personal and social, physical and psychological, spiritual and emotional. She was especially preoccupied by that odd kind of violence that "devout, churchgoing folk" often invite, embrace, or perpetrate. In the short story "Revelation," for example, Ruby Turpin, a good-natured Christian whose every gasp ends in "Thank you, Jesus!", is in fact a bigot blinded by racism and xenophobia. Near story's end, after she's been attacked in a doctor's office by a mentally deranged college student, Ruby's rage boils over. She feels God has let her down, has unjustly allowed her to be hurt and ridiculed. "If you like trash better," she shouts, "go get yourself some trash then." But God stays silent, and all Ruby hears is the echo of her own voice in the still evening air. "A final surge of fury shook her," writes O'Connor, as "she roared, 'Who do you think you are?'" Then, through a field of living flame, Ruby spied a bridge spiraling upward; on it, "rumbling toward heaven," were "whole companies of white trash, clean for the first time in their lives...and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs...In the woods around her the invisible cricket choruses had struck up, but what she heard were the voices of the souls climbing upward into the starry field and shouting hallelujah." Ruby finds her bitter cup of pain sweetened at last by all those weirdos, leaping and clapping and shouting hallelujah!

Or consider O'Connor's conflicted prophet, Haze Motes—a Christian in spite of himself, the improbable hero of the novel *Wise Blood*. Haze is obsessed by his new automobile, and he proudly boasts that nobody who owns a good car needs to be saved. But religion still haunts him, so Haze embarks on a self-appointed mission to preach a "new Jesus" (lower case "j"), savior of a "Church without Christ." "I'm member and preacher," Haze announces, "to that church where the blind don't see and the lame don't walk and what's dead stays that

way. Ask me about that church and I'll tell you that it's the church that the blood of Jesus don't foul with redemption." Yet try as he may, Haze can't quite escape the real Jesus—or the power of his blood. Wherever he turns, he hears Christ's wise blood whispering, haunting, taunting, leaking out onto the world, chasing him around the city. By novel's end, Haze, now a victim of self-inflicted blindness, finally sees what his heart had always known—that *his own blood* must fill that new Jesus' cup.

The voice of the blood

Wise blood—that almost instinctual feel for the presence and power of Mystery—is a phrase that applies to many of the characters in Flannery O'Connor's fiction. *Wise blood* is blood that not only spurts, seeps, spreads, stains, and saves, but speaks. So if we plan to preach the cup, the first thing to notice is how *blood itself preaches*. Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* reminded us that the two tables—Word and Eucharist—are "so closely connected with each other that they form *but one single act of worship*" (# 56). It's significant that this comment about the twin liturgies of scripture and sacrament comes directly after the Constitution's provision for Communion from the cup (# 55). Not only does the word preach (in proclamation and homily); *bread and cup* also preach. Indeed, the act of preaching only *begins* in the homily; it *continues* in the Eucharistic Prayer (once extemporized, now scripted), and is completed at Communion, when the voice of the blood joins the song of all who feast at the Supper of the Lamb. That's surely the reason why *Liturgiae instaurationes* (1970) maintained that "the Liturgy of the Word prepares for and leads into the Liturgy of the Eucharist" (# 2b), a point reiterated in the U.S. bishops' 1982 pastoral *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* (*FIYH*). The homily isn't a talk given during Mass; the preacher's task is "to point to the signs of God's presence in the lives of his people so that, in joyous recognition of that presence, they may join the angels and saints to proclaim God's glory and sing with them their unending hymn of praise" (# 15; cf. 6061).

That, I suspect, is why most postconciliar documents (e.g., *FIYH* #62; *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [*GIRM*] 2002 #66) assume that, ordinarily, whoever presides should also preach. Preaching's two high points—Gospel homily and Eucharistic Prayer—comment on one another, forming a ritual counterpoint

that concludes with Communion. Eucharistic preaching thus begins when the word is broken open and ends when communicants drain the cup. The homily at Mass opens with the word of the preacher and ends with the voice of the blood. To say this is not mere rhetoric. The preacher's voice is heard precisely (and *only*) so that the "loud cry" of Jesus' blood may be heard by all who come to the table. For preaching is not an act of self assertion on the presider's part. As *FIYH* puts it, "the homily is not so much *on* the Scriptures as *from* and *through* them" (#50). Preaching is an act of *kenosis*, of divestiture and dispossession. In the homily, the preacher speaks *only* so that the gospel may be heard; in the Eucharistic Prayer, the presider prays *only* so that the *praise and thanksgiving of the whole assembly* may be voiced; and at Communion, the presider completes his homily with the words "Happy are those who are called to his supper" *precisely* to show that the One who feasts the folk and forms a people to call his own is *the Lamb who was slain*. If one looks at the act of eucharistic preaching in its entirety (homily-Eucharistic Prayer-Communion in bread and cup), it is clear that the preacher's voice must yield, always, to the voice of the blood. The preacher's goal is to yield to silence to efface himself, erase himself, so that, as Communion concludes, only the loud voice of Jesus' blood is heard. Preaching itself is sacrificial.

That's why liturgical documents of the last forty years have so strongly emphasized the importance of receiving the cup at Mass. "Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clear expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the relationship between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Father's Kingdom" (*GIRM* 2002 #81). It isn't simply that drinking belongs to the ordinary human experience of meals and hence also to the Eucharist. It's rather that the voice of Jesus' blood belongs, essentially, to the sacramental signs in which Christians affirm the presence of *one and the same Jesus* in an absolutely *new* mode of presence, a presence that demands our coming to grips with *bloodshed*.



Fr. Barry Fischer preaching during a liturgy at the recent MERLAP meeting in Rome.

No forgetting

Blood, shed, always makes us uncomfortable, of course—and that is precisely the point. Without the cup, the Eucharist might easily sink to the level of an elegant dinner where—surrounded by friends, fragrance, lights, and music—we sup serenely while the rest of the world goes mad. Good etiquette, alas, can make us forget our origins—and the origins of what we eat and drink. As my teacher Aidan Kavanagh once put it, "However elegant the knowledge of the dining room may be, it begins in the soil, in the barnyard, in the slaughterhouse. . . . Table manners depend on something's having been grabbed by the throat" (*The Shape of Baptism*; New York: Pueblo, 1978, p. 160). The cup will not let us forget. It will not let us forget a prayer that turned to blood (Luke 22:44). It will not let us close our ears to the cry of dereliction that shattered the soft spring day when a troublesome "Galilean prophet with an attitude"—co-crucified with criminals, suffocating, maddened by thirst—screamed in anguish to a God who made no reply. *The cup will not let us forget*. It will not let us sanitize the fact that Jesus died in "bad company"; nor will it silence the loud voice of his blood.

Torture. Bloodshed. Ritualized, state sponsored execution. Criminals brought to (whose?) justice. Curses, pleas, broken legs. A corpse abused by betting soldiers with a final spear thrust. Blood and water draining from a cadaver. And all these were sacred signs that God is busy "reconciling the world to himself"? No wonder Christians in the West stayed away from the cup for so many centuries!

Spending Sunday morning in a charnel house isn't our idea of a good time. Our interest lies in meeting the victorious, glorified Jesus of Easter, not a battered "man of sorrows."

Right; but we must remember there are not "two Jesuses," one before Easter and another after (a risen "replacement," nicely cleaned up). There is but one Jesus, in whom—both before Easter and after—we meet the God of justice and righteousness made flesh in a world of injustice and unrighteousness. There is but one Jesus,

See Cup, continued on page 10...

LIVING ON THE EDGE

Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.

They call it the “causeway”—a 26-mile bridge over Lake Pontchartrain that connects the city of New Orleans with towns to the north. Recently, while giving a retreat near New Orleans, the director of the retreat center took me across the causeway to visit the areas of the city most affected by Hurricane Katrina and the breach of the levies almost two years ago.

We drove through the most devastated areas of the city—Lakeview, St. Bernard Parish, and the lower ninth ward—and saw how the vicious scars of Katrina remain. Almost two years since the storm swept through the Gulf Coast and exposed the ugly underbelly of racism and the ever-widening chasm between the poor and rich in this country, the visible scars on these neighborhoods in New Orleans seem to suggest the chasm grows even wider.

The most depressing sights were the acres of FEMA trailers, packed together and parked side-by-side, row-by-row, radiating the heat of the humid June afternoon.

These tiny trailers might offer a welcome respite for a weekend getaway but not a place to live for almost two years without causing claustrophobia or fueling frustration that explodes in anger. It is not surprising that New Orleans has one of the highest murder rates in the nation. On the very night we toured some the areas hardest hit by Katrina, three murders took place only hours after we visited.

But there was also a sign of hope. At one point we came upon a block party, neighbors out on their porches and front lawns, the smell of barbecue and spicy Cajun food filling the area, children dancing in the block-off streets to the sounds of zydeco. It offered a small sign of hope in a city that has known so much despair. But as we drove back across the causeway to the safe and secure sanctuary of the retreat center, the images of devastation we saw seared my memory.

That causeway over Lake Pontchartrain may serve as a metaphor for those called and claimed by the blood of Christ. We are the bridges that span the expanse from the safe to the unsafe, from the holy ground where we experience God in our prayer and community to the holy ground where we live and work with the poor, the outcasts, those who have experienced exclusion,

alienation, and abandonment, those whose lives have experienced devastation and destruction of hurricane proportions. Whether the damage is caused by wind or war, by a breach in the levies or a breach of faith, by an abuse of power or a betrayal by the beloved, the scars on the land, the wounds on peoples’ souls, call out to us from the edges of life.

We build bridges on the edges of things. Recently we celebrated the feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist, the prophetic bridge between the covenant made with our ancestors in faith and the new covenant written in the blood of Christ. His life reflects a life on the edge. But his mother, Elizabeth, who gave him his name, also reflects a life lived on the edge and how to be a bridge to a future full of hope.

In New Testament times, it was the right or privilege of the father to name the child. So it was unusual for Elizabeth to claim “John” as the name of her son. Even though the people still went to Zechariah to confirm Elizabeth’s choice, it was Elizabeth who stood firm. It is the stance of Elizabeth that is important here: she is on the edge, with perhaps not a leg to stand on, certainly no tradition to call upon or ancestor to cite. Because Zechariah is speechless, the people assume the bouncing baby boy would be named after his father because the firstborn son is always named after his father. The echoes, “We have always done it this way” ring down the long hallways and causeways of religious life. But instead of yielding to tradition, she took people to the edge. She says clearly, plainly, emphatically, “No. He will be called John.”

The people are so astounded, so amazed and even frightened by this experience of Elizabeth choosing the name and Zechariah first losing then finding his voice, they ask, “What, then, will this child be?” What this child became is what each of us is called to become. With our many gifts inspired by the same Spirit, the same Spirit that inspired Elizabeth and Mary, Gaspar and Maria, we are to be the bridges that span the gulf of apathy and indifference that divide so many in our world.

See Edge, continued on page 10...

“Whether the damage is caused by wind or war, by a breach in the levies or a breach of faith, by an abuse of power or a betrayal by the beloved, the scars on the land, the wounds on peoples’ souls, call out to us from the edges of life.”

THE SEARCH FOR GOOD SOIL

Ian Wilson

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” Matthew 13: 3-8

Often, the youth we work with at the Precious Blood Center in Chicago find themselves scattered across very rough, violent territory. Many unknowingly lay their roots with negative role models, education as a burden, materialism as life’s goal, and forgotten dreams. In this environment, the youth are ‘ate up’ by drugs, ‘scorched’ by mainstream society, and ‘choked’ by the Criminal Justice System.

The Precious Blood Center in Chicago provides the fertilizer that will enable them to grow stronger. One new way we do this is through the Seeds of Hope Farm.

An easy ninety minute drive from Chicago, the Seeds of Hope Farm is a fully operational greenhouse and farm. The property also offers ponds, a baseball field, and camping.

In collaboration with several other community groups, we have been able to employ youth from the community to cultivate organic vegetables, flowers, and herbs. The plants and produce are then sold at Chicago Farmers’ Markets.

The youth live on the farm four days a week and in Chicago the remaining three. Their typical work day includes soil management, planting, transplanting, watering, and weeding. The youth also spend their leisure time hiking, playing video games, and studying for their GED.

Surrounded by fresh cut grass, goats, and a horse, Lamar, one of the youth, takes a deep breath and proclaims, “It just smells better out here. I don’t gotta watch my back, and it feels good to do honest work.” Before this opportunity, Lamar spent most of his time “chillin” with his fellow gang members and selling drugs. “I’m tryin’ not to mess this up,” he says, “I know it is a move in the right direction.”

Knowing the power and success of Restorative Justice Circles, we also conduct Support & Accountability Circles with the youth and farm staff. The circles give each person an opportunity to be heard, which helps solve and prevent conflicts on the farm. During one Farm Circle, a staff member praised the youth for their hard work and pointed out that their “behavior and attitude on the job have improved ten-fold.” The experience in a supportive and challenging environment teaches these young men they can succeed on the job, at school, and in life.

In the near future, we hope to also offer retreats for the youth at the Seeds of Hope Farm. These new programs help to enhance the ministry at the Juvenile Detention Center, mentoring, and circles that the Precious Blood Center offers to youth.

Just as the tomatoes and marigolds growing on the farm look to the youth for healthy soil and a nurturing environment, the youth look to the Precious Blood Center for support and guidance toward good soil. 🌱

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The New Creation
REFLECTIONS FROM THE
PRECIOUS BLOOD MINISTRY
OF RECONCILIATION

Cup, continued from page 6...

whose continued, empowering presence (as divine mercy, peace, and forgiveness in an unjust world) declares that God is *always* on the side of weakness and vulnerability and *never* on the side of imperialism and injustice. God's reign—so Jesus preached—empowers rather than dominates; it lifts the lowly and knocks the powerful on their butts. This theme—power to the powerless—drives all those stories that show Jesus, before and after Easter, opening eyes and ears, waking hearts to the scriptures, breaking bread, urging his “little ones” to preach the gospel of freedom by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, clothing the naked, refreshing the thirsty, and visiting the imprisoned. Blood is death's outlet song, and blood still shines in the wounds of Jesus' risen flesh, for in his victory over sin and death, he entered the heavenly sanctuary “not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood” (Hebrews 9:12).

That is why our Easter faith began, in fact, long before Easter; it arose, like the faith of Jesus' earliest followers, from experiences of empowerment. “Go and tell John what you hear and see,” said Jesus; “[T] he blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them” (Matthew 11:45). So too, the Risen One brings “his own blood”—*our* blood—into the sanctuary. Easter did not cause Jesus somehow to lose or misplace his human nature; on the contrary, he bore it into the personal space of God's own life. And thus, our (yes, still wounded) humanity belongs forever to the definition of God's divinity, just as in the mystery of the Word made flesh, God's personal presence belongs forever to the definition of humanity. Christian faith itself is thus nothing more or less than this *experience* of “Jesus' continued empowering presence . the continued presence of absolutely the same Jesus” in an utterly new and different mode of existence. (See John D. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* San Francisco: Harper, 1995, p. 210.)

Dreams of justice

Of all this the eucharistic cup is sign and seal; *blood* is the bond—something human between us and God. Moreover, blood is always about bodies, and bodies are always about justice. Ours is not merely wise blood, waking blood, it is dreaming blood. Our blood blooms with visions. Coming to Communion, we dare to dream a world where peace and mercy flourish. Drinking the cup, we pledge ourselves to justice and solidarity with the losers, the powerless—all the have-nots who've been shut

up, shut out, and shut down. The loud voice of Jesus' blood will not let us forget that he died (as we must) for and among the weak and vulnerable, the insignificant “trash” imperialist cultures love to hate. As Fr. Robert Schreiter puts it: “The cup of the blood of Jesus makes us participants both in the life of God and in the struggle against the suffering of the world” (*In Water and in Blood*; New York: Crossroad, 1988, p. 62). For when, during the Eucharistic Prayer, the presider repeats Jesus' words, “This is the cup, he is not referring primarily to the physical object he holds in his hands. “This” is not an object, but an action, an event—and that *event* is nothing less than the covenant in Christ's blood, a new beginning for human history, a new set of relationships between God, the world, and its people.

Thus, every eucharistic homily, however it begins (given the Gospel of the day), will always come to the same conclusion: the cup. There is fire in the cup that burns until it ignites the fire in our belly. If blood could talk as it blazes, it would tell us to tremble in awe and gratitude. Surely, too, it would pronounce judgment on our sin. It would demand to know why we've kept the hungry child hungry, the table bare, the furnace cold, the beggar's bowl empty, the old woman's meds priced well beyond her reach. But blood would also wake the dead, warm the shelterless; it would call us home, call us by name. From a field of living flame, blood would build a bridge to heaven, where “whole companies of white trash, clean for the first time in their lives. . .and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs” could “climb upward into the starry field, shouting hallelujah.” 

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Edge, continued from page 8...

We are to be the bridges that connect all that seek to separate us or drive us or keep us apart.

What this child became challenges us to become “prophets of the Most High” who prepare the causeway for the reign of God by reflecting the “tender mercy of our God” who “guides our feet into the path of peace.” With the gifts God has inspired in us—gifts of healing and hope, of discerning and dreaming, of evangelizing and educating, of speaking truth with our “thousand tongues,” we draw all peoples near through the blood of Christ, and reclaim our call to be the causeways to a future full of hope. 

TRANSITIONS

Teutonic Province

The members of the Teutonic Province met in assembly at Kufstein, Austria, from June 10-13. Elected for four-year terms were Frs. Andreas Hasenburger, provincial director; Josef Gehrler, first councilor; Josef Klingele, second councilor; Willi Klein, third councilor; and Georg Becher, fourth councilor.

Sisters of the Precious Blood

The Sisters of the Precious Blood have elected a new president and council for the Dayton-based congregation of 205 members. The elections were held at the conclusion of the sisters' assembly, June 24-30, at Bergamo retreat and conference center in Dayton.

Sister Mary Florence Seifert is the congregation's new president. She succeeds Sister Maryann Bremke, who completed two four-year terms in the position and, according to the congregation's legislation, was not eligible for re-election.

Elected to serve on the congregation's general council are Sister Jeanette Buehler, vice president, and Sisters Marita Beumer, Edna Hess and Madonna Ratermann. Sister Marita succeeds Sister Nadine Kaschalk.

The formal installation of the new leadership team will take place Sunday, August 12, at the congregation's motherhouse, Salem Heights, in Dayton.

The Sisters of the Precious Blood were founded in Switzerland in 1834 by Mother Maria Ann Brunner. Their U.S. motherhouse was established in Maria Stein, Ohio, in 1846 and relocated to Dayton in 1923.

In addition to Ohio, the Sisters of the Precious Blood work in Arizona, California, Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C. They also serve in Latin America, in Chile and Guatemala.



From left: Sr. Florence Seifert, Sr. Madonna Ratermann, Sr. Edna Hess, Sr. Jeanette Buehler, Sr. Marita Beumer.

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We Remember

Cletus Homan, husband of Lillian, brother-in-law of Fr. Ron Will, died June 21.

Fr. Eduardo Torres Márquez of the Iberian Province died June 19 in Guadalcanal, Spain.

Fr. Emil Labbe of the Cincinnati Province died on Friday, June 8, at St. Charles Center, after a long illness.

Ernesto Chapa, a staff member at the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation, died in a motorcycle accident, Saturday, July 7.

“Open our eyes to the needs of all...
Let your Church be a living witness
to truth and freedom, to justice and peace,
that all people may be lifted up
by the hope of a world made new.”
Eucharistic Prayer, *Jesus, the Compassion of God*

Most people hear the word “Latin” and they hear the music or taste the cuisine. For some, however, the word conjures up the good old days of Catholicism and provides the illusion of a solution to what ails us liturgically. So now Pope Benedict has written a decree (in Latin!) that allows for the use of the Tridentine Mass.

It’s more than just a return to Latin (the current rite has always allowed for its use). Eucharist is never celebrated in a vacuum. The pre-Vatican II Mass had a context, a theology, a worldview, all of which was addressed in the reforms and renewal of the council. While I would ordinarily greet this kind of development with a small yawn, I am troubled by the implications. Is the Pope also encouraging a return to that which the old Mass expressed? To name just a few: a passive role for the laity, a hierarchical emphasis with clergy at the top, little connection between liturgy and life, an individualistic spirituality, limited use of scripture, and sparse commitment to preaching (the Tridentine Mass doesn’t use the new lectionary).

The reforms of Vatican II addressed much more than the liturgy, but the eucharist was stated to be “the source

and summit of Christian life.” It still is. Some articles in this issue address justice concerns, including the hot button of immigration. Nathan Mitchell speaks eloquently of the power of cup, our partaking of it, and what it asks of us. (Let’s also stop and recall here that the Tridentine Mass does not allow for anyone but clergy to take communion from the cup.)

In a recent issue of *National Catholic Reporter*, Richard Wood is quoted as saying “Catholic social teaching, including important insights from liberation theology, is not at the periphery of Catholic faith. That God makes an option for the poor—not against the rich, but by accompanying the poor and promoting the kingdom of justice here and now—is core Catholic teaching. I would place the church’s social teaching at the heart of the Eucharist, to share the Eucharist across social divisions. It’s not just about me and God, but about me and God together with God’s presence in the world and with other people, especially the poor” (July 6, 2007).

It doesn’t matter what language is used in the Mass, as long as the participants understand it. And as long as it has a context that is open to ongoing renewal, an appreciation and incorporation of the evolving theology of eucharist, and an understanding that the Mass is something we do, not something we attend. “Do this in memory of me.” “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” The Mass demands more of us than we might want to admit. It’s not only the bread and wine that are changed. 🍷

The
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