



The New Wine Press

Motivated by the Spirituality of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ

*Volume 24 No. 10
June 2015*



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Justice & Peace Lecturer, Jim Ennis, of Catholic Rural Life

Care of Creation

by Kathy Keary, Co-director of Precious Blood Companions

St. Mary Church in Centerville, Iowa was the site of Jim Ennis' presentation, *Ecology: What's Faith Got to Do with It?*, part of the Peace and Justice Lecture Series. Jim Ennis is the executive director of Catholic Rural Life, a non-profit whose mission is to renew faith by bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the social teaching of his church into the heart of everyday life. Their areas of focus are threefold: ethical food and agriculture, environmental stewardship, and the focus of the April 11th talk, care of creation.

Social justice is commonly known among its advocates as the church's best-kept secret. Of the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching, the people in the pews are probably least aware of care for God's creation as an essential part of the Catholic faith. It is not unusual for an individual to compartmentalize, maintaining different values in various aspects of one's work life, church life, and personal life. As Catholics, we are called to allow our faith to direct all aspects of our life. Care of the environment is frequently considered an option rather than a mandate of being a follower of Christ. Mr. Ennis asserts that this compartmentalization is one of the reasons we have an ecological crisis.

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Sophistication in agriculture has resulted in a huge reduction in the number of farmers. Those continuing to farm are utilizing huge machines separating them from the soil. Only 17% of United States residents live in rural areas, with only 2% engaged in farming. Young people are leaving rural life. Disconnect between people and the earth is cited as a contributing factor promoting a lack of concern for the God's creation.

The Book of Genesis tells us that when God created the universe, He looked at all that He had made and found it to be very good. God gave us dominion over the work of His hands. The mentality that we can use the earth in any way we choose is contrary to the idea of gift. It is our responsibility to steward creation. Mr. Ennis encouraged us to view the world as gift rather than just the political issue of the environment. He believes this mindset will heighten our perception of our responsibility: a common and universal duty to serve the common good as we care for this awesome gift.

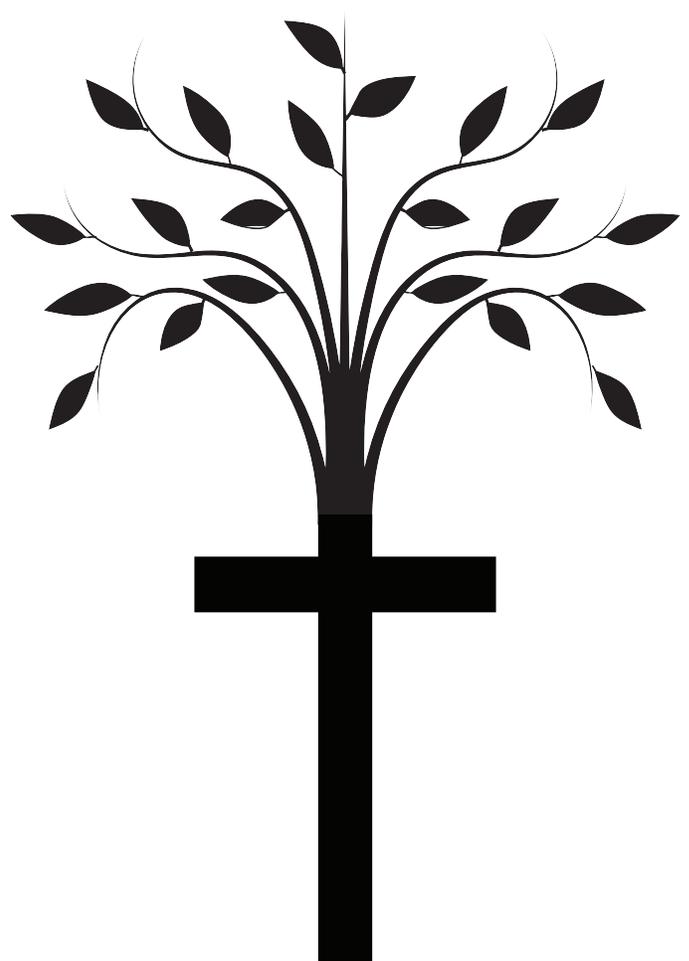
Much of the day was spent detailing the Church's position in caring for creation. Many are looking forward to Pope Francis' insight on this topic in an upcoming document. St. John Paul II warned in his 1990 message for the World Day of Peace: "Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its life-style. In many parts of the world, society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which they cause...Simplicity, moderation, and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few."

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* also emphasizes the care of creation as a part of our duty as Catholics. The issue of exercising unconditional dominion over the created world, regardless of moral considerations was raised as a problem.

Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical letter, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth) included the topic of care for the environment. The section begins: "Today the subject of development is also closely related to the duties arising from our relationship to the natural environment. The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it

we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity?"

Jim Ennis emphasized that our politicians have a responsibility to us and it is our right and duty to communicate our concerns to them. At the same time, he does not think we will get to where we need to be regarding environmental issues by regulation alone. He said: "I think we will get there by transformation. We need to do what we can within the Body of Christ to act responsibly. This is a shared concern." He insisted that we must think about the broader community in our decision-making and actions. As people of faith, we are called to look at what we are putting on our lawns and fields, which ends up in our water system. Our faith leads us to recycle, reuse, and reduce waste. We are reminded of Mother Theresa's invitation, "Do what is in front of you."



Sent by the Blood

The Leadership Team of the Kansas City Province of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood is pleased to announce the following assignments, effective July 1, 2015:

- **Rev. Aloys Ebach, C.P.P.S.:** Pastor, Church of the Annunciation, Kearney, MO.
- **Rev. Matt Link, C.P.P.S.:** Pastor, Most Holy Redeemer Parish, San Francisco, CA.
- **Rev. Jack McClure, C.P.P.S.:** Parochial Vicar, Most Holy Redeemer Parish, San Francisco, CA.
- **Rev. Lac Pham, C.P.P.S.:** Sabbatical
- **Rev. Dien Truong, C.P.P.S.:** Director, Vietnam Mission
- **Rev. Mr. Truc Minh Vu, C.P.P.S.:** Sacramental and Supply Ministry for Vietnam Mission (August 1, 2015). Following his ordination to the priesthood on June 20, 2015, Truc will return to Vietnam in July to serve the Vietnam Mission.
- **Rev. John Wolf, C.P.P.S.:** Sacramental and Supply Ministry for the Kansas City Province.

We are grateful to these members for accepting the call to be sent by the Blood of Christ in the spirit of St. Gaspar to be a reconciling and renewing presence in the Church and our world.

Joseph Nassal, C.P.P.S.

Provincial Director

Richard Bayuk, C.P.P.S.

Ronald Will, C.P.P.S.

James Betzen, C.P.P.S.

Thomas Welk, C.P.P.S.

Dear Editor,

Just finished reading my latest issue of The New Wine Press and have to comment.

My first reading was the one by Fr. Ron Will, a beautiful piece about Jesus meeting His mother after the Resurrection. I could just feel how she felt as a Mother. I could never imagine how she coped with all that happened. Thank you, Fr. Ron for that article.

Then turned to Fr. Garry's piece about sin and confession. Wonderful words!

I have always enjoyed following the Precious Blood priests and the articles, but mostly keeping up with the priests. They have made my life and my faith what it is today.

Thank you,

Pat Nieman

St. Mary Parish, Garden City, KS

The New Wine Press

Missionaries of the Precious Blood

Kansas City Province

www.kcprovince.org

The Society of the Precious Blood

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

The Kansas City Province—incorporated members, covenanted companions, and candidates—united in prayer, service and mutual support, characterized by the tradition of its American predecessors, are missionaries of these times with diverse gifts and ministries.

In a spirit of joy, we strive to serve all people—especially the poor—with care and compassion, hope and hospitality.

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

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Martyrs for New Wine

by Fr. Jim Betzen, C.P.S., Pastor, St. Mary's Church in Ottumwa, Iowa

In January of 2011, I attended the Maryknoll Pilgrimage retreat, where we visited the shrines of the Central American martyrs. Joining other priests, brothers and deacons from the United States, I arrived at the Maryknoll house in Guatemala, where we were welcomed and heard stories of the ministry of the Maryknoll missionaries. The retreat was visits from those who worked with the martyrs.

Our tour took us to many shrines where the Central American martyrs who gave their lives are commemorated, including Archbishop Oscar Romero's shrine and martyrdom site, and shrines to Sisters Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel, and lay volunteer, Jean Donovan. We visited the Central American University, where six Jesuit professors were martyred for their teaching about human rights and visited a museum dedicated to the martyrs, including Fr. Rutilio Grande, whose death prompted Archbishop Romero to become more involved with protecting his people against the military. In Guatemala, we visited the village of San

Lucas and later, the village of Santiago Atitlán; the area where Fr. Stanley Rother, a priest from Okarche, Oklahoma, who worked tirelessly as pastor to further the development of his parishioners, who returned to his parish after escaping assassination once and later was shot and died in his rectory. We visited the tomb of auxiliary Bishop Juan Jose Gerardi, author of *Nunca Mas* (Never Again), who led the truth-finding commission after the long civil war, implicating the military in war crimes. We visited the house and garage where Bishop Gerardi was bludgeoned to death.

The last few days, we returned to the Maryknoll house and heard the stories of the Maryknoll missionaries and their ministry with the poor and struggles with the military during the civil war.

There are several lessons this retreat offered. First of all, we are called to global concern for the human rights of all peoples and awareness that human rights violations continue today. We must be vigilant citizens

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Reconciliation as Gift: A Conversation with Beth Heidler

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

It was a chilly January afternoon when I pulled into Beth Heidler’s driveway in Warrensburg, MO, and I was grateful she agreed to a visit on the subject of Confession. I didn’t know Beth well before then, however with 30 years experience in ministry and a profound reputation for a person of deep faith, I was eager to hear what she had to say. Our long conversation was a true gift, a chance to grow in wisdom and understanding.

Beth has a long background in ministry: she’s spent over 30 years in parish ministry, raised a family, shared spiritual friendships with many religious, been a voracious reader of many spiritual writers and been part of 12-step programs for a long time. She and her second husband Joe were in a happy marriage for 23 years, and both Precious Blood Companions. She did a lot of preparation for our conversation, talking to many of her older friends and gathering their thoughts as well as preparing her own. The first quote she gave me was from her friend Monica, who said: “Reconciliation is the best thing the Church has going for it...of course, I don’t use it anymore, but I love it.”

Memories about Confession from her childhood were similar to other Cradle Catholics of her generation I’ve talked with. There were horror stories the kids passed around, and a frequent threat was: “You’ll have to go to Confession to (the tough priest.)” The nuns of her generation who taught in Catholic schools weren’t given formal training in theology, everything came from the priests they served with, which was of highly variable quality. Beth observed: “The Baltimore Catechism had a lot going for it, but theology wasn’t one of them.” There seemed to be more mortal sins when she was growing up, sins that usually don’t appear in instructions today. The most difficult thing was that no questions were allowed in religion class—and Beth said her hand was always up anyway.

As a young adult, the biggest struggle was the belief that the priest in the Confessional was guided by the Holy Spirit, and therefore could never give bad advice. As such, her observation during this part of her life was the sacrament was “not what I wanted it to be...” Her family

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Assembly

by Jeanette Kohlberg, Bismarck, North Dakota Companion

After experiencing my first Provincial Assembly in 1989, I wrote: “My prayer is...one of thanksgiving for the visionary existence of Companions. Memories forever etched on my heart include the feelings of great joy and affirmation as all of you stood and applauded during the Rite of Welcome. The entire time spent with you in community was filled with the warmth of welcome and acceptance. God’s spirit has inspired dreams for the future and the Precious Blood Society has accepted the challenge to affirm those dreams in the present.”

Twenty-five years since my first Covenant written in 1990, those memories are stronger than ever. Memories of the past, joy in the present, and hopes for the future are ignited again. At times over the years the bonds have been stretched, but have not been broken. While I was able to attend several Assemblies during those early years, it had been quite a few years since I have attended an Assembly.

We have been blessed by visits from Community members at various times over the years, with the most recent occurring a year ago in April 2014. Fr. Ron Will, our sponsor in 1990, wrote that he felt this most recent visit to be a family reunion and that “we are still family, with the same blood flowing through our veins.” During the visit from Fr. Ron and Fr. Dave Matz, we were invited to renew our Covenants. As in other renewals of Covenants over these twenty-five years, I felt this to be a

Covenant of grace that re-presents (makes present) this bond to the Precious Blood family.

This year, arriving at the Assembly early enough on Tuesday to be present at the Companion Covenants ceremony and Eucharist reminded me to live my own Covenant, as I reflected on how to Remember the Past, Celebrate the Present, and Envision the Future! At times during the Tuesday evening social gathering I could almost hear the memory of the sweet refrain of “Danny Boy” sung softly by Fr. Ben. The whole day Wednesday was certainly a family reunion through reconnecting with Incorporated Members and Companions, and getting to know new Companions. It is inspiring to witness how the number of Companions has grown over the years. I sense the future in this progression of the community. The Jubilarian Mass and banquet on Wednesday evening was truly a celebration of Precious Blood family at its best.

Back home in North Dakota, during the weekend after the Assembly, I was catching up on some shows I had recorded while I was gone. One of them was the “Late Show with David Letterman.” He is retiring in May (after 4230 episodes) and has been having some extra special guests during these final shows. Thursday’s show included a powerful performance of *Stand by Me* by Tracy Chapman, one of my favorites. Letterman noted that this is one of the songs he used as a lullaby

for his infant son. While listening to those lyrics again, I immediately thought of my Precious Blood family reflected in the following words by Ben E. King.

When the night has come/And the land is dark/
And the moon is the only light we'll see/No, I won't
be afraid/Oh, I won't be afraid/Just as long as you
stand, stand by me

If the sky that we look upon/Should tumble and fall/
All the mountains should crumble to the sea/I won't
cry/I won't cry/No, I won't shed a tear/Just as long
as you stand, stand by me

For that is what families do. They stand by one another, even when we don't get to see each other very often. In renewing Covenant I feel that I am promising to stand by you, and asking that you stand by me.

Yes, the bonds have been stretched at times across the miles and across the years, but they are still connected. They have grown stronger again for me. We are a Precious Blood family. It was a wonderful family reunion at the 2015 Assembly. I'm reminded of the ending of the *Prayer of Companions*:

May there be no strangers among us, only friends
who welcome each other with warmth and
hospitality. Send your Spirit upon our hearts as we
gather in your name. AMEN!

Martyrs, continued from page 4

of our own country, telling our elected officials we support human aid over military aid, and that we do not want our country to support foreign governments that oppress and deny its citizens basic protection and human rights. Our national interests must always be measured against the welfare of the citizens of these countries. For us who encounter immigrants, hopefully we seek the truth rather than form biased opinions. We must always ask why people would leave their homes and extended families to come to a foreign land where life will be difficult. Most immigrants come to our country and our communities to escape poverty, oppression and/or violence. Another measure is to learn as much as we can from documentaries on TV and Internet about injustice throughout the world. Finally, we must always pray for victims of injustice and oppression. We can also pray for more leaders like the martyrs of Central America who worked for the advancement of the poor.

Confession Series, continued from page 5

life was exceptionally stressful during this time, and she frequently found herself confessing that she yelled at her kids, yet she never seemed to receive the strength not to do it again as the teaching of the time promised. Many priests in her experience did not treat women as intelligent people, and their own issues and prejudices, even their voyeurism, frequently colored the advice they gave as many things confessed were collapsed into the subject of sex. In summary, she said, "What I was taught was far worse than what I was doing."

However, Beth's attitude toward Confession was not dismissive, and she sees the value of the sacrament in the larger context of Reconciliation. The issues that troubled her were with individual confessors and not the sacrament itself. Reconciliation isn't something we can do on our own; we need someone else to be authentic enough with ourselves and God.

Beth shared a favorite quote of hers from the book *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Peace, Justice and Healing* by Emmanuel Katogote and Chris Rice: "Reconciliation is not the sum total of our work, but it is also the particular gift we learn to receive as we live into the story of God's People." She reminded me of the journey of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments: they always strayed, but God always brought them back. God's mercy is what is at the core of reconciliation, and she told me of some experiences she had in the sacrament that were very positive, especially a priest in a small town who had the courage to tell her that it wasn't a sin to disobey her abusive first husband. The journey of the sacrament and reconciliation as a whole is that it's about our opening up as God opens up to us.

Another quote from this book also struck Beth as a good description of the journey of Reconciliation and Confession: "A Christian vision of Reconciliation needs a theological foundation, more than that, however, the term 'beyond' reminds us that Reconciliation is a journey beyond our own vision, beyond human actors, strategies and programs. God's desire and vision is beyond our desire and vision." Reconciliation as entry into God's story leads us into something more than remaining in our own failings and sin. Our own sin tends to bury us in ourselves, our own desires and priorities; Reconciliation is about a transcendent encounter that leads us away from being stuck in ourselves and our faults as it heals us.

To be continued in the July issue of The New Wine Press.



Rafting at Midnight

by Fr. Al Ebach, C.P.P.S.

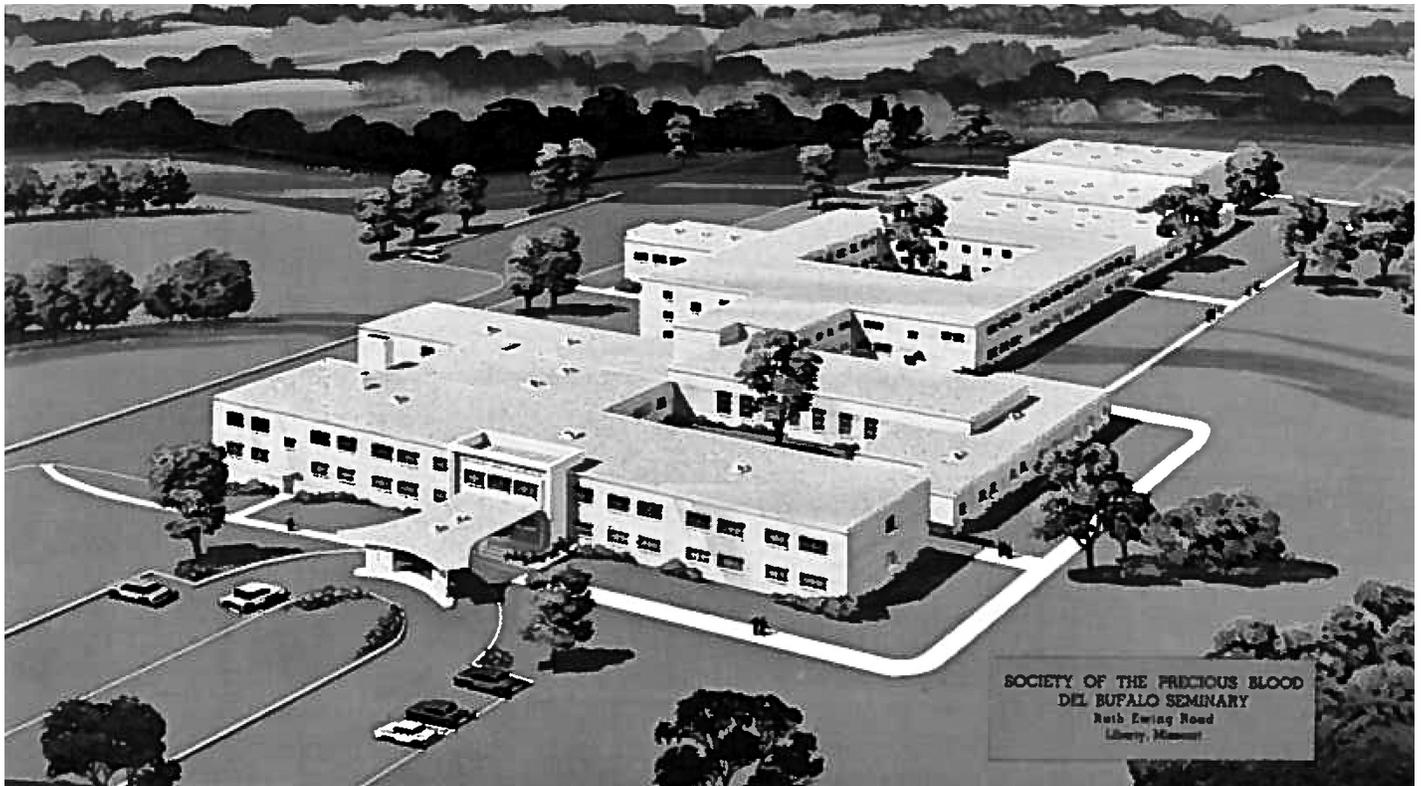
This year is thirty years since the “forty and under” community members gathered in a beautiful lake home in the Ozarks, thanks to Paul Sattler’s connection. This group of 28 or so members—depending who took the count or what day of the weekend it was—got together for no particular reason except to share a new spirit of community life. Some of the members older than forty thought it was an attempt to conspire against them and their authority. The intention for the gathering was neither political nor ecclesial.

It was a weekend of comradery, prayer, and discussion with no particular agenda. Fr. Joseph Charron, the Provincial then, joined the group at one point to share some thoughts about community life. Along with this retreat experience there was also time for social activities, which included harmless mockery among each other and imitations of certain members who obviously were not present to defend themselves. I woke up one morning to sounds of wheezing, sneezing, retching and gagging coming out of one of the bathrooms. Inquiring what was happening I was soon to learn that some of them were imitating sounds of our elder members, which we had experienced in past

assemblies and/or retreats echoing down the halls of Precious Blood Seminary in the shared bathroom.

Now many of us are the members making wheezing and hacking sounds, although they may not be as pronounced because we have the privilege of private rooms at our assemblies. This past Assembly reminded me of the anniversary of the “forty and under” gathering and all that may have been conceived on that weekend—definitely unplanned and unintentional. I do not believe any of us gathered had been elected to leadership positions yet, however there seemed to be so many dreams to be brought to fruition outside the hierarchical structure: companion movement, Precious Blood Center, volunteer program, New Wine Press, scholarship program, mission houses, social outreach, better grasp of Society of Apostolic Life, ministry of reconciliation, Vietnam project, formation programs, and many other ministries I have probably missed. The point for me is not necessarily to name or boast about all the programs or movements, but rather, realize what can happen when people gather together to share their gifts and discuss possibilities.

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Sign of the Times: The Closing of Precious Blood Seminary

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

In 1971, less than ten years after it opened, rumors flourished that Precious Blood Seminary would close. At a district meeting at the seminary on the Feast of St. Gaspar in 1971, these rumors were strongly denied and an animated discussion followed among the 41 members of the district about whether or not to admit non-seminary students to the high school.

“Most of the present faculty at Precious Blood believes that this would not really constitute any change in this school since we do in fact now have a sizable number of students who have no real intention of becoming religious,” Father Dennis Schaab, secretary for the district, wrote. “Precious Blood is working well as a school, as a developer of good Christian leaders, and as a house of formation for our Society today with many non-seminarians living here. To accept some more qualified students with no intention of entering our Society would be a change to our admission policy but not really a change in the school as it is now.”

On October 21, 1974, Alan Hartway, a member of the first graduating class at Precious Blood Seminary, became

the first graduate to be a Definitely Incorporated member of the Society. That same year, a committee chaired by Father James Sloan was appointed to evaluate the future of the seminary. Several members wrote articles in the Newsletter voicing their concerns. The discussions about both the philosophy and practicality of having a high school seminary amid the decreasing number of available members to serve as faculty and staff continued in the Province for several years.

Father Joseph Charron was elected Provincial on April 18, 1979. Fathers Vincent Hoying, Paul Sattler, Tom Albers, and William Dineen were elected to serve on the Provincial Council. The Province had 115 members, including 101 priests, 9 brothers, 2 deacons, and 3 incorporated seminarians.

The Provincial Council established a task force on future planning in 1981. The discussion about the viability of maintaining Precious Blood as a high school seminary for the community culminated in a questionnaire asking members to respond to two questions. In response to the

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Province History, continued from page 8

first question, “Do you personally believe in and support the concept of a high school seminary?”; 51 members voted in favor, 15 not in favor, and 5 unsure. In response to the second question, “Is Precious Blood Seminary a viable way for us as a community to engender the spirit and add membership to the Province?” 45 voted in favor, 19 not in favor, and 5 unsure.

In preparation for the 1983 Provincial Assembly, members met in districts on the question of maintaining Precious Blood as a high school seminary. The Provincial, Father Joseph Charron, attended each of the meetings. Prior to the meetings, members received a report on staffing Precious Blood Seminary: statistics, finances, and options for formation. There was a growing consensus in the Province that some decision would have to be made at the April 1983 Assembly concerning the future of Precious Blood Seminary.

The question of continuing the apostolate of a high school seminary program was presented to the members at the 1983 Assembly by the Province’s task force on future planning. On Tuesday, April 5, 1983, the Province devoted the day to further discussion that included honest reflections by members serving or who had served at the seminary. On Wednesday morning, April 6, the Assembly voted 58 to 32 to close Precious Blood Seminary at the conclusion of the 1983 school year.

While the decision to close the seminary affected the entire Province, it was especially difficult for the brothers because many of them served at Precious Blood Seminary in various capacities as cooks, coaches, teachers, maintenance ministry, vocation office and support staff. On the morning after the vote to close the seminary, Brother Stephen Ohnmacht became the first brother elected to the Provincial Council as Fourth Councilor. Father Joseph Charron was re-elected Provincial, with Fathers Thomas Albers, William Dineen, and Joseph Uecker joining Brother Steve on the Council. A few months later at the 13th General Assembly in Rome that elected Father Anton Loipfinger moderator general, Father Uecker was elected vice-moderator. Father Charron, with the consent of his Council, appointed Father Paul Sattler to replace Father Uecker on the Provincial Council.

The Council appointed a task force to explore the future of the high school seminary facility. Since the

vocation office had focused primarily on recruiting for the seminary, another task force was created to envision ways to invite and attract future members for the Province. The 1983 Assembly also established the task force on future planning as a standing committee of the Province. One of its major objectives was to propose and implement clustering of our parishes so our missionaries serving in various geographical areas of the Province would live closer to one another to facilitate more frequent gatherings and foster community, especially among those who lived alone and ministered in one-priest parishes.

Next Month: Matters of Justice and Peace

Rafting, continued from page 8

On my drive back to New Mexico I kept recalling the gathering at the Ozarks, not only because it is the thirtieth anniversary but also because it seemed to have called many of us to look at life with different eyes. I realized that this weekend had a greater influence than I had ever imagined. I never thought about it as being a game changer for our future, but knew it had an impact on many of us.

I also had this memory recall because of what transpired during this past Assembly’s election process. It saddened me to hear a call from younger members to elect one of them to groom him for the future. The grooming process for many of us did not happen while serving in an elected position. I believe it happened while hanging out around a raft in the lake at midnight where questions were asked and dreams shared. To me, grooming happens way before anyone is ever elected. Maybe opportunities to hang around rafts are not made available enough so people can experience one’s true calling to community or to leadership.

This time around may not have been the call for the younger people to be elected as part of the province leadership, however, there will be a time when the election process will inevitably invite the younger members to those positions. The question remains: Where are the rafts that will help all of us be groomed to prepare for what life has in store for any of us? Some people may think they are already groomed and ready. I truly believe that all of us should have the privilege to share across a raft at midnight. It presents a different perspective when one may not swim well and has to hang on to a raft or to another member of the community.

Adolfo Sentenced Again to Die in Prison

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

It was a perfect May Saturday in Chicago as students from DePaul University joined the PBMR staff, youth and neighbors in a springtime cleanup and preparations for a summer of new life! Vegetable beds were filled with goat manure from a local farm in hopes of an even better-than-last-year harvest. The labyrinth was touched up in preparation for the evening Peace Walk. New relationships were formed and there was laughter, joy and a sense of freedom after the winter lock-down. Our youth were having fun, working hard together, preparing the community garden, pulling weeds, mowing, and planting flowers in the peace garden. After the day's work, we all stood, dirty and tired, but connected at a different level saying, "It is good—very good!"

As darkness came upon our work, a full moon high in the sky, a bonfire in the peace circle, and luminaries around the labyrinth, people gathered from the community, sharing concerns for our youth and our neighborhood, praying that 38 year-old Adolfo Davis of our community might be granted his freedom Monday after being sentenced to life without parole at 14. In silence, one by one, we walked around the labyrinth path into the center "God space" where we stood in solidarity. In a neighborhood where there are often gunshots, screaming, and sirens, there was a sacred silence and a deep peace.

Sunday we celebrated liturgy and again prayed for Adolfo. We were challenged to speak boldly for justice and to prune away the dead branches so new life could come forward. We sang with hope and looked forward to the long-awaited day of Adolfo's resentencing.

Monday, May 4th came, and it seemed it was Good Friday all over. Another 30+ year-old man, not as innocent as Jesus but yet a son of God, was condemned once again to die in prison. He was whipped by each sentence from the judge's mouth and scourged as she stripped him of his human dignity. Then she shamed him and sent him to die in a prison cell. Adolfo put his head down on the defense table and wept.

Father Kelly, who had testified on his behalf, was called by the judge "one of his followers and part of this

movement to release prisoners sentenced to life without parole as juveniles." Kelly sat silently feeling each scourge as the judge read the condemnations and sentenced Adolfo to natural life....

There was a silence, unlike the silence within the labyrinth on Saturday night. Outside the courtroom, there was crying, embracing, standing in amazement, and disbelief. The media was there to hear the stories but no one wanted to speak.

There was no "Father, forgive him, for he did not know what he was doing." As a society, where is our belief in human rights, in mercy and forgiveness, in the grace of redemption?

Jacqueline, the only woman in Illinois awaiting resentencing, was devastated by Adolfo's sentence. She wept for him and said, "I have been in prison since I was 5, raped, abused and when I cried out for help, no one wanted to hear my pain—much like Adolfo—and like Adolfo we are handcuffed, shackled and cast away without a chance to tell our story."

Last night, when Adolfo was able to call Father Kelly, he said: "Maybe God just wants to wait a little longer for my freedom. Maybe I have to wait for my freedom so that that more people could bear witness to the injustices that this case shows." Adolfo knows that this next phase of challenges is no longer just about him, but about a larger discussion about children sentencing, and the purposes of the criminal justice system.

Amazing...

We have a lot of work to do to prune away the dead branches of this institution that still believes in locking up children to die in prison. It was a sad day; it is a sad time, but we hold on to the belief that there will be an Easter Sunday. Adolfo already seems to believe just that, so how can we not? As men and women dedicated to Precious Blood Spirituality, are we not challenged to speak out boldly that each person be treated with human dignity and seen as redeemable and worthy of our unconditional love?

The New Wine Press

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Change Service Requested

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



Editor's Notes

Wet Blanket

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

As the oversized pages appeared Tuesday morning, April 14, I thought back to Provincial elections past when we posted our challenges and dreams, all the way to the first process I witnessed in 1995. Over twenty years, some of the same things were still on the lists: not necessarily dangerous but testament to our continuing struggle living as a Precious Blood community. The following discussion was a continuation of those conversations past, as we sought together for our identity and shared mission, responding to the signs of the times and our own gifts and challenges.

Then a topic threw a wet blanket on everything: merger. The topic has also been around for these 20 years, and denying the possibility is dumb; Jesus never said, "Blessed are the willfully ignorant." However, the fire of dialogue was extinguished after that; after all, discussing issues of the future with a dying group is a bit like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. In the 2010 Assembly, merger was the topic that smothered every other conversation and it did it again this year.

Every other issue about our identity, our ministries, our declining numbers and scarcity of new members, our relationship with our Companions, our future in the Church, are issues facing any current or conceivable

North American province. Any conversation we could have among any of us would be useful in looking ahead; none of these come off the table in a merger. Some might say we should wait and talk with them about these things, however there has been no drive to organize such conversations yet. Waiting only makes them more difficult.

Merger will change nothing as it stands now: it will not solve our common problems and disputes, but will probably magnify and increase them. It will not save us from ourselves. Unless we confront our issues as a community on every level, personal and corporate, a new American province will be born fatally ill with the same contagion that affects us separately now. Complacency, personal comfort and rationalization will not be cured by a new house.

Smothering conversation is deadly, and this happened in April. Merger talk at this time does nothing but reinforce our complacency, keeping us from looking honestly at ourselves. Pope Francis says that ongoing free dialogue is a key part of the Church's journey. Unless we are ready to be challenged and transformed, unless we're ready to confront one another about what the Cry of the Blood calls us to, ultimately we smother Christ.