

# PRECIOUS BLOOD COMPANIONS

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## INQUIRY and FORMATION

## WORKBOOK



Lay Associates of the Precious Blood  
Cincinnati and Kansas City Provinces



# PRECIOUS BLOOD COMPANIONS

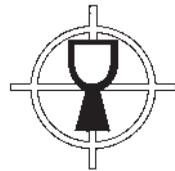
## PLEASE READ THIS FIRST

*before turning the page*

Welcome to the process of becoming a Precious Blood Companion. This **Inquiry - Formation Workbook** is yours, for your own use. Feel free to write in this book, underline or highlight any parts of it.

It is designed to cover a two-year period (or more). It is recommended that those in inquiry and formation meet monthly over a two-year period. Every DELIBERATION and every STUDY CHAPTER is to be covered. If any are missed they are to be made up in extra sessions. Move through this material at your own pace without rushing.

Each section is to be read prior to any discussion in the group. Adequate preparation for group sharing also includes responding to the *discussion starters* prior to gathering with the others.



## **TWO-YEAR PERIOD OF PREPARATION**

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Becoming a Precious Blood Companion normally takes at least two years. It involves the following steps:

**INVITATION** - attending an information night then several Companion gatherings

**INQUIRY** - exploring one's intentions with the help of four **DELIBERATIONS**

**FORMATION** - going through the **STUDY CHAPTERS** and determining one's covenant relationship

**COMPANIONSHIP** - celebrating the Covenant Rite and continuing on-going formation within a small group setting

### **INVITATION**

The first step toward becoming a Companion is the Invitation. Persons are invited to attend an information night about becoming a Companion, then sit in on the Companion gatherings of the local group.

#### **Who is invited?**

If you received an invitation, it's because someone – a Companion or a priest or brother who meets with Companions – saw in you an openness to Precious Blood spirituality. This invitation is a way for you to learn more about what may already be at work in your life.

#### **What are the prerequisites?**

Inquirers with Companions desire interaction with the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

They are searching to enrich their spiritual lives.

They want to gather with others to enhance their ministry through study and sharing.

#### **How long does the INVITATION period last?**

After being with the group during several gatherings those who have been invited then request to begin **INQUIRY** if they wish to do so.

## INQUIRY

INQUIRY offers an opportunity for an individual to consider a call to become a Precious Blood Companion. There are four INQUIRY DELIBERATION sessions.

Inquirers go through the DELIBERATIONS with the sponsor and/or covenanted Companion(s) apart from the rest of the Companion group.

Inquirers continue some participation in the monthly Companion gatherings during the INQUIRY DELIBERATIONS. (*Gathering with the Companion group prior to and/or after the INQUIRY session is encouraged.*)

Inquirers are invited to pray for enlightenment during their DELIBERATIONS and to pray various Precious Blood prayers, which the Convener and sponsor can provide.

Inquirers continue works of service or some ministry in which they are already engaged. *No new or additional ministry is expected.*

Finally, with the help of the sponsor and Convener, each Inquirer makes a decision about entering Companion FORMATION and investigating the STUDY CHAPTERS.

## FORMATION

FORMATION begins with a welcome rite.

During FORMATION the candidates examine the STUDY CHAPTERS in this **Workbook**.

The sponsor and/or covenanted Companion meets with those in FORMATION (normally monthly) to assist their study of and sharing in the STUDY CHAPTERS. Companions can also lead these sessions.

STUDY CHAPTER sessions are held separate from the regular Companions' gathering, i.e. in another room, while the present Companions gather with their own agenda. It is recommended that all come together for opening and closing while the inquirers have their study session apart for at least one hour. That allows the inquirers to get acquainted with the regular Companion group.

An inquirer concludes FORMATION by writing a one-year COVENANT. The final STUDY CHAPTER is designed to assist in the writing of one's covenant.

## COMPANIONSHIP

COMPANIONSHIP begins with the covenant rite (*celebrated during a provincial assembly when possible*).

COMPANIONSHIP includes on-going formation, continuing in active ministry, taking part in an annual retreat or day of reflection, and sharing in as many Companion gatherings and provincial events as possible given one's state in life.

COMPANIONSHIP is grounded in Jesus' commandment to love and care for all, especially those most in need. Jesus said, "This I command you, to love one another" (John 15:17). This simple command is at the center of our understanding of what it means to be Companions of the Precious Blood.

After first covenant all Companions are equally part of the same group unless they decide to form more than one group. Each group is required to have its own convener and sponsor.

After the first one-year covenant, covenants are renewed for three years.

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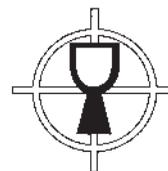
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Precious Blood Companions

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## - INQUIRY -

### First Deliberation A THOUSAND TONGUES: C.P.P.S.

Impelled by the love of Christ, manifested especially in the shedding of his Blood, and aware of the needs of the Church, Gaspar del Bufalo, founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, longed to have “a thousand tongues to move hearts to the Precious Blood of Christ.” He was an excellent preacher not only in the pulpit but in the example of his life. He attracted a group of like-minded priests and brothers, uniting them by a bond of charity. He involved the laity in his missions.

In that number of the “thousand tongues” of his dream are today’s Missionaries of the Precious Blood and Companions.

#### MISSIONARIES OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

*In 1815, a Society of Apostolic Life was founded by Gaspar del Bufalo under the title of the Precious Blood. The Congregation has evolved and developed through the work of the Holy Spirit to its present structure and form. In this DELIBERATION we consider the current structures and government as well as the role and place of the laity in the life of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.*

### A Society Of Apostolic Life



**Moderator General,  
Fr. Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S.**

Our Moderator General, Fr. Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S. says we are not “diocesan” nor are we “religious.” “Perhaps the foremost identifying aspect of our identity as a Society of Apostolic Life,” he writes, “is the ‘pastoral objective.’ When reflecting on spirituality, we must always keep in mind that it is a spirituality *for mission*. When speaking of community life and what form that might take today, we do so keeping before us always that we are *in community for mission*. Everything must be seen from this perspective.”

The new Code of Canon Law names three basic elements of a Society of Apostolic Life: (a) the apostolic aim of the society (*mission*), (b) fraternal life in community (*a communion of relationships in the bond of charity*), and (c) the striving to live a life of charity (*the spirituality of the Blood of Christ*).

## C.P.P.S.

The official title of our Society is *Congregatio Missionariorum Pretiosissimi Sanguinis Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*. Its abbreviation by custom is *C.P.P.S.* You may wonder how this Latin translates into English. Statute S1 of the Society's Constitution states that "Every province is free to translate this title according to the needs of its culture and language." The Cincinnati Province uses the title **Missionaries of the Precious Blood** while the while the Kansas City Province uses **Society of the Precious Blood**.

## Bond of Charity

The Missionaries of the Precious Blood do not take vows as part of their membership in a Society of Apostolic Life. Instead, in accord with the vision of the founder the members live in a bond of charity. In the rite of definitive Incorporation each member makes a promise of fidelity to the Society that is mutually reciprocated. The mutual bond of charity is also included in the covenant rite made by Companions.

## Normative Texts

The government of the Society is defined in the Normative Texts of the community. The Normative Texts are the Constitution, General Statutes, and the Provincial Statutes. These documents outline a form of governance that establishes authority within the context of the bond of charity.

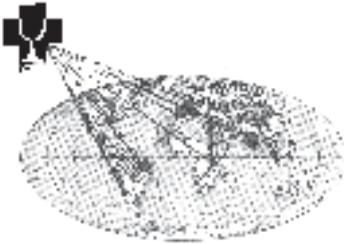
In the Normative Texts the specifics, who has authority over what, are carefully spelled out. There is one basic form of government followed in provinces and in vicariates. At each level, a director and a council is elected by those who are to be governed. Additionally, provinces hold assemblies, or annual meetings, to discuss and vote on important issues.

## The General Government

The supreme authority in the Society is exercised while the general assembly is in session. A general aentatives from all the provinces who meet in Rome to handle the most important business of the Society and to elect the moderator general and his council. A general assembly may be called whenever the need arises, but ordinarily there is one called every six years, the length of the terms of those elected to serve in the general government.

The moderator general and his council are responsible for monitoring the overall state of the Society worldwide and promoting its ongoing renewal and expansion. They also conduct necessary business with the Vatican. The moderator, along with some councilors, reside and work at the generalate, the Society's house in Rome, making regular visits to all the members.

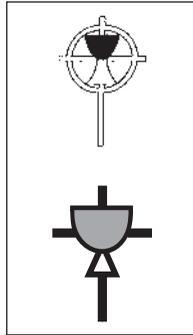
## World-Wide Presence



For the sake of government and communal life, the Society is divided into provinces. Today there are more than 500 members in seven provinces serving in more than a dozen countries. In Europe there are the Italian, Teutonic (Germany and Austria), Iberian (Spain and Portugal) and Polish (Poland and Croatia) Provinces. The Teutonic province has a vicariate in Brazil. The Italian Province has vicariates in Tanzania and India. There are three provinces in North America. The Atlantic Province is headquartered in Toronto. It was formerly a vicariate of the Italian Province and continues to have close ties with that province. Members of the Kansas City and Cincinnati Provinces minister in the U.S. and in missions abroad. The Cincinnati Province has established a vicariate in Chile and a mission in Peru. The Chilean Vicariate sponsors a mission in Guatemala. While falling under the sponsorship of a particular province, each vicariate or mission is somewhat autonomous.

## Districts

Some provinces are further divided into districts. At district meetings, members discuss issues facing their province, and share community life. Districts do not have any direct governmental authority.



*The symbol for the Kansas City province is the cup, cross and circle for the covenant.*

*The symbol for the Cincinnati province is the cup and cross.*

## Provincial Assemblies

Every definitively incorporated member is entitled to participate in, and vote during a provincial assembly (a meeting of all the members of that province). The action of a provincial assembly is required to conduct the more important business of the province.

## Provincial Council

The provincial director (usually just called the provincial) and his council are elected for a four-year term during an assembly. The provincial and his council (the number of councilors is

determined by each province) conduct the ordinary affairs of the province. They settle policy questions and make personnel decisions. Each province, through its provincial statutes, customizes its rule of life in accord with the Normative Texts.

## Lay Associates

The Companion insignia (worn as a pin or pendant) is a cross, a cup, and a circle. (See front cover.) The circle is a symbol for covenant. The insignia is presented during the covenant rite and worn by Companions.

From its founding, the members of the Society of the Precious Blood have been closely associated with the laity with whom they have worked and served.

Lay associates today are called Precious Blood Companions. They respond to their baptismal call to service through association and collaboration with members of the Society. This association is formalized in a covenant rite that allows each Companion to characterize his or her relationship with the Society in a covenant. Together the incorporated members and covenanted Companions strive to rediscover the call for Precious Blood spirituality in our time and culture.

## Union of the Blood of Christ

The Union of the Blood of Christ (U.S.C.) is a canonically recognized lay association of the faithful. It has its own statutes, and the moderator general serves as its central director. Its main purpose is the spreading of Precious Blood devotion. The Union of the Blood of Christ is most active in the Italian and Atlantic Provinces.

You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things... *(excerpt from Vita Consecrata an apostolic exhortation by John Paul II in response to the 1994 synod of bishops on the consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world)*

### Conclusion

Since the Second Vatican Council, the world-wide C.P.P.S. has sought fitting ways to be faithful to Gaspar's charism in our time and in various cultures. We are called to "faithful creativity," a phrase coined by our moderator,

Fr. Barry Fischer. General and provincial assemblies have focused on this ongoing renewal. Much effort has gone into a study of the charism of our founder and Precious Blood spirituality. We continually look to the signs of the time and seek to find our faithful place in the life of the Church.

Like other religious communities and societies of apostolic life, we have experienced a significant decline in our membership. This has not been easy to interpret. However, in the legacy of Gaspar we face each difficulty as another opportunity to find Christ with us and to be led by the Spirit. "Do not rupture our unity," Gaspar wrote to Don Innocenzo Betti, January 1831. "Give explanations quietly and without agitation. Do not get aggravated when everyone does not think along the same lines as you... Look at yourself as well as the Institute... Pray more than ever."

Currently, the areas of growth for the Society are found in the developing nations of the world. The majority of our candidates are natives of Chile, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, Guatemala, Tanzania, Poland, India or Vietnam. This brings a new richness and diversity to the Community. Another significant sign of hope for the Society is its renewed association with the laity. While in many ways it is the formalization of existing relationships, Companions mark

one more step in the ongoing evolution of the life of the Community.

Finally, Fr. Fischer reminds us that even though years of reflecting on our identity, studying our spirituality, and the positive description of a Society of Apostolic Life offered by the revised Code of Canon Law, "there is still much need for further clarification. Our identity continues to call for attention and discernment, since it is a dynamic reality still in evolution."

## THE LARGER PRECIOUS BLOOD FAMILY

### Our Precious Blood Family

In addition to the men's Society of Apostolic Life, there are various congregations of women religious under the title of Precious Blood. During the past decade growing ties have brought together nine provinces of our Precious Blood family in the United States. These include the Sisters of the Precious Blood (C.P.P.S.) of Dayton, Ohio, founded by Mother Marie Brunner; the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood (C.P.P.S.) of O'Fallon, Mo., founded by Sr. Theresa Weber; and the Sisters Adorers of the Blood of Christ (ASC) founded by St. Maria de Mattias, who have an American province.



## **The Precious Blood Leadership Conference**

The leadership of the women's communities and the provincials of the three North American men's provinces meet at regular intervals to collaborate in various projects and activities such as Lent and Advent reflections and human rights efforts. The vocation and formation directors from the various congregations also gather annually. The PBLC has a web site with links to all participating congregations and their associates:  
<http://pblc.precious-blood.org>

### ***DISCUSSION STARTER***

We hope that this section has helped you understand that the Precious Blood priests, brothers and sisters whom you know are part of a worldwide family. Discuss the implications for a Community that is dealing with global issues – how can we help each other/reach out to each other through the barriers of language and culture?

# PRAYER FOR THE CONGREGATION

Let us pray for our Congregation, for the superiors, members, and Companions, and for an increase of vocations:

Loving God, through the intercession of St. Gaspar and St. Maria de Mattias, bless our Precious Blood family. Grant us more members and associates who will serve the Congregation in humility, obedience, and compassion, and in all things carry out your holy will.

*Let us pray for our missions:*

Loving God, you said, "The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few." Raise up among us many generous vocations for service in your missions and bless those now serving your people throughout the world. May the holy apostles Peter and Paul and St. Francis Xavier, and all the holy missionaries help them and protect them.

*Let us pray that we might see and fulfill our mission in the world today:*

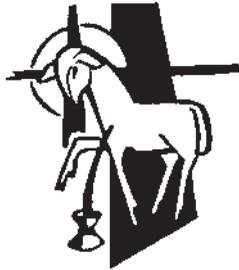
Loving God, make us aware of our ever-changing tasks. Help us to discern and to understand the signs of our times so that our work may bear fruit for the salvation of all and for your glory.

*Let us pray for our sick:*

O merciful Jesus, graciously look upon your servants who are sick. Comfort and strengthen them. Accept our prayers on their behalf, and may they accept their present suffering in the same spirit that you accepted the cross for our redemption.

*Let us pray for our benefactors:*

Loving God, in your kindness reward with life everlasting all those who have been good to us for your name's sake.



*Let us pray for the grace of a happy death:*

O Jesus, King of eternal glory, grant that we may leave this world in your love and be brought into your

holy light and peace. May St. Joseph, patron of the dying, pray for us.

*Let us pray for those who have died, especially our deceased members and benefactors:*

Eternal rest grant unto them, Loving God. And let perpetual light shine upon them.

*May they rest in peace.*  
Amen.

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## PSALM OF THE EDGE

Spirit of Gaspar, take us to the edge. With a gentle push, send us forth to fly beyond the confinements of our minds to the heart of mystery. You preached the vision of a new heaven and a new earth.

This vision has its time and will not disappoint. Etch the vision in our imaginations To help us see the time is now. Give us courage to find our home on the edge where heaven meets earth and hope is born.

Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.

**- INQUIRY -**

**Second  
Deliberation**

**IN THE COMPANY  
OF FRIENDS:**

**Spirituality**

**The Starting Point**

“**W**hen the hour came, Jesus took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer’” (Luke 22:14b-15). The gathering place for Companions is around the table – in the company of friends. It is the starting point and space to which we return. There we eagerly desire to share stories of lives poured out in loving service.

Jesus included the phrase “before I suffer...” Paula Ripple writes, “The man who left that table to cry out to his Father, in the garden and later from the cross, does not claim to lead us to some

secure harbor where we can hide and live untroubled lives.”

Companions leave that table as the starting point for lives:

- poured out in service of the reign of God;
- bonded in love with all, especially those on the margins of society;
- caught up in a common vision shared with the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

**Transformation:  
Letting Go**

Our founder, St. Gaspar del Bufalo, certainly did not live an untroubled life nor claim to lead the men in his Institute to some secure harbor where they could hide. Our current moderator general, Fr. Barry Fischer, continues in Gaspar’s spirit, saying, “to hear the cry of the blood is unsettling.

It disturbs our peace.”

Gaspar encountered enemies and troublesome times, yet he faced difficulties with unshakable faith. “God will not fail to assist us,” he wrote to a member in 1820. “The more hopeless human means appear to us, so much more does confidence

in God increase. God will take care of things.” Trials for Gaspar were occasions inviting him to change.

He taught that “excessive attachment to our own opinions, views and desires” is an obstacle that keeps us from “walking in the ways of Christ.” Following Jesus in fidelity to the Gospels often requires a major change in our opinions, views and desires. Letting go is never easy, as the

*You are a chosen race,  
a royal priesthood, a  
holy nation, God’s own  
people, in order that  
you may proclaim the  
mighty acts of God who  
called you out of  
darkness into God’s  
marvelous light.*  
(1 Pt 2:9)

late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin wrote in *The Gift of Peace*: “By letting go I mean the ability to release from our grasp those things that inhibit us from developing an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus.” Gaspar would have us know that hardship offers us occasions for deepening our relationship with Jesus.

We let go so we can have empty hands for what God wants to give us. Fr. Barry Fischer calls this stance “faithful creativity.” Benedictine monk Godfrey Diekmann writes: “We acknowledge that Christ, of course, is the true Son of God. But we are also true sons and daughters of God, not by nature but by gift, and this is actually sharing the life of God.” As each offertory reminds us: “by the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”

How do we share in the divinity of Christ? It is in and through the Blood of Jesus that we have been brought near. Pope John Paul II writes in his apostolic exhortation *The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People* that the baptized participate in the mission of Christ. We are all holy, he writes, “we are all ‘anointed’ and in him are all ‘christs,’ that is, ‘anointed ones.’ Through baptism the lay faithful are made one body with Christ and are established among

the people of God. They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ.”

In Romans 12:1 we read that the offering of our daily activities unites us to Jesus’ offering of himself on the cross. We continue the transforming power of the Eucharist in our common ordinary actions.

### **Transforming the Ordinary Into the Holy**

During their gatherings through the course of one year, the Companions of Rensselaer, Ind., were reading Fr. Joe Nassal’s book *Passionate Pilgrims*. In day 5, early evening of his book, Fr. Nassal refers to transforming the ordinary into the sacred. He writes, “This covenant causes us to be changed, to be transformed, to be agents of transformation. We are challenged at each and every Eucharist to be messengers and midwives of the reign of God in our world today” (p. 64).

In their discussion at one gathering, the Companions were asked, “do you see yourself acting to transform the ordinary into the holy as a priest transforms the bread and wine? In what ways?”

The questions were framed within the context of a discussion on Eucharist. At Mass, the celebrant transforms bread and wine,

common artifacts, into something precious and holy. After participating in the banquet, we ordinary people are transformed into the body of Christ, something precious and holy. We then go forth into the world. It is there in the world that we ourselves perform the priestly function of transforming the ordinary into the holy, thus being midwives of the reign of God. This idea was illustrated beautifully when Companion Mary Ellen Kreilkamp told this story.

For years Mary Ellen had been in the habit of going to daily Mass. Then she took a job as a librarian in an elementary school in Rensselaer that conflicted with the Mass schedule. She was unable to attend. This was a source of sadness for her. But, in place of Mass, God had chosen to use Mary Ellen in the priestly work of transforming the ordinary into the holy. Mary Ellen was completely unaware of this until it emerged as a result of the discussion at that Companions gathering.

As a librarian, Mary Ellen had to shelve an enormous number of books every day. When some of the children volunteered to help her, she allowed them to take the books to the proper section and lay them on top of the shelves where she would eventually properly order the books. This proved to be a great help to Mary Ellen, but what it did for the kids

who helped her was surprising. These children, many of whom were challenged by non-supportive and dysfunctional home environments, found that they were needed by an adult they liked and trusted. Because they liked being needed, more and more of them volunteered to help her. As the kids shelved the books, they became interested in the



Even though Mary Ellen had to give up going to daily Mass because of her job in the library, what she did for those kids was priestly work. She transformed them from the ordinary to the holy.

books and began to reserve them for when it was their turn to go to the library and take out books. Soon, an entire bottom shelf of Mary Ellen's desk was filled with these reserved books.

Even though Mary Ellen had to give up going to daily Mass because of her job in the library, what she did for those kids was priestly work. She transformed those kids from the ordinary to the holy. She transformed them from "just kids" to kids who were wanted, needed, and valuable, who could perform a ministry for someone and be appreciated for it. As a bonus, they became interested in books.

Fr. Mark Peres, C.P.P.S., pointed out that when he consecrates the bread and wine at Mass, it looks the same after the consecration as it did before. He went on to observe that often, transforming the ordinary into the holy is simply a matter of transforming our perception. We come to see that what we thought was ordinary was really holy all along. It is our perception of the thing or of the person that has changed.

So the work of transforming the ordinary into the holy often involves transforming our perceptions, our observations and our understanding of people and events.

For Companions Rose Lansdown, Mary Lou Potts and Geraldine Dill, work in the RCIA and the children's Catechumenate often involves taking catechumens who see themselves as ordinary or common, and transforming their perceptions till they see themselves as the holy people they have always been, called by name to be children of God. In a wonderful way, this is what conversion is: seeing the holy in what seems ordinary.

As Companions, we no longer see those who have been redeemed by the Blood as ordinary, as common, as marginalized. In a priestly act, we transform them into the holy. This often involves a transformation of our vision from old perceptions to new ones. Where we once saw only brokenness, we now see self sacrifice. Where we once saw slavery, we now see freedom. Where we once saw death and dying, we now see rising and new life. Where we once saw only sin, we now see forgiveness. Where we once saw only duty, we now see privilege. Where we once perceived shabbiness and squalor, we now see simplicity and beauty.

Where we once saw only a man in poor-man's clothes, we now see the body of Christ. We see seeds and think flowers. We see caterpillars and think butterflies.

## *DISCUSSION STARTER*

Give illustrations of how you had to let go of your own opinions, views and desires and how this has transformed your life.

How would you respond to the question posed to the Companions of Rensselaer: “do you see yourself acting to transform the ordinary into the holy as a priest transforms the bread and wine? In what ways?”



## **PRAYER OF COMPANIONS**

Jesus our Brother,  
in the company of your  
friends on the night before  
you died, you broke bread,  
poured wine, washed feet,  
and celebrated the hope alive  
in your heart.

May the bread we break in  
the company of our friends  
continue to nourish the hunger in our  
hearts.

May the cup of blessing we share  
with each other quench our thirst for  
justice, love, and peace.

The Precious Blood you shed for  
your people stains our hearts, our  
hands, our lives.

Motivated by the memory of your  
love and the reality of your presence  
with us, may our lives be poured out  
in loving service of our brothers and  
sisters.

Jesus our friend,  
you have brought us together  
through the blood of your cross.

May we be ministers of your healing  
love, reservoirs of reconciliation,  
harbors of hope.

Jesus, our Companion,  
inspire us to be a leaven of your love  
in our world. May there be no  
strangers among us, only friends,  
who welcome each other with  
warmth and hospitality. Seal your  
Spirit upon our hearts as we gather  
in your name.

**Amen.**

*Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.*

## - INQUIRY -

### Third Deliberation

#### DARING TO TAKE RISKS: Mission

*The lay faithful “carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world.”*

Lumen Gentium, #31

## THE ROLE OF THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH

### Being Church

Standing before the ten-foot wide and ten-foot high door that gives entrance to the ASC sisters' chapel in Wichita, Kansas, is an awesome experience. This huge ceremonial door with a stained glass abstraction of Mary as Our Lady of the New Covenant is a testimonial to liturgical changes following the Second Vatican Council.

But we know that the doors that have opened since Vatican II expose us to more than liturgical transformation. We are each personally and as a people of faith called to transformation. As “people of God,” we enter into a new-sprung understanding of how we are Church. This stimulating perception of Church is both youthful and rich with biblical and historical traditions. The people of God, whether ordained or vowed or lay, are all accountable for the mission of the Church.

Pope Pius XII said it well: “The lay faithful find themselves on the front lines of the Church’s life; they in particular, ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness *not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church.*”

## Being Missionary

Being a Precious Blood Companion is finding oneself immersed in mission. How does a missionary go about one’s life? Fr. Tom Hemm, C.P.P.S., during a Companion retreat said: “your profession, job, ministry, your family life has to be in service of the reign of God; then you are being missionaries in that very place.”

For Precious Blood people it is being attentive, wherever one is, to the cry of the blood. “Our identity and mission is centered in the cry of the blood and our response to it,” says Fr. Barry Fischer, our moderator general. “We are living an awakening of the consciousness that we are all missionaries, and not only those who go or are sent to missions in foreign lands. We need to rediscover our missionary charism as a core part of our identity.”

“To discover what it means to be a missionary in every aspect of life, we need more than ever to work together and share intimately in this discovery,” Fr. Hemm suggests. “We need to be companions to one another to help us see how we can reach out to people today in a new way.”

Living the gospel imperative of peace and justice and addressing social ills that oppress those who

live on the fringes of our society is particularly challenging. It will more than likely lead us to face some difficult decisions. “When we dare to take the risks involved,” Fr. Fischer said, “and share the gifts we have, we will be blessed and enriched and the future will open up before us.”

## **A Spirituality of Mission**

“Spirituality pulls us down to get our feet on the earth and not let us just be up in the clouds,” says Fr. Hemm. “It is not just prayer and devotion. What we do with material things: our money, our resources, our possessions shows us where our soul is, and tells us all about our spiritual life” (Mt 6:21).

At the transfiguration, he continues, “Simon Peter wanted Jesus to get back on the clouds where he belongs. But spirituality isn’t what happens on the mountain of transfiguration; it’s what happens in town, in those situations where persecution takes place. Peter would have liked Jesus to forget about the cross. But Jesus is talking about reality, offering a very real, material understanding.

“At the last supper Jesus had to show the apostles that he was speaking about reality when he washed their feet. Again it was Peter who objected as if to say, you’re not going to tell me that

this is about spirituality! The reality didn’t dawn on Peter at first, and Jesus has to explain the meaning of a spirituality of service.

“In this business of the reign of God, the spirituality of mission is about forgiving (Mt 18:22). Not a devotion, but something as real as leaving the altar to first be reconciled. Learning to face the issues, the material realities of our daily lives, discloses our spirituality.”

The call of the laity to be involved in the mission of the Church is a call from God to be involved with material realities. There are weeds among the wheat that Jesus says will grow together. Our responsibilities do not allow us to bury our talents. As Pope John Paul II writes in *The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People*, we are “called to take an active, conscientious, and responsible part in the mission of the Church in this great moment in history, made especially dramatic by occurring on the threshold of the Third Millennium.”

## **Call to Holiness**

Because a spirituality of service is necessarily involved in temporal affairs, it is the responsibility of missionaries to behave “in such a way that they may always start out, develop and persist according

to Christ’s mind, to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer” (Lumen Gentium, #31). To persist according to the mind of Christ whose Precious Blood was shed for all “demands the conversion in us of everything this world holds most dear,” Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, writes. The missionary, according to Fr. Barry Fischer, “is one who has to plant roots only in God ... in the heart of a pilgrim God.” Being a Companion, in the words of our founder, St. Gaspar Del Bufalo, is “fulfilling the will of God and becoming holy along that path through which God is pleased to lead us.”

*We cannot change  
people by our  
convictions, advice,  
and proposals, but we  
can offer a space where  
people are encouraged  
to disarm themselves...  
to listen with attention  
and care to the voices  
speaking in their  
own center.*

– Henri Nouwen, Reaching Out, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. 1975)

## People of the Spirit

In his writings, St. Gaspar continually used Scripture texts referring to the Holy Spirit and named his followers “people of the Spirit.” To follow the Spirit is to know when to let go of old ways when necessary to respond to changing times and new challenges to our faith.

To follow the Spirit is to become literate in the ways of the Spirit. Human nature likes to have something to lean on, a pattern to repeat that seems more secure. But security is not a sign of Companion life. We do not consider something sacred because it seems safe. Rather the holy thing to be done can often be frightening and unsure. It is by going through it that we encounter the holy, not by doing an end run around our life situations. Going through it reveals our weakness, and as Paul reminds us: “when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10). It is trusting in the power of the blood, letting go of our own devices, that we are able to behold a God who is creating “new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17).

## Missionary Truth

The missionary must be prepared for division and confrontation. Joseph Cardinal Bernardin wasn't afraid to face conflict in his life; he received objections from his fellow bishops, among other

things, for his Common Ground proposal. The Missionaries of the Precious Blood in Chile, Peru, Guatemala and Vietnam have suffered opposition living in a state of persecution and oppression. St. Gaspar had a much deeper suffering. Who made Gaspar suffer most deeply? Four popes. Gaspar's example teaches us important lessons about missionary truth:

- Because he was compassionate, he defended



“I shall adhere to this method: Pray, explain, communicate ideas... Even when I was in disagreement ... I nevertheless accepted the plurality of opinions expressed and I still went forward. ...The communication of ideas is very important.”

St. Gaspar 1828

Sonnino against the decree signed by the pope.

- Through meeting with the pope on various occasions he saved the congregation from enemies in the church. Though deeply grieved, he met these popes in humility and love.
- Even with Pius VII who had given authorization and funds for the society, Gaspar didn't run from battle and had to speak the truth, pointing out how the pope he was wrongly advised.
- Because he was out with the people, Gaspar had information that the popes didn't have.

If saints run away from the battle, they leave the battlefield wide open for those who fight without love. Those of us who love the Church but also have our feet on the ground say the Church has to be missionary, it has to be reformed, it has to grow. Our spirituality of the Blood is a spirituality that does not run from conflict even within the Church. Loyal to the Church and loyal to the missionary gospel, preaching the gospel truth as Jesus did.

- We can't cover up divisions but need to speak openly and lovingly on the stands we take.
- We have a powerful tool in the spirituality of the Blood for dealing with conflict, not running from it, nor ignoring it.

- What was Gaspar’s staying power? He didn’t fight the battles on his own but came to the Community for strength and guidance.
- We are especially gifted in our companionship, both clerical and lay; we need companions to help us get our feet on the ground. To support is to be truthful with one another.
- Companions are not “yes-brother-,” “yes-father-,” “yes-sister-,” people, but rather associates who help all to grow in the missionary truth even when it hurts.

speaking only the truth in every situation.

As one Companion put it: “Through the closer association with the Precious Blood Missionaries and Companions, it begins to seem possible, quoting St. Gaspar, to ‘fulfill the will of the Lord and become holy along that path through which the Lord is pleased to lead us.’”

Gaspar’s problems brought him to the cross; there at the “book of the crucifix,” he found strength. In the conflicts we face today, in our deepest pain we find the truth at the book of the crucifix.

### Conclusion

Sr. Joan Chittister suggests that conversion is a “process of coming to see the world differently than culture and comfort and the desire to control entice us into seeing it.” Isn’t that how Gaspar could stand in the truth? He wrote: “Let us surrender our own will in all things and we shall have died to ourselves.” With nothing but God in view, as Gaspar proposes, we can be faithful to our call to be missionary and stand in the truth. Let us companion one another by

*When men (and women) are animated by the charity of Christ, they feel UNITED — and the needs, sufferings, and joys of others are felt as their own.*

– Pope John XXIII

***DISCUSSION STARTER***

How do I describe what a missionary  
is from my own lived example?

How can we companion one another to be missionaries of truth?

## SEVEN OFFERINGS OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

In union with Christ Jesus, who shed his blood on the cross for the salvation of the world, and who in the Eucharist, renews the offering and sacrifice that glorify you, Loving God, we pray:

*We offer you, Loving God, the Blood of Jesus!*

For the glory of your holy name, for the coming of your reign, and for the salvation of all:

*We offer you, Loving God, the Blood of Jesus!*

For the growth of the Church:

for the pope, bishops, priests, religious, Companions, and for the sanctification of all your people:

*We offer you, Loving God, the Blood of Jesus!*

For the salvation of sinners, for an unconditional fidelity to your word, and for the unity of all Christians:

*We offer you, Loving God, the Blood of Jesus!*

For civil governments, for morality in public life, and for peace and justice among all nations:

*We offer you, Loving God, the Blood of Jesus!*

For the consecration of our world, for those who suffer, for the poor, the sick, the abandoned, and the troubled:

*We offer you, Loving God, the Blood of Jesus!*

For our spiritual and temporal needs, for

those of our relatives and friends, and for our enemies:

*We offer you, Loving God, the Blood of Jesus!*

For those who will be born to eternal life today, and for all who have died, so that one day all may be reunited in heaven in the glory of the Lamb:

*We offer you, Loving God, the Blood of Jesus!*



## Compassionate Creator

Compassionate Creator,  
Eternal God,

we offer you the Precious Blood  
of Jesus Christ.

May its almighty power  
free us of our sins,  
lead our departed sisters and  
brothers to eternal joy,  
and immerse your Church  
in love and unity.

**Amen.**

- INQUIRY -

**Fourth  
Deliberation**

**UNIQUELY  
PRESENT:  
Community**

*“In those areas of life, in which the laity are uniquely present ... they are the extension of the Church’s redeeming presence in the world.”*

(U.S. Bishops)

**Conversation in  
Community**

One of the three foundational pillars of a Society of Apostolic Life is community. And there can be no community without on-going conversations. Sharing is part of everything that takes place during each Companion gathering. In conversation we offer encouragement to one another and discover how God is working in our lives. We observe that there are challenges as well as consolations in the gospels. We speak from the heart, and listen with our whole hearts. Sharing presumes confidentiality. Being in the company of friends brings healing, comfort, focus, and challenge. Sharing happens best when we are good at listening to one another. Listening and sharing are two skills that can be acquired or further developed.

When we learn how to listen and share more appropriately, we discover that speaking about holy things can be the same as speaking about the daily and ordinary experiences of life as we listen, even to ourselves, with contemplative ears.

**SACRED LISTENING**

We are constantly buffeted with sounds from radios, TVs, and stereos; and sometime all three at once. Is any part of our day silent? And yet what do we hear? What

are you hearing right now? Is there a particular sound that goes unheard? Listen.

It would be simple at this point to say, we often don’t listen to God speaking to us daily through nature, in the voice of a friend or even in the cry of the poor. But we don’t have to go to that extreme. Often we don’t listen to one another.

“Many times in the course of a conversation, we are not really LISTENING to what the other person is saying – we’re formulating our reply in our minds,” said Sr. Jean Sonnenberg, ACBS, a member of the North American Conference of Associates and Religious. “That has about as much alchemical effect as two ping pong balls bumping into each other. The ping pong balls are slightly altered in the direction their bounces take, but they go away from the encounter unchanged.”

As we come together in our Companion groups, we need to *listen* to one another – to reverence each one’s story. In our gatherings we share in confidence the stories of what has been going on in our lives. These need to be heard. “Deepening our relationship with God and with one another in the context of a faith community happens only to the degree that we bring a listening heart to the experience,” according to Sr. Jean. “I call the

listening sacred. It is a form of spiritual discipline.”

“We get healed when we tell our story” is a statement Sr. Jean credits to a professor she had at the Washington Theological Union. He used to say that at least twice a week, she said. “If he didn’t say that, he would say, ‘it’s our secrets that make us sick.’”

Sr. Jean continues: “Sacred listening requires attentiveness and a willingness to attend deeply to the experience of another without judgment, and often without comment. We learn to listen with the heart and accept the other just as she or he is. This is healing, deeply healing.

“How does healing happen in the context of faith sharing? It allows one to speak of one’s deepest fears and deepest failures and still be accepted. If that happens, we no longer have to invest huge globs of emotional energy into maintaining a persona that we think will make us acceptable to others – whether it be the persona of the hard worker, the generous one, the giver, the washer-upper after the pancake dinner, or whatever. We’re freed, yes *freed*, to be our authentic selves.

“The spiritual journey is a journey from slavery to freedom. But it’s risky. As Maria Rieckelman said, ‘You can take the people out of Egypt, but you can’t always take the Egypt out of the people.’

“Some of us are addicted to the image of ourselves as successful, as thoughtful, as kind, and can’t risk speaking of any experience that might give people the impression we are anything less than that. Who are we kidding?”

“We find it relatively easy to speak of what we are grateful for. We sometimes find it difficult, if not impossible, to speak of the challenges that come into our lives through a spouse, (a sibling), a teenage child who may be experimenting with drugs or sex or alcohol, a harsh employer or perhaps an internal challenge such as an inability to stand up for ourselves, compulsive busyness, rescuing, or addiction. But God is speaking to us through all the circumstances of our lives.

“What might God be inviting us to through these challenges? When we speak the truth of our lives and find ourselves not being judged for it, but rather, received, accepted, and heard, we can tangibly experience that God loves us, not for what we do, not for how *good* we are, but just because we are. That heals the wounds that come from the expectation that we must be someone other than who we are. That frees us to become who we were created to be. And that’s salvation, healing, wholeness, grace, Spirit.”

## A MINI WORKSHOP ON LISTENING SKILLS

There are three stages of listening: attending, following and responding.

### Attending

Attending means paying close attention.

Maintain a relaxed, open body language

Look at the other’s face or eyes

Rest your mind, allowing your senses and instincts to “listen”

### Following

Following means walking alongside another, allowing the other to lead you.

Do not interrupt, divert, impose your opinions, or press to have your own views heard prematurely

Remain genuinely interested

Encourage by:

- (a) your movements: nod, smile, maintain eye contact
- (b) brief, sincere comments: “Me too;” “Wow!” “And?”
- (c) descriptions of the person’s “body language,” e.g. “You have a smile that goes from ear to ear.”

### Responding

Responding with understanding flows naturally from sincerity,

empathy and compassion.

Respond without advice-giving, making snap comments or judging what the other person has said

Affirm the other's feelings: "How frustrating that was for you!"

Paraphrase what the speaker emphasized before introducing a new topic: "You did everything you could to get the promotion and they chose somebody less qualified."

Remember: The only constant in life is change. Life is a process of becoming, of learning, and of evolving into our truest, highest selves. The goal is awareness, even if looking at our behavior is difficult, as we observe, it has already past!

We cannot change the past. But, once we are aware, we can make conscious, more life-affirming choices. We can choose the direction of our growth into wholeness, i.e. holiness. It's a trajectory. A massive leap of change is unnecessary, even slight changes are all it takes to begin to move into a more life-giving direction



## TAKE AN HONEST INVENTORY

How much do I talk? Too much? Too Little?

How frequently do I interrupt when others are talking?

What does my body posture say to people?

What do my facial expressions say? Am I conscious of what my face is saying when I am with others?

Do I welcome feedback? How do I react when I get it?

How do I let others know what my needs are? Am I dependent?

Manipulative? Possessive? Controlling? Warm? Caring? Available?

How do I act when I am angry? Jealous? Lonely? Insecure? Threatened? Frustrated? Happy? Excited?

Do I always have to be right? Have the last word?

Are my feelings and my behavior congruent? Does what I feel inside match or fit what I say on the outside?

Do I experience a real relationship between my religious beliefs and values and my treatment of people?

# LISTEN!

When I ask you to listen to me  
and you start giving me  
advice...

You have not done what I asked

When I ask you to listen to me  
and you begin to tell me why I  
shouldn't feel that way...

You are trampling on my  
feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me  
and you feel you have to do  
something to solve my  
problem...

You have failed me, strange as  
that may seem.

Listen! All I ask is that you  
listen, not talk or do ...just hear  
me.

I can do for myself. I'm not  
helpless; maybe discouraged  
and faltering,  
but not helpless.

But when you accept as a single  
fact that I do feel what I feel, no  
matter how irrational,  
then I can quit trying to  
convince you

and get about this business of  
understanding what's behind  
this irrational feeling.

When that's clear, the answers  
are obvious and I don't need  
advice.

Irrational feelings make sense  
when we understand what's  
behind them.

Perhaps that's why prayer  
works... because God is mute  
and doesn't need to give advice  
or try to fix things.

God just listens and lets you  
work it out for yourself.

So please. . .listen and just hear  
me.

And if you want to talk, wait a  
minute for your turn. . .and I will  
listen to you.

*Anonymous Author*

## ***DISCUSSION STARTER***

### ***Sharing Your Story***

*All may share their stories from the notes from the questions to the left. Each shares only what he or she wants to, allowing everyone an opportunity to share.*

Let us all listen with reverence, and hold in confidence what we hear.

*Make some notes about your life by responding to the following reflections:*

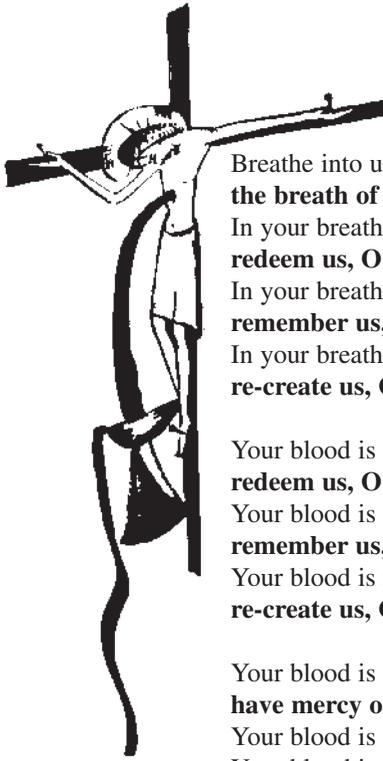
What were significant events in your life?

Who are the people who have had an influence on you?

What have been your successes and failures?

What have been meaningful faith events in your life?

What interests you in becoming a Companion of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood?



## LITANY OF REDEMPTION

Breathe into us...

**the breath of life**

In your breath is peace...

**redeem us, O Christ**

In your breath is memory...

**remember us, O Christ**

In your breath is life...

**re-create us, O Christ**

Your blood is precious...

**redeem us, O Christ**

Your blood is promise...

**remember us, O Christ**

Your blood is pregnant with life...

**re-create us, O Christ**

Your blood is compassion...

**have mercy on us**

Your blood is contentment...

Your blood is confrontation...

Your blood waters the earth...

**bring us to life**

Your blood soaks the soil...

Your blood refreshes the soul...

The blood of the poor...

**is precious to you**

The blood of the martyrs...

The blood of the unborn...

The blood of the accused...

The blood of the innocent...

The blood of the enemy...

The blood of the lost...

The blood of the lonely...

The blood of the old...

The blood of the young...

The blood of the hopeless...

The blood of the oppressed...

The blood of the victim...

The blood of the prisoner...

The blood of the dying...

Cup of suffering...

**redeem us**

Cross of commitment...

Covenant of love...

Altar of sacrifice...

Chalice of reconciliation...

Blood of Christ...

**remember us**

Blood of our ancestors...

Blood of those bound unjustly...

Blood of Gaspar and Maria...

Blood of our Community...

Your blood is a fountain of faith...

**re-create us**

Your blood is a stream of mercy...

Your blood is a river of life...

We raise our hands in prayer...

**stain us with your Blood**

We drink the cup of suffering...

We embrace the cross of victory...

We renew our covenant of love...

We live the liberation won for us...

We have washed our robes in your blood...

**rend our hearts**

We have washed our hands in your blood...

We have washed our hopes in your blood...

You have redeemed us, O Christ, with your Blood...

**by your wounds we are healed**

By your wounds...

**we are healed**

- Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.

# FORMATION

After completing the previous four DELIBERATIONS, you are ready now to examine the eight STUDY CHAPTERS. You are again reminded to write notes, underline, highlight in this *Workbook*.

FORMATION begins with a welcome rite (*see next page*).

## The Process for Formation

The sponsor and/or covenanted Companion meets with those in FORMATION (normally monthly) to assist their study of and sharing in the STUDY CHAPTERS.

STUDY CHAPTER sessions are held separate from the regular Companions' gathering. It is recommended that all come together for opening and closing while the inquirers have their study session apart for at least one hour. That allows the inquirers to get acquainted and to pray with the Companion group.

An inquirer concludes FORMATION by writing a one-year COVENANT. The final STUDY CHAPTER is designed to assist in the writing of one's covenant.

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# COMPANION WELCOME RITE

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*when celebrated in the local Companion group*

This ceremony is to be embellished with prayer, intercessions, and song when possible.

## **Convener of the local group:**

The following have completed the inquiry deliberations.

[...names...]

*Each responds with “present” as his or her name is called.*

It is their intention to enter formation, continuing their journey toward becoming a Precious Blood Companion.

## **Provincial director or his representative:**

I, [name], representing the provincial director of the - name- Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, extend to each of you an official welcome.

In the words of our founder, St. Gaspar: “Let us, indeed, become strengthened through the Blood of Jesus Christ.” May your reflections on the study chapters and your continuing journey with Companions and the incorporated members of our Society of Apostolic Life bring you to a clearer discernment of your call so that you may respond in faithful creativity.

Be assured of the prayerful assistance of all the Companions and incorporated missionaries of the Precious Blood.

Welcome!

*Approval is expressed through applause.*

## - Formation -

### Study Chapter

# 1

## PRECIOUS BLOOD COMPANIONS:

### ASSOCIATES OF THE MISSIONARIES OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

## Companion Summit Statement July, 1997

When Companions and members of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood gathered for a summit meeting in 1997 at St. Charles in Carthagena, Ohio, the statement that they wrote together came from the heart. It had been built, word by word, like a tower climbing toward God.

### The Summit Statement reads:

Companions and incorporated members are called by God to live a life of faith through the spirituality of the Precious Blood and St. Gaspar. We live the bond of charity with each other, carrying that charity with us to the world according to our vocation and gifts. As missionaries, we share and proclaim the spirit of the Community: reconciliation, prayer, hospitality and justice.

### Bringing It To Life

But like any definitive statement that is meant to be all-inclusive, it falls short of the three-dimensional reality. To bring its words to life, the statement has to be laid like a template over the lives of the Companions it describes. (See *Reading Between the Lines* on the facing page.)

## An uncharted direction

Being a Companion of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood has always been a state of mind, not a plan of action. Companions have no official ministry. That can be liberating, but at the same time it is a concept most Companions initially found foreign and difficult to grasp. Most of them are so active in their respective parishes that they have come to expect any call from the pastor to end with the question, "So, will you head up the committee?" When they received an invitation to become a Companion, most naturally waited to be assigned a chore to go with it.

The chore actually came from inside: becoming a Companion can mean looking off into a new direction, opening your mind to new thoughts, listening harder for God's call. Companions continue on in any and all ministries they had before they made their covenant, and often add new ones. But being a Companion, they often find, provides an underlying support for the work they are already doing. Companion gatherings become a place where they can be affirmed as missionaries and evangelizers, a place where they can gather strength for the work to which they will soon return.

*(Continued on page 34)*



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## **Reading Between the Lines**

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### **Companions and incorporated members**

Peggy Doherty of Vallejo, Calif., chairs a vocation awareness committee

**are called by God to live a life of faith**

Paul Armbruster of Cleveland volunteers at a hospice for indigent people illness

**through the spirituality of**

Ralph and Claire Ann Wheeler of Seneca, S.D., dedicated their lodge to the Precious Blood of Jesus

**the Precious Blood and St. Gaspar.**

Wynone Wildeman of Warrensburg, Mo., formed a support group for single mothers

**We live the bond of charity with each other,**

Don and Mary Ellen Krielkamp of Rensselaer, Ind., ministered in Tanzania

**carrying that charity with us to the world,**

Jackie Maddy of Albia, Iowa, journeys in faith with youth and adults of St. Marys Church

**according to our vocation and gifts.**

Ray Cron of Celina, Ohio, delivers medications to hospice patients

**As missionaries, we share and proclaim**

Don Ollier coordinates and serves at St. Marys food kitchen at St. James Church in Liberty, Mo.

**the spirit of the Community:**

Arlene Pelzer of Lake Mary, Fla., built houses for families in need in the Dominican Republic

**reconciliation, prayer, hospitality and justice.**

(Continued from page 32)

## Companion Gatherings

Companion groups gather, usually monthly, in a spirit of **hospitality**. From Old Testament times hospitality has been regarded as a sign of God's presence. As a cup holds all that is poured into it, we hold with reverence the lives of all who gather. An unconditional acceptance and welcome are hallmarks of hospitality.

Companion gatherings also offer time for **prayer** in community. Praying with others is different from praying alone; and praying in a Precious Blood manner is more than saying prayers. An openness to various forms of prayer invites the community into a fresh relationship with God. Reconciliation is at the heart of a praying community.

**Theological reflection** during Companion gatherings ties the messiness of life to the presence of God, the joys of life with the reign of God, and the social injustices in life with the challenges of the Good News. The cross with its intersecting of the vertical and the horizontal is a good symbol of contemplation and theological reflection. Gaspar called it "the book of the cross."

An element of Companion gatherings called **study** is what we are doing right now. Study can

mean reading and sharing an article, or a chapter of a book, or watching a video followed by a discussion. Occasionally there is an issue of *Fresh Bread*, reflections issued by the Companions office, for on-going formation. Each province's newsletter and other C.P.P.S. publications are always available for sharing and discussing.

These elements of hospitality (which at times should include a meal together), study, prayer, and theological reflection, can be very intertwined. While separate time need not be set aside for each, all these elements should be included in each gathering.

A final sharing that happens during many gatherings is the **business**. Conveners use this time to share information on upcoming events and other business important to the group.

The goal of Companion gatherings is to enrich our spiritual lives, to deepen our bond of charity in community, and to strengthen us for our varied ministries. The hope is that through gatherings Companions may become more aware of their gifts more apprised of their responsibilities in today's Church.

## The Provincial Mission Statements

Companions have chosen to weave their lives into those of

Precious Blood priests and brothers. The Cincinnati Province and the Kansas City Province each has its own mission statement.

### The Cincinnati Province mission statement reads as follows:

*We, the Cincinnati Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, are an apostolic community founded in 1815 by St. Gaspar del Bufalo.*

*We are united by a bond of charity and rooted in the spirituality of the Blood of Jesus.*

*We are called to participate in the on-going renewal of the Church and the realization of the Presence of God among ourselves and the people we serve.*

*In our willingness to be flexible and responsive to changing needs, we fulfill our mission through:*

- supporting and nurturing one another
- embracing a life of prayer
- calling forth the gifts of the laity and working in collaboration with them
- preaching and witnessing to the Word of God
- promoting conversion and reconciliation
- pursuing justice ever mindful of the poor and marginalized.



Its words echo the words and actions of Companions as they

collaborate with priests and brothers to bring forth the Kingdom of God. Companions live out concrete examples of the values that the mission statement delineates.

In the Kansas City province, Companions live out the values and priorities defined by the members there.

### **The Kansas City Province mission statement reads as follows:**

*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 light of the Gospel.*

*The Kansas City Province, united in prayer, service, and mutual support, characterized by the tradition of its North American predecessors, are missionaries of these times with diverse gifts who work in a variety of 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.*

## **Personal Invitations**

Many Companions are impassioned dreamers with big dreams. Others lead more quiet lives of faith, helping people one by one. The Spirit issues personal invitations, not blanket conscription, and each is called to his or her own ministry, whatever that may be.

No one will respect that more than other Companions, who are quick to offer praise and affirmation, love and support. Many Companions express their appreciation for monthly gatherings as a time when they can recharge, relax and reconnect with people who understand and accept them.

That kind of closeness brings life to all who share it, said Valerie Millus of Rome City, Ind., especially as Companions come together to speak of their love of the Lord and their work in God's name. Companion gatherings leave her "bubbling over," she said. "I think that is the greatest faith-builder there is people sharing their stories about how God moves in their lives. That really revives your faith in the world."

## **A Mosaic**

During the 1998 Assembly of the Kansas City province, Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA, urged the gathered

priests, brothers and Companions to move from a "melting pot to a mosaic" mindset. It was a very striking image for Marilyn Beck of St. Joseph, Mo. She recalls, "Each person's gifts in a group help to enrich and expand the dimension of the group, just as each piece of a mosaic, though distinct in color, shape, and texture, fits together to create one beautiful image. Jumbled up, these pieces would still be distinct but not complementing the others to help make each other a part of the whole picture. As Sr. Dianne said, 'inclusivity is not just a noble venture but necessary,' for that mosaic to be complete. We need to help each other find our right space in the mosaic of our community and our society."

## ***DISCUSSION STARTER***

Review the mission statement of your province. Give examples of how you see that mission statement is being lived out in the Precious Blood Community.

## - Formation -

### Study Chapter

# 2

By Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.

### A MINGLING OF MEMORY AND MERCY: SPIRITUALITY OF THE CUP

“Blood,” Archbishop Oscar Romero once said, “is the most eloquent of words.” In this chapter we will explore what we see when we look into the chalice filled to the brim with the Blood of Christ. When we see this wine which celebrates our identity as Companions of the Blood of Christ, do we see how this most meaningful of words, blood, calls us to an eloquent witness?

Several years ago I was polishing the chalice my family gave me on my ordination. The silver on the outside of the cup had become tarnished over the years. As I was sitting holding the chalice, the verse from the first letter of Peter came to mind: “Realize that you were delivered from your futile way of life not by any diminishable sum of silver or gold...but by Christ’s blood beyond all price” (1 Peter 1:18-19). When my family gave me the chalice, I doubt they had Peter’s principle in mind. But as I sat there that morning, polishing the silver on the outside of the chalice and seeing the gold on the inside, Peter’s words seemed to apply. The glitter of the gold will fade; the sterling silver will tarnish; but the Blood of Christ poured into this chalice will continue to redeem.

In this chapter, then, we are invited to look closely at the contents of the cup. Can we see the reflection of our own faces? It is in seeing our own reflection in the Blood of Christ that we will find mingled there the meaning, the memory, and the mercy contained in the spirituality of the cup.

### The Meaning: Can We Drink This Cup?

As we look into the cup, we hear the echoes of the question Jesus once posed to his disciples, “Can you drink this cup?” (Matthew 20:22) This is the question facing those who aspire to live as Companions of the Blood of Christ. It is the question Jesus asked James and John after their mother pleads on their behalf that



Jesus find them a high place at heaven’s table. The question seems so simple and straightforward. Can you drink this cup? As we look at the chalice filled with wine, we might be tempted to blurt out as James and John did, “Well, yes, of course we can!”

But when we look at this cup, really look at it, we might pause and ponder the meaning of the question. When we look at this cup and see how this cup has caught our tears from sorrows we

can barely name, from pain we can barely claim, from wounds we want to forget, can we drink this cup?

When we see how this cup has caught our fear of loving without counting the cost, or our fear of changes that come too quickly or too slowly, or the shame we embrace or the guilt so pervasive that forgiveness seems out of reach, can we drink this cup?

When we see how this cup has caught our indifference at another's suffering, or our blindness to the look of regret in another's eyes, or our silence in the face of injustice, can we drink this cup?

When we see how this cup has caught the words another spoke that hurt us to the core, or the anger that simmers on our soul's back burner, or the lack of appreciation we feel or the want of encouragement we need, or the busyness that consumes our days or the loneliness that lingers through the night, can we drink this cup?

When we see how the cup holds the courage to speak our truth though we know we'll be opposed, lose a few friends, distance a few relatives, rattle a few cages, see a few hands close into a fist, can we drink this cup?

Can we drink this cup when we know the vintage wine it holds will make us bold in living and

maybe even dying for what we believe? Dying not for ideas or ideology; or even for causes no matter how just, but for people, real people, holy, human beings. Can we drink this cup?

Can we drink this cup when a single sip takes us on a trip through killing fields marked with crosses, landscapes littered with losses, until we arrive at a lonely hill where we will be stripped and shamed, beaten and blamed, with nothing left to pray except, "Why? Why, God? Why have you forsaken me?"

Can we drink this cup after smelling its bitter bouquet? But rather than bristling at the steward for serving a vintage more like vinegar than wine, we know this one will have to do. Because this one, this vintage, contains all our suffering and all our sorrow, all our tears and all our fears, all our regrets and all our remorse, all our shame and all our blame. Yes, this one will do. Can we drink this cup?

## Missing the Meaning

In the Gospel story when this question was first raised, James and John say they can drink this cup. But do they understand? Jesus had just told them of his destination and his destiny: Jerusalem and Calvary. We see the failure of the disciples so clearly here: after just being told that the destiny of discipleship is crucifixion, they ask for a

promotion. At least, that is how the other disciples interpret the question. John and James want high places in the company. But in the company of disciples, in the company of true friends, there is no higher place, there is only the lowest place. There is no one to wait on them for they are to wait on God as they serve each other. Though they have experienced leaders who lust for power, privilege, and position, Jesus tells his disciples, "It cannot be that way with you" (Matt 20:26). Discipleship is not about self-promotion but self-denial — a demotion that places the other's need before one's own ambition.

In the context of our companionship at the table of Eucharist, we can drink this cup if we know that the contents are not an elixir that erases our wounds but rather causes us to experience them more deeply.

We can drink this cup if we know that in this chalice the Divine One we call messiah is mingled with the mayhem and mangled promises of every person; the crushed hopes and shredded dreams of every generation.

We can drink this cup if we know that this cup holds the vintage wine of victory that causes courage to swell shrunken souls, passion to pulse through paralyzed limbs, and commitment to warm cold hands, hearts, and feet.

We can drink this cup if we realize the risks we take with a single sip: that we will become intoxicated with redemption. And once we are inebriated with eternity, we will take the lowest place, pick up the heaviest cross, endure the most grievous loss.

We can drink this cup if we know that in this company of companions there are no slaves, only friends. And in this company of friends, all are equal, all are one. We are one in our desire to look out for the other's interests. We are one in our desire to serve.

Can we drink this cup? Can we look into the chalice red with wine and see the reflection of our lives being poured out in love for others? Can we see not only our own faces but the faces of those with whom we stand and so seek to give others a glimpse of God's glory even amid the gloom of their lives? When we look into this cup, can we see the faces of the poor ones, the broken ones, the bruised and battered ones? This is the challenge of our companionship in the blood of Christ: to look into the chalice and see the reflection of who we are and who we might become when we live the memory of the cup we drink.

### **The Memory: Do This in Remembrance of Me**

For many years I had an ceramic image of St. Gaspar hanging on the wall in my office. One autumn

afternoon, a strong draft of wind slammed the door of my office causing the image of Gaspar to fall and to shatter on the concrete floor. When I picked up the pieces, the two largest pieces that remained intact were the face of the founder and the chalice he held in his hand.

When suffering slams the door on our lives and causes our images of God to shatter, Precious Blood spirituality reflects that these two images will remain: the face of God that is stained with tears because God knows what we suffer; and the hand of God holding a chalice to collect all the pain and suffering of the world into this cup. In this chalice God gathers the pain and suffering of every human being, lifts it up, and drinks it in.

"How well chosen wine was," the poet Luci Shaw writes, "to stain our souls with remembrance. A shocking red, unforgettable as blood, a rich brew in the cup, a bitter burning in the throat, a warmth within, chosen well to etch our lintels with the paradoxes of a high priest bound to his altar, death as a tool of love and blood as a bleach."

This is the memory the cup holds: the death of Jesus is the "tool of love" that redeems the world.

Through his Blood, the Blood that stains our memory, colors our conscience, gives us pause, and cause to hope again, is the Blood of life.

Like that image of Gaspar holding the cup, we all have our images of God. Though these images are not a substitute for experiencing the



Can we drink this cup? Can we look into the chalice red with wine and see the reflection of our lives being poured out in love for others?

real presence of God, our images help us to articulate how we have experienced the presence of God. We have these images, these pictures of God etched in our souls: a red sky at night might remind us of God's real presence; the face of a child or of our beloved might illuminate for us the face of God; the shoulder of a friend when we are sad or broken-hearted might remind us of God's shoulder that catches our tears; the laughter of companions whose company we keep might capture

for us God's joy. Though we have not seen God, we have seen glimpses of God's presence in very real and affirming ways. These glimpses, these benevolent glances, are so important to sustain our faith in the Divine Presence.

But sometimes our images of God become too small, too specific, and too precise. Like that picture of our founder hanging on the wall that falls to the floor and cracks when a door slams or the earth trembles, our images of God are sometimes smashed when the ground beneath our feet quakes because of suffering we cannot explain and loss we can barely name. We try to pick up the pieces of our picture of God in these times of incredible tragedy, but our images are never quite the same.

## **We Do This in Memory of Jesus**

While giving a retreat at a parish in Kansas City a few years ago, I spent a day visiting some of the contemplatives of the congregation — the people often referred to as “the shut-ins.” I met a husband and wife, Joe and Margaret, who have been married fifty-two years. Margaret was suffering from Alzheimer's disease, the insidious disease that stole her memory. She could not remember her husband's name. Margaret looked at Joe with a vacant stare. Joe cared for her with great compassion and love. I

saw his tears as we prayed with Margaret and anointed her.

Afterwards, in the living room, I saw the picture taken on their 50th wedding anniversary before the disease began to take its toll. Their smiles told a story of commitment and gratitude. It is a picture that Joe obviously treasured. He remembered the good times even as he struggled through very difficult times. For on the other side of the wall where this picture hung, Margaret could not remember his name.

I met another woman, Theresa, about my age, who was a pediatric nurse. Theresa loved her work. Every day she held newborn children in her arms. Is there a more profound image of God, of life, than this? But in her late twenties she began to develop the symptoms of multiple sclerosis. Eventually she was confined to a bed, her body is frail and useless. She cannot use those arms which once held countless children to feed herself now. The disease affected her speech. She can barely talk above a whisper. After we celebrated the anointing of the sick and she received communion, Theresa asked me, “Has God forgotten me?”

I tried to assure Theresa that God has not forgotten her. But what evidence did I have? What images of God did I possess to give such an assurance? I held her hand and she smiled. I knew she wasn't

expecting an answer. But it was a question she had to ask. And as we held hands in silence, I saw a beauty in her eyes I had not seen before because I was too distracted by the image of this woman in her early forties whose body betrayed her. Held in the sacredness of that moment, held in the gaze of her eyes, I knew that Theresa already had the answer to her question: God had not forgotten. God does not forget.

When I left Theresa's room and walked back into the living room, I saw the pictures of Theresa before the illness began to make her body a hostage. How beautiful she was before this illness imprisoned her. How beautiful she is now, though her body is twisted and tortured. I saw the beauty in her eyes which reflects her faith. It won't be the glamorous picture of Theresa I will remember but the picture of Theresa in that bed, stretched out upon her cross, that holds my attention and focuses my fragile faith. It is not a **glamorous** picture but a **glorious** picture of one woman's faith shining through inexplicable suffering.

I heard in the echoes of Theresa's question, “Has God forgotten me?” another question, raised by another whose body was twisted and tortured, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” And in both questions there is an image of God that in a strange yet sacred way gives me strength.

At his last supper in the company of his friends, Jesus raised the cup of blessing and said, "Do this in memory of me." When we take this cup that contains both the blessing and the suffering of our lives, we remember Jesus. But even more, through Jesus' identification with the contents of this cup, "This is my blood," God remembers us.

## The Mercy of God

When we are in situations of extreme suffering or intolerable loss, the question "Why" is an appropriate question. In asking the question, "has God forgotten me?" Theresa was struggling to make some sense of her suffering. She had every right to ask the question. But her question wasn't suggesting that God somehow caused this disease to infiltrate her body. Instead, like Jesus' question on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?", which is, of course, the opening verse from Psalm 22, it was an anguished cry of affirmation that somehow, somehow, God is present in the midst of her suffering. When Jesus shouts those opening lines of Psalm 22 from the cross, he is capturing the truth of the entire psalm which reflects the passage from doubt and fear to faith and hope.

In raising the question, "Why have you forsaken me?" Jesus voices his affirmation in the ever present mercy of God.

From a Precious Blood perspective, images of God that are too small, too human, too narrow, too limited, too controlled by divine cause and effect are false images that can restrict our understanding and acceptance of God's mercy. These images can be as dangerous and destructive as the false idols our ancestors in faith constructed in the desert on their journey to the promised land. Precious Blood spirituality suggests that we replace those images of God with ones that will strengthen not sever our faith in God when suffering threatens to fray the sacred connection.

In the image of a tear-stained face of God who holds a cup in the divine hand, the mercy of God mingles with our own memory of what Jesus did on the night he was betrayed. Remember what Jesus said when he invited the disciples to drink from the cup: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." That phrase, "for many," implies that Jesus, instead of drawing in the boundaries of God's love, expands them even more by moving to the margins where the poor, the unclean, the sinful make their home.

In the words of a poet, Christine Lore Weber, "All prayer ultimately hollows our lives into a cup to collect the blood of a torn world and transform it into the wine of Justice." This is what Jesus did that night he was

betrayed; this is what he does for us each time we drink from the cup: he hollows out our lives so that we can hold all the blood shed in anger and violence, murder and mayhem in the chalice of our hearts. This blood, poured out for all, calls us to become vessels of blessing, containers of compassion, receptacles of redemption for all the world.

Because we have the courage to drink from this cup which holds God's mercy, we believe this choice wine will fill our hollow lives with the Blood of Christ and cause this chalice of our hearts to overflow with love. As Rumi, the Sufi poet, prophet, and mystic wrote, "When grapes turn to wine, they long for our ability to change," so when we drink of this cup, like grapes that become wine, like wine that becomes blood, God calls forth from us our willingness to be changed. This blood, precious and bold, merciful and memorable, pulses with passion from our hearts and races through our veins to bring us life and liberation.

*Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S., is an author, preacher, and consultant to the Companion movement.*

## ***DISCUSSION STARTER***

Fr. Nassal states that those who aspire to live as Companions of the Blood of Christ face this question: "Can you drink this cup?" How do you respond?

### **Prayer of the Chalice from the Sufi Tradition**

O Divine One,  
to Thee I raise my whole being,  
a vessel emptied of self.  
Accept, O gracious God,  
this my emptiness,  
and so fill me with Thyself —  
Thy Light, Thy Love, Thy Life —  
that these Thy precious Gifts  
may radiate through me  
and overflow the chalice  
of my heart  
into the hearts of all with whom  
I come in contact this day —  
revealing unto them the beauty  
of Thy Joy and Wholeness  
and the serenity of Thy peace  
which nothing can destroy. +

## - Formation -

### Study Chapter

# 3

## ST. GASPAR: THE MAN, THE MISSION, THE DREAM

God has a dream for each of us. Sometimes our dreams are small, touching only our families and a few close friends. At other times they grow larger than life itself, stretching beyond our imaginations to touch countless generations who come after us. Such was the dream God had for one man, Gaspar del Bufalo, founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

The seeds of such dreams are sown in our hearts by our parents, grandparents, and ancestors who have inspired us by their lives of faith and loving service. Certainly the same can be said for the parents of St. Gaspar.

His father, Antonio del Bufalo, was a servant in the family of a prince. He was a pious man of firm faith who was a staunch defender of the Holy Father. Gaspar's mother, Annunziata Quartieron, was one of those quiet and saintly women who seemed to model her life and faith after the holy women of Scripture. She realized early in Gaspar's life that God had great things in store for him. She regularly inspired him with readings from the sacred Scriptures, especially passages from the passion of Christ,

readying the soil for God to plant within Gaspar a deep and abiding devotion to the Precious Blood.

## The Man

Gaspar del Bufalo was born in Rome on January 6, 1786. Before his 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday he was ordained a priest, July 31, 1808. Seven years later, on August 15, 1815,

Gaspar founded the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. And he was not yet 52 when he died on December 28, 1837. The medical report called him a "victim of charity" because even though he was in ill health himself, he

continued to minister to the victims of the cholera epidemic that broke out in Rome. Gaspar was beatified in 1904 and named a saint on June 12, 1954.

## Signs of Compassion

It was a very trying time, just three years before the outbreak of the French Revolution when Gaspar was born. Napoleon had already begun to trample on every human right as well and the rights of the Church. By the time Gaspar was eleven, Napoleon had forced Pope Pius VI into exile and took over the government of Rome.



*Gaspar del Bufalo*

As a youngster Gaspar gave short sermons to his family and friends and showed a great concern for the poor and sick. Perhaps because he came from a family of meager means and because he himself had been a sickly child (almost dying at the age of two, only to be cured through the intercession of St. Francis Xavier), Gaspar's compassion for the poor and outcasts consumed him. He spent his summer vacations as a youth visiting hospitals and bringing meals to the hungry.

When Gaspar was 18, desiring to imitate St. Francis Xavier, he began organizing for action on behalf of the "people on the fringe," one of his greatest gifts. He frequented the marketplace where he would minister to the marginalized: offering religious instruction to peasants from rural areas who came to Rome to sell their hay, providing catechism for orphans and children of the poor, and setting up a night shelter for the homeless.

### **Gaspar's Companions**

Gaspar continued what became his life's work of ministering to the outcast and speaking words of comfort to all. But he did not do these things alone: his finest trait was his ability to draw others to himself as co-workers. What drew them to him was his intellectual ability, his good will, and his holiness. When giving instructions at the Basilica of San

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himself as  
co-workers.**

Marco the Canons there gave him the nickname "the little apostle" (apostoletto).

### **Courage of Conscience**

While engaged with his companions in the apostolic work of evangelizing the cart drivers (barrozari) and farmers from the countryside who came into the Roman Forum, Gaspar met Fr. Francesco Albertini, the canon of S. Nicola. Albertini became his spiritual advisor and had a profound influence on Gaspar, teaching him a deep love and appreciation for the blood of Christ. Gaspar often referred to Albertini as the founder of our Community. Together they founded the Pious Union of the Most Precious Blood in 1808.

In the meantime, Napoleon and his forces began to put pressure on the new pope, Pius VII, taking him prisoner and exiling him from the papal states in May of 1809. As the French took over the country, fear and corruption held

sway. Gaspar witnessed it all with a torn heart and doubled his efforts and preaching.

Then on June 13, 1810, Gaspar was brought before the magistrate to take an oath of allegiance to the emperor. In words that echo the Gospel of John when Jesus said "the truth will set you free," Gaspar told the magistrate: "I would rather die or suffer evil than take such an oath. I cannot. I must not. I will not." For the courage of his conviction, Gaspar was sentenced to prison. But even though his body was incarcerated, the truth had set his spirit free. While in prison, his health once again began to deteriorate, but his mind and heart continued to expand. A dream was about to be born.

### **Years of Exile**

While exiled, Gaspar continued to preach and teach whenever he could. Though he had performed works of mercy for most of his young life, now in the silence of his cell this work was clearly defined by the Precious Blood of Christ. In the solitude of exile, his vision became clear: to continue the works of mercy and evangelization in the context of community. He and Albertini prepared the basis for the congregation of missionaries Gaspar established in 1815 in Giano, Italy, after he was released from prison, and drew up fundamental articles for the institute of the Sisters of the Most

Precious Blood. He would join forces with other men and women united in the bond of charity to touch others with the redeeming grace of the blood of Christ.

## Enemies

We cannot speak about Gaspar without noting his courage in the face of his enemies. Even within the Church there were priests, bishops, and even popes who opposed Gaspar. He was painfully aware and often humiliated that he was the subject of false rumors and accusations.

Gaspar's enemies filled Pope Leo XII's ears with rumors about Gaspar being a "false reformer," alleging that the Society was illegal, that its members were interested only in eating and drinking. In an audience with Leo XII on Aug. 15, 1826, Gaspar finally had the chance to offer a defense. At the end of the audience the pope embraced the missionary and said, "You have many enemies, but fear not. Leo XII is now on your side."

Gregory XVI, brought the most pain to Gaspar by threatening to suppress his congregation. Gaspar boldly battled back, convinced that his congregation was the *opera di Dio* (God's work). "Let God do whatever he wishes with my life and my reputation, as well as my honor," he wrote. "If I am to be rejected, let it serve for his glory. . . I have total trust that the Society, which is entirely God's,



**“I would rather die  
or suffer evil  
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such an oath.  
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I will not.”**

will go forward.” Fr. Innocenzo Betti, one of Gaspar's first followers, wrote: "I see the poor Canon, afflicted and torn, despite all of his virtues, as he watches the axe being wielded at the plant for which he sacrificed so much of himself up to now." Ultimately, Gregory XVI became convinced of Gaspar's true character. It was he who gave the society its first official house in Rome and gave his approval to the initiation of the processes for Gaspar's beatification and canonization.

## The Mission To Renew and Reconcile

Napoleon was defeated in January, 1814 and Gaspar was

free to return to Rome to begin his mission as an apostle of the Precious Blood. He had spent four years in exile and imprisonment, but his enthusiasm had not waned. He came back to a city that was in chaos. In the aftermath of Napoleon's occupation, the church in Rome was experiencing great turmoil. Pope Pius VII praised Gaspar for the work he was doing, and appointed him to preach missions throughout the city and surrounding countryside for the spiritual renewal of the people, and especially for the clergy who had compromised under Napoleon. Gaspar quickly accepted the assignment as the path he was to pursue for the rest of his life. In responding to the Holy Father's request, Gaspar drew upon the rich resources of two of his mentors, Frs. Albertini and Bonnani, to begin an Society of Apostolic Life. From that point on, he closed his many letters with the identification, "Apostolic Missionary."

Gaspar's priests and brothers did an amazing job of rechristianizing the Papal States and surrounding areas. But it was not easy work. The people were sometimes rough and uneducated, opposed to religion and to clerics. Uprisings were frequent. When Gaspar's missionaries were sent to the city of Benevento the papal delegate called it "a jungle of untamed beasts." But after 15 days of mission work by the society, the city was transformed through the reconciling Word of God.

## Gaspar's Companions

In the course of his missionary life, there were several attempts not only to prevent Gaspar and his companions from entering certain cities but even assaults on his life. One failed attempt was to poison him. Gaspar's defense was his secure confidence in God's will: "in all things, whatever God wishes." On another occasion, as a member of the "Carbonari" approached Gaspar to stab him, the man was suddenly disarmed, not physically, but by Gaspar's words: "Brother, do you wish to go to confession?"

St. Gaspar brought devotion to the Blood of Christ out of the sanctuary and into the streets. His preaching was rooted in the saving act of Christ on the cross and so he carried the crucifix close to his heart. Indeed, the mission cross became the symbol of the newly-formed Missionaries.

Gaspar's words and witness became the wings to lift the burden of sin from the hearts of his listeners. He called people to reconciliation, to restore that right relationship with God and others.

### Among the Outlaws

The power of Gaspar's presence and preaching was found most dramatically in his work with the gangs of outlaws that were terrorizing the papal states at the time. These bandits were holding

**"I wish that I could  
have a thousand  
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Precious Blood  
of Jesus."**

up carriages and robbing and beating travelers. Fear pervaded the city of Rome and the surrounding areas. Though the government sent special military units into the hills to capture the outlaws, still the terror continued.

Confronted with this persistent and painful problem, Gaspar said the answer lay not in force and punishment but in love and religious instruction. Armed with the crucifix as his only defense, Gaspar personally sought out the bandits, talked with them, and gradually won their trust and confidence.

His success continues to be celebrated to this day by the people living in the city of Sonnino. After the government of the Papal States had issued a decree for the destruction of this city of uncontrollable banditry, Gaspar wrote to Pope Pius VII, offering a plan to reform it that included building permanent mission houses to minister to the people there. Gaspar managed to

draw sizeable numbers of outlaws into his retreats. In time, Gaspar and his men restored the feeling of trust in Sonnino.

In his 23 years as a missionary, Gaspar preached endlessly in missions, retreats and conferences to every group imaginable: priests, sisters, lawyers, artists, prisoners. He was a gifted preacher. Our third moderator general, Venerable John Merlini, said of his preaching that "his very appearance on the podium moved people, especially when he took hold of the Crucifix. He would work his way into the hearts of his listeners. . . Both the learned and the unlearned would flock to hear him."

Gaspar and his missionaries visited city after city. "I wish that I could have a thousand tongues," he wrote at this time, "to endear every heart to the Precious Blood of Jesus."

## The Dream

### The Dream Becomes Reality

On one occasion Gaspar had given a mission in the little town of Giano in Umbria, where there was an abandoned monastery, San Felice. Gaspar saw that old structure, in need of repair, as a place to take up residence. So it was at San Felice near Giano, Italy, on August 15, 1815, that Gaspar founded the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

It was Gaspar's vision to wed the spirituality of the Precious Blood with the concept of a community for apostolic works of mercy. This sacred union gave birth to a Society of Apostolic Life that would "proclaim peace through the blood of the cross."

Fr. Joe Nassal writes: "A few years ago I had the privilege of visiting the birthplace of our Society, Giano, a beautiful spot which sits on a hill near Rome. With vineyards draping the landscape, this historic and holy shrine is now a retreat house operated by the Italian Province of the Missionaries. I could imagine Gaspar sitting in this sacred place. In this solitude, God gave shape to his dream of an apostolic society bearing the name of the Precious Blood. A community that would become a beacon of hope and reconciliation for a wounded world. With the promise Jesus gave to his disciples, 'I will be with you always, even to the ends of the earth,' sealed upon his heart, Gaspar set out from San Felice to heal and to reconcile.

"We celebrated Eucharist the afternoon we were there. As we gathered around the altar and circled the sanctuary, the vision of Gaspar became real. And the promise of the 'ends of the earth' was enfolded. Gathered around that altar were members of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood from Italy and Austria, Germany and Poland, Spain and

Portugal, India and Tanzania, Chile and Peru, Guatemala and Brazil, the United States and Canada. Though we were from different countries and cultures, spoke different languages and lived different lifestyles, still we were one in Gaspar's vision. Amid our diversity, we discovered our unity: the bond of the blood of Christ."

## **Companions Today**

Gaspar's gift of attracting and inviting others into his work, continues today in the Precious Blood Companions. Gaspar involved the laity in the missions he preached and in the groups he established to carry on after the missions. In that same spirit Companions are responding to a call to be involved in the work of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, ministering to those on the fringes of society and reconciling all through the power of the saving Blood of Christ.

## **Maria de Mattias**

One of the greatest consolations to Gaspar was a mission he gave in the town of Vallecorsa in 1822. The town had seen horrible strife in 1814 as factions battled for its control; eighteen people had been massacred in the church, and one woman stabbed directly in front of the main altar. Since that time the town had been stricken with fear and hatred, and a spirit of revenge. St. Gaspar arrived there as a messenger of peace and

reconciliation. Among his listeners was a 17-year-old girl named Maria de Mattias. She was attracted to the crucifix that Gaspar held as he preached. Between the saint and Maria there was an almost immediate silent communication, an invitation without words. Several years later, Fr. John Merlini, as her spiritual director, was instrumental in advising Maria as she founded a congregation of women affiliated with the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood (ASC).

## **Keeping the Dream Alive**

The spirit of St. Gaspar still animates the priests, brothers and Companions of the Precious Blood. His spirit calls us to compassion for the poor and outcasts; inspires us to confront unjust and oppressive structures; encourages us to seek communion with all creation. We are, in the words of St. Paul, "ambassadors of reconciliation" who strive to live the spirituality of the Blood of Christ in our world today. This Precious Blood stains our hands, our hearts, our imaginations and leads us to pursue peace and seek justice for all God's people.

St. Gaspar risked his life so that others might experience peace. He refused to compromise his faith, choosing to obey God rather than the state in matters of conscience. He preached with the power of his convictions and

touched others with the compassion of Jesus. His life is our life; his mission is our challenge; his dream is our destiny.

*This article was co-authored by Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S., and Fr. Ray Cera, C.P.P.S.*

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***Pope John Paul II from his address to the  
XV General Assembly of the  
Society of the Precious Blood,  
in Rome, October 19, 1989***

The spirituality of St. Gaspar ... is truly at the heart of the Christian life. The Most Precious Blood of our Lord has always been the object of a special attention on the part of all the saints: it is the school of sanctity, of justice, of love ... Never cease ... to delve deeply into this mystery of justice and of love: diffuse it into the whole world.

In the General Assembly which you are celebrating, you have studied the specific topic of the mission of your Congregation, making an analysis of the situation in the various places where you work in order to meet present challenges according to the charism of your Congregation. This charism, in fact, is the ministry of the word of God, as stated in the Constitution of your Congregation. In a society which too often ignores the signs of the presence of God, you must be the word that knocks at the door of every human heart, so that it may open to receive the Savior. In a society which often fails to uphold human dignity, especially the dignity of the poor, you must awaken the voice of conscience that sustains the primacy of truth and love.

My dear brothers, I fervently hope that the teachings which we have learned from the life of your founder — contemplation of the mystery of the Blood of Christ and commitment to the ministry of the word — will be an inspiration for your personal and communitarian renewal, so that you may present yourselves to the people of God, not only as teachers of the word, but also as convinced witnesses to Christ, who loved us and gave his Blood for us (cf. Gal 2:20).

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## ***DISCUSSION STARTER***

Gaspar heard the cry of the blood among the poor and sick and those with needs.  
How does my life of companionship respond to those in need?

Where do I hear the cry of the blood in my parish or community and what is my response?

## - Formation -

### Study Chapter

# 4

## BRINGING ALL PEOPLE NEAR: A SPIRITUALITY OF CROSS

By Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.

Precious Blood people have their eyes fixed on the cross of Jesus Christ. We find our footing at the foot of the cross. In this chapter we will explore how the spirituality of the cross reflects God's desires to bring all peoples near through the Blood of Christ. We will examine the crosses we carry in our own lives and try to see them as invitations to a holy communion with a God who suffers with us and a planet so often plagued with pain. The spirituality of the cross engages our memory by asking us to recall how God chose to stand with us in the person of Jesus. When we stand at the foot of the cross, we do not stand alone.

### At the Foot of the Cross: Holy Ground

Like long-distance runners about to embark on this cross-country course, the first thing we do is to check our feet.

On a retreat several years ago, a priest told me about one of his first assignments in the inner city of Chicago. The neighborhood bore the scars of urban blight and decay. He went to the grocery store one day, walking over countless broken bottles on the sidewalks and streets. As he stood at check-out line, a young boy from the parish greeted him. The priest noticed that the youngster wasn't wearing any shoes. Bob asked him where his shoes were. The boy said, "At home." He told

the priest that he preferred to walk barefoot. "Of course, my feet get bloody sometimes because I step on broken glass." The priest summed up the story by saying, "I want to go to heaven with my shoes off."

In a sense, this is what Precious Blood people do: we walk through the streets with no shoes. Nothing between our feet and the ground. With bloody feet from broken glass and broken dreams, we find ourselves standing on holy ground. The spirituality of the cross suggests we stand where the blood of the poor, the accused, the condemned has seeped into the soil beneath our feet. This is holy ground.

When we stand with others under the weight of their crosses, we stand in the same place Jesus did. It is a place of condemnation, accusation, and rejection. It is a place that resembles a lonely hill outside the city of Jerusalem where tears are shed and hopes are shattered. This is the place where we will hear the call of companionship.

Where do we stand? Too often we answer that question from the standpoint of ideology: we say we are liberal or conservative, progressive or traditional. But as Companions of the Blood of Christ, we answer that question not from the viewpoint of ideology but from the vantage point of our spirituality. When we stand close to the cross, we will

see that the water and blood flow like a stream from the side of Jesus make us a community. In this water and blood, we are washed and redeemed: “It is in Christ and through his Blood that we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven” (Eph 1:7). In water and in blood, we are brought near: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). It is the power of this water and blood flowing from the cross of Christ “who is our peace,” that breaks “down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart” (Eph 2:14).

In the water and in the blood that soaks the holy ground on which we stand, we find “peace through the Blood of his cross” (Col 1:20).

## **Cross Examination**

Those who have stood under the weight of cross; those who view the world from the perspective of Precious Blood spirituality, know the meaning of that phrase from the Apostles’ Creed when we say, “Christ descended in to hell.” They know because they’ve been there too. They have the scars on their souls, the wounds on their hearts, and the ashes on their psyches to prove it. But this has taught them to keep seeking, in Paul’s words, to “know Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection; likewise to know how to share in his sufferings by being formed into the pattern of his death” (Phil 3:10).

People who are prepared to be “cross examined” for their faith “give no thought to what lies behind but push on to what is ahead” (Phil 3:13). Like Paul, their “entire attention is on the finish line” (Phil 3:14). They see the cross not as a hurdle on this racetrack of redemption but rather as the way one must follow in order to reach the finish line.

This is the call to companionship captured in the cross of Jesus. As Companions, we walk together not knowing exactly where the finish line is. Remember what Paul writes, “It is not that I have already finished my course; but I am racing to grasp the prize if possible” (Phil 3:12). This is “the prize to which God calls us — life on high in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14). We run this race, we pursue this prize, when we have the courage to examine those crosses of our own lives. We run this race, we pursue this prize when we are crushed by the crosses of our lives but have the courage to get back up again and continue on this cross country course. And we pursue this prize when we stop along the way to stand with another in his her pain and suffering.

## **The Obstruction of the Cross**

For many of us, however, when we follow this way of the cross we sense this central symbol of our faith not as an opportunity or an invitation but rather as an

obstacle, as something we want to avoid. Most of the time many of us view the cross not in terms of triumph but in terms of tragedy.

A few years ago on September 14, the feast of the Triumph of the Cross, we placed a large cross between the altar and the congregation. Preaching that day, I had to look through the cross to see the people. The cross was in the way. We placed the cross in the most visible place we could find. We could not deny its presence, just as we can’t deny the presence of those crosses in our own lives.

Or can we? We can move the cross off to the side. We can stand it against the wall. We can get it out of the way of our worship. Isn’t that what we often do with the cross in our lives: we move the cross out of our way. We hang the cross on the walls so that no one will trip or stumble or fall. We place it on steeples that rise toward the skies, putting the cross out of our reach.

In most places where I preach, I have my back to the cross. But for that one Sunday morning, the cross was in the way. Whatever I said that day had to pass first through the cross. Which is, of course, the point and the paradox of the cross. When the cross is in the center of our lives, it is more than a distraction, it is an obstruction. The cross we placed at the center of our worship obstructed our view — my view

of the congregation, their view of me and of the altar.

The cross was in the way. But isn't that how we often view the cross in our lives: not so much as the way of the cross but the cross as in the way? Don't we view the construction of the crosses in our lives more as obstructions than opportunities? Don't the crosses of our lives weigh us down rather than lift us up? Don't we claim our crosses as tragedies not triumphs?

## The Language of the Cross

Think about how we speak of those crosses we carry. Don't we often talk about them in the language of loss? When we suffer a setback, or are engaged in a struggle, or endure a relationship that is difficult, we say of the experience, the event, the person, "I guess it is a cross I have to bear." We speak of it as something — or someone — that tries our patience. Sometimes a heavy cross, an incredible loss, weighs us down, pushes us to the ground.

Reflect for a moment on how we use the word "cross" in our language. A parent says to a child after the child talks back: "Don't get cross with me." A boss comes into work in a foul mood and the whispers in the office warn: "He's cross today." Or, "Better not cross him."

We use the word when there's a

mix-up of communication: "She crossed me up." Or, "Our letters must have crossed in the mail." We use it to write people off: "I crossed her name off the list." In some relationships with people, the cross is multiplied: the familiar double-cross.

In body language, we cross our arms, cross our legs, cross ourselves, and each gesture conveys a certain meaning: distance, a lack of interest, a defensive posture, a blessing, or the beginning of a prayer.

We cross the street to get to the other side. We come upon a hill with a yellow sign that has a black cross in the center and we slow down because just over the hill there's a cross road. And we don't want to cross paths with an oncoming car to cause a crash.

We cross stitch, cross examine, cross over, cross country. There are cross winds, cross beams, cross walks, cross words. It's puzzling.

Have I crossed you up? Or is it down?

## The Direction of the Cross

According to Paul's famous hymn in his letter to the Philippians (2:5-11), the movement of the cross is both up and down. That's the direction of the cross. It takes us higher and deeper. But it also takes us to the east and to the west. In the darkness of our night,

we look to the northern skies and see the northern cross; turn to the south and see the southern cross. This is what the cross does: it points to the north, pushes us to the south.

This is the direction of the cross: it is the way that leads to life. This sense of direction is captured in the Philippians hymn which portrays a downward movement as Jesus did not claim equality with God as something to be exploited but rather emptied himself, taking the form of a slave. God came down to earth. Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. But because of this downward movement of the Divine One, "God highly exalted him."

The cross goes both ways. The cross goes all ways. The cross is the way. Except for many of us, in the language of our lives, the cross is too often in the way.



## Looking at the Cross

When we look at our own lives and see the crosses we've carried, the experiences of suffering we've endured, and maybe even the people we've encountered whose personalities or ideologies have tried our patience, we begin

to sense how these crosses have allowed us to go deeper into the mystery of suffering, the mystery of life. We look at those experiences of how we survived not by our own strength or talent or gifts, but because of an inner strength we never knew we had until our world came crashing in and the cross grew so large we thought we'd be crushed under its weight. We often say in moments like these: "I never would have made it through without my faith."

This is the quality of redemptive suffering that is traced upon the cross. Redemptive suffering brings people together; it does not divide. A powerful example of this occurred a few years ago when a frail, fragile little woman in India, Mother Teresa, died. There was an extraordinary outpouring of emotion from all parts of the world upon learning of her death. At her funeral, the true measure of what it means to be Catholic was in evidence as people from all faith traditions gathered to pay their respects and voiced prayers of gratitude to this small woman who carried large crosses. It was her ability to see the tragic consequences of the cross — the poverty, the homeless, the hungry, the leprosy — and her ability to respond in faith that the world regarded her life as a triumph. Mother Teresa claimed the cross as her triumph and this was seen clearly at her funeral as national boundaries and religious barriers were crossed in paying

tribute to a woman who consistently refused to be labeled as a saint and instead clung to the words, "as I have done, so you must do."

As Mother Teresa has done, so we can do. Unfortunately, for most of us, we are content to make people like Mother Teresa saints and let ourselves off the hook. But when we don't look away and see the cross for what it is, we see it is our life. As painful as our lives are at times, there is the ultimate promise being spoken through this cross. As difficult as it is to bear at times, this cross will lift us free. As tragic as our lives become at times, God's faith in us, God's love for us, God's hope in us, makes it possible to claim our little lives as a triumph of the cross.

### **Conversation with the Cross**

When we place the cross at the center of our lives, we begin to understand that life is not about comparing losses — as when we hear about people whose crosses are so large that ours seem to shrink into insignificance. No, it is not making comparisons but making conversation with our own crosses. It's about feeling the weight of our own crosses, measuring the depth of our own losses, and beginning to see them not as obstructions but as opportunities for God's ultimate triumph in our lives. For when we are in the depths, we cannot rely

on our own resources. We can rely only on the One whose grace comes down from heaven and lifts us up again.

When we are emptied by the suffering we have endured, we can only rely on the redemption won for us on the cross to fill us with hope again.

When we are weighed down by tragedy, it is the cross that is etched upon our lives at baptism that claims us for Christ. With this gift of faith growing in our hearts, we claim our cross-laden, blood-stained lives as a triumph of hope.

When we heed the conversation of this cross, we hear the wisdom of the wood — a wisdom the world deems as foolish. These planks of wood, once living, are cut down and tied together to hold the body of another living being. From this wood, the voice of the dying gives life to the living. From this wood, the suffering of the innocent gives forgiveness to the guilty. From this wood, the blood of the Lamb gives courage to the lost. From this wood, the compassion of the crucified gives comfort to the grieving.

At times in our lives this conversation with the cross is given voice in the witness of someone who knows the language of the cross. A friend of mine was very ill from cancer. For almost two years, Nancy had to receive weekly intravenous treatments. Somewhere in the middle of this

exhausting process to restore her health, Nancy lost her courage. She wanted to run from the tree of the cross for she found no shade, no comfort. In describing this experience, she wrote, "It is hard to say which collapsed first, my soul or my veins, but collapse they both did. One day the search for a healthy vein became too painful. I pushed the needle away and cried."

In telling this story, Nancy recalls that the nurse left the room but returned a short while later holding the hand of a little girl. This ten-year-old girl had battled cancer for most of her life. The child smiled at Nancy and said, "You should have got one of these." Lifting her T-shirt, she showed Nancy the hole that had been cut into her abdomen so that she could receive her treatments through a permanent plastic port. Then this little girl put her hand, so small and so soft, on Nancy's hand and said, "You can take it." And Nancy did.

Through her own suffering, under the shade of her own cross, this little girl smiled. And in her smile and in the touch of her hand, Nancy found the courage to rest awhile longer under the shade of her own cross.

The little girl's words to Nancy, "you can take it," reflects Jesus' invitation to his disciples: "Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny one's very self, take up one's cross each day,

and follow in my steps" (Luke 9:23). There was a certain sense of authority in the little girl's words because of the suffering she had known in the ten short years of her life. When someone comes to me when I am sitting under the tree of the cross and says, "I know what you're going through," my first reaction is, "How dare you! How can you possibly know what I'm going through? How can you possibly know my suffering or my pain?" But when that person shows me his or her wounds, as the little girl showed Nancy, when I know a little of the story of what the other has suffered, I find the invitation to sit for a spell with the other under the shade of the tree of the cross. And I find, as Nancy did, that I can take it. I can take up this cross and follow. I can find the courage to go on.

This is what Jesus is saying to us: "I know what you're going through." And when God knows what we're going through, we can find the courage to continue.

### **Brought Near through the Blood of the Cross**

The spirituality of the cross reminds us how we find our home as people of faith, as children of promise, as companions in the Blood of Christ in the broken heart of God. It is here where every suffering and every death; where every torture and every terror; where every pain and every passion of every human

being comes together at the same sacred place: in the broken heart of God.

We stand close together at the foot of the cross. This One who hangs from the wood of the cross draws us near. We stand at the cross and listen to the wisdom of the wood: we are not alone. Our suffering is united with the very suffering of God. Our pain is etched in the grains of this wood. Our death dares to be incorporated into the death of Jesus.

In coming together, in walking this way of the cross, in standing close to each other at the foot of the cross, we find a soul mate for our suffering; a companion for our journey to death; and savior for ourselves and our world.

***DISCUSSION STARTER***

What has the “book of the crucifix” taught you?

## - Formation -

### Study Chapter

# 5

## OUR PRECIOUS BLOOD FAMILY IN THE U.S.

*Founders and Foundresses share  
a spirituality of the Blood,  
calling us to be open to the new.*

### FATHER BRUNNER: Relevant for Today?

By Dominic Gerlach, C.P.P.S.,  
edited by Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.

*Fr. Francis de Sales Brunner became a member of the Society of the Precious Blood on September 27, 1838. He built up a community of CPPS in his native Switzerland. Five years later he would respond to an urgent request from Bishop John Purcell of Cincinnati, to minister to the German immigrants in his new state. Accompanied by seven priests and seven seminarians*

*and brothers Brunner voyaged to the United States arriving in Cincinnati in December of 1843. He established eight mission stations in northwestern Ohio and one in Indiana during the next fifteen years. Fr. Brunner was the founder of the American province, which now are the provinces of Cincinnati and Kansas City and also included the former Province of the Pacific.*

The Venerable John Merlini held Fr. Brunner in very high esteem.

He exhorted the American superiors immediately after Brunner's death to cultivate his memory by saving his writings and publishing his biography.

However, there was no immediate, unified enthusiasm for Brunner in the United States. His rule had irritated some members whose animosity continued after his death. The same iron will and single-minded passion that helped him establish the Precious Blood Congregation in this country against all odds were seen as obstinacy and wrong-headedness by his detractors. However, by the 1890's the atmosphere had changed and the



***Fr. Brunner's achievements may not have been as dramatic as Gaspar's, but they were parallel, equally solid, and certainly lasting.***

admirers of Brunner won out.

By the early 1900s, still very much under the influence of the late Fr. Brunner's rule, the Society was experiencing an era of rapid growth and recognition. The number of vocations to the Society grew, stimulated partly by the opening of Saint Joseph's College in 1891 and the expansion of St. Charles Seminary in Carthagena, Ohio, especially with the new building in 1922.

The beatification of Gaspar del Bufalo in 1904 aroused little excitement in the United States. But it was Brunner who continued to inspire the province during these years, which is reflected in the fact that as late as 1931 the new minor seminary at Canton, Ohio, was named Brunnerdale in honor of Brunner, not Gaspar. It was still Brunner who was perceived as having given the American Province the formula that made it prosper.

By the late 1940's and the early 1950's, a reversal had set in. Several reasons suggest themselves. At a time when literal conformity to canon law came into its own, Brunner's work was perceived as somewhat irregular. Also, at this time, a new, definitive historical study of Brunner was launched. It let the facts speak for themselves, unfortunately not in the context of Brunner's time, but in the context of the 1940's and 1950's. In the 1950's there were signs that we were going to become a fully canonical religious order, whether it fit our needs or not.

However, I would venture to say that there was a deeper reason for abandoning Brunner's cult, a reason that was all the stronger because it was subconscious. The American Province in its origins had been associated with poor, humble immigrants. It was from the same poor (either in Europe or later on in America) that the vocations to the Society were

drawn. Yet, as the descendants of immigrants approached the fulfillment of the American Dream, the C.P.P.S. kept close pace with them, until by the end of World War II they had together reached what we might call middle class affluence. Then the rigorous moral and pious traditions associated with Brunner began to feel uncomfortable. A Precious Blood priest who joined a country club could no longer imagine that Brunner was still smiling down on him from heaven.

I recall most vividly an experience that occurred in the early 1950's. I was sent out on a recruiting journey for Saint Joseph's College. Since this was a new venture for me, I asked a seasoned confrere how I might make the college attractive to a high school senior. He told me to be sure to stress the fact that with a college degree the graduate can expect to make \$300,000 more in his lifetime than a person who doesn't go to college. After having been nurtured on Brunner spirituality for twelve years, this shocked me!

Later on, I learned that recruitment propaganda for Brunnerdale had taken a similar direction, one that stressed the "middle class" advantages of the school in terms of varsity sports, swimming pool, superior academic standards and other benefits. In effect, Brunner was rapidly disappearing from

"Brunner"dale also.

All of this may lead us to ask if Fr. Brunner's influence is relevant for us today. If we limit our consideration to *externals*, such as the pious image of Brunner that looks down on visitors in the St. Charles Center corridor, his monastic inclinations, his time-conditioned governance and economizing, then my answer would be yes, Brunner is irrelevant. But in all fairness we must look beyond the externals to what was *basic* in Brunner's life. I have in mind specifically his apostolate to the humble, poor elements among the German Catholic population. His achievements may not have been as dramatic as Gaspar's were with the gangs of bandits, but they were parallel, equally solid, and certainly lasting. His deep religious convictions kept a struggling Society together in a mission territory with no material help from the home base in Rome. And he garnered many vocations — precisely from the kind of people he served. He was held in high regard among the poor and humble.

What then makes Brunner relevant for us today? There were first of all the solid, Gospel-inspired values of *prayer* (a conviction that life is God-dependent), *self-denial* (without which life is empty), and *community* (one can scarcely teach others community when one does not practice it himself).

These are perennial values, often listed as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving respectively. However, there was a fourth value that he exemplified, one that was Brunner's forte, one that demands our attention, and that is *adaptability*.

In 1839, Brunner had been sent by his Italian brethren to bring the Society to German-speaking Europe. However, to succeed, he had to adapt to circumstances. Because the political-ecclesiastical establishment there was stacked up against him he turned toward the apostolate to the poor, untutored classes, both men and women, who then supported themselves by labor and begging.

His great opportunity came, however, with Archbishop Purcell's invitation to come to Ohio. Here again, he was assigned to the poor in the remotest regions of the diocese. He served the immigrants in America, which invariably included the poorest of the poor, namely, the orphans. One memorable example of the latter was the future Bishop Joseph Dwenger. To accept religious vocations of poor youngsters and support them all the way through high school, college, and the seminary eventually became one of Brunner's most glorious traditions. Many Precious Blood priests can still remember and attest to the fact that what enabled them to become priests was this

generous policy of the Society.

To accomplish all this, Brunner had to make adaptations, not to the spirit of Gaspar's Rule, but to the letter. Specifically, in these new conditions Brunner departed from the letter of Gaspar's Rule by committing his men to work chiefly in the parochial ministry. (Gaspar never intended for his missionaries to be parish priests.) Establishing parishes was the need of the Church in Ohio, yet Brunner kept to Gaspar's spirit by insisting on the term "missionaries" and on residence in community. He also insisted on financial accountability to the Society and to a strong bond or promise of fidelity to the Society.

The term "adaptability" implies that we cannot expect to follow Brunner's example literally any more than Brunner followed Gaspar's example literally. The world keeps changing, and we, as missionaries, are flexible.

The poor are the ones to whom Jesus asked us to spread the Good News. They are now found largely in cities, people whose condition (or rejection) has led them into the pit of despair, with all the problems that follow: alienation, violence, drugs, unemployment, lack of education, AIDS, etc. These are really not all that much different from the problems Brunner met among the immigrants of his time. The common denominator is despair, the remedy for which is the

"Good News" with muscle in it.

What keeps clouding our vision is that we have come to view the world through middle-class glasses. The fields are indeed as ripe for the harvest as ever, and the workers will not be lacking because vocations will be drawn from the people served. No, Father Brunner is not at all irrelevant except in the eyes of those who want it so.

*(Fr. Dominic Gerlach, C.P.P.S., taught for many years and is now retired at Saint Joseph's College, Rensselaer, Ind.)*



**MARIA ANNA  
PROBST BRUNNER  
1764 - 1836  
Foundress of the Sister of  
the Precious Blood  
(Dayton C.P.P.S.)**

The Sisters of the Precious Blood were founded by a creative Swiss woman, Maria Anna Probst Brunner. She was a widowed mother of six. Maria Anna had a deep love for the Eucharist and for the poor, especially orphans.

In 1833, while in Rome with her son, Fr. Francis De Sales Brunner, Mother Brunner enrolled in the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. In the Church of St. Nicholas she listened to the preaching of Canon Gaspar del Bufalo. After her husband died and her children became independent, Maria Anna realized her life work was still not completed. At age 68 she experienced an unusual calling from God and dared to say yes. Women were attracted to her life of adoration of the Eucharist, reconciliation, simplicity, and outreach to the poor. These

women joined her in that total dedication to the Precious Blood.

Mother Brunner died in 1836, but she had begun a second family and the work of this family was to continue and spread. In 1844 several sisters came to America and from that beginning the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood has spread. The motherhouse is in Dayton, Ohio.

You can learn more about this congregation at its website, [www.bright.net/~cppsnews/](http://www.bright.net/~cppsnews/)



**ST. MARIA DE  
MATTIAS  
1805 - 1866  
Canonized in 2003  
Foundress of the Adorers of  
the Blood of Christ (ASC)**

“Happy will we be,” she wrote, “if we can give our lives and all our blood for the faith, in order to save even one person.”

*By Maureen Lahiff*

Maria de Mattias was born and baptized on February 4, 1805 in Vallecorsa, Italy. She was born into a period of constant political turmoil; since her family had property and wealth, it was not safe for Maria and her brothers to play outside. Though Maria was a lively and restless child, her life was boring. Her father did not think his daughters should be taught to read and write, yet Maria soon began devouring the family’s many spiritual books.

In Lent of 1822, a Precious Blood mission team came to Vallecorsa, led by Gaspar del Bufalo. For three weeks, the whole town was caught up in the drama of a Precious Blood mission. Gaspar’s preaching on the love of God, who sent his Son to pour out his Blood that all might be saved, touched Maria. She heard Gaspar’s invitation to imitate Jesus by giving our lives for our brothers and sisters as addressed directly to her.

In 1824, Giovanni Merlini preached the Lenten mission. Maria’s conversations with Merlini were the beginning of a relationship that lasted for the rest of her life. From the time he met her, Merlini wondered if Maria could be the person to found the community of women that would complete the work planned by Gaspar and Francesco Albertini during their exile.

Merlini put Maria in charge of the Daughters of Mary, the association for girls. Maria began to invite the young women of Vallecorsa into her home on Sunday afternoons for prayer and devotions. Sometimes Maria would speak from her heart as well as leading them in prayer and adoration. Soon, older women of the town began coming as well. Gaspar supported Merlini's work with Maria, and delegated him to be her spiritual director and mentor.

It was a long wait for companions and a suitable place to found a community and school. Finally, near the end of 1833, the place and conditions were right, in Acuto. Maria's plans for Acuto included far more than a school. Drawing on Albertini's writings, the Fundamental Articles, she envisioned a complete program of devotions, spiritual formation, and retreats, educating women and girls in the faith and its practice—a mission house for women directed by women. The school opened on March 4, 1834. The people of Acuto were enthusiastic and responsive.

What characterized the community from the beginning was its distinctive combination of adoration and apostleship. Gaspar commented that the lifestyle of the sisters should not be austere, because of their heavy apostolic work.

Word of what Maria was doing spread throughout the villages and towns of central Italy. Maria

made arduous journeys to visit the small communities scattered throughout the mountains. Many of these places had no resident priests, so instructions and devotions led by the sisters were the only regular source of spiritual life. Maria describes her visit to Vallerotonda in 1860: "giving instructions to the girls and married women; in the evening there are about a hundred, but on Sundays there are around three hundred, not counting the men who stand outside." Maria preached from balconies and standing on tables in town squares. In her letters to Merlini, Maria expressed doubts about speaking in public, but she also reported her satisfaction at the number of people seeking confession and communion in response.

In his letters, Merlini often urged Maria to take care of herself. Maria struggled against illness all her life. She suffered from asthma, and often succumbed to fevers. Even when she was physically exhausted, Maria was full of energy for the work and the travels it required. The rapid growth of the community, the scarcity of resources, and the press of the people's needs often resulted in friction and disputes that Maria had to resolve.

When Maria died on August 20, 1866, in Rome, she was 61 years old. The community had over fifty schools in Italy, and had spread to Austria, Germany and

England. Maria was declared blessed on October 1, 1950 by Pope Pius XII, and was canonized on May 18, 2003 by Pope John Paul II. Her feast is celebrated on the day of her birth and baptism, February 4.

Eventually the Sisters Adorers of the Blood of Christ (A.S.C.) were established in the U.S. They have welcomed lay associates to share in their spirituality and ministries. You can learn more about their Community on their website, <http://www.adorers.org/>

## **Maria's Legacy To Us**

Maria implemented Albertini's vision of the universal call to holiness and mission. She was highly creative, adapting the Church calendar and the devotions of the people in practical ways, fostering the spiritual life of busy people. Maria saw women's potential for being active agents of evangelization, salt, light, and leaven in their homes. Maria saw that the call to adoration and mission was extended to all. This was concretely expressed by inviting lay auxiliaries to adore and pray alongside the sisters. Her vision of church and the participation of the laity anticipate Vatican II; indeed, we might say that Albertini, Gaspar, and Maria helped fashion a church capable of conceiving what was born at Vatican II.

Maria's devotion to the blood of

Christ, in an era when she could not receive the Precious Blood, calls those of us who have the privilege of sharing in the cup to a deeper appreciation of our communion in the Blood of Christ.

*Maureen Lahiff is a Companion of Alameda, Calif.*



**MOTHER THERESA  
WEBER  
1822-1848  
Foundress of the Sisters of  
the Most Precious Blood,  
of O'Fallon, Mo.**

The congregation began in 1845 in Steinerberg, Switzerland, when a small group of young women joined together to live a life of prayer and sacrifice. Mother Theresa Weber was elected superior. With a strong and active devotion to the Precious Blood of Jesus, the first sisters worshipped before the Blessed Sacrament and prayed for the reparation of sins through the power of Christ's redeeming Blood. Immediate needs led them also to the field of

education and soon afterwards to the making of church vestments.

God guided the sisters from Switzerland to the French Alsace, then to Germany and finally to the United States in 1870. Their motherhouse was established in O'Fallon, Mo., in 1875. Since then the missionary efforts of the sisters have returned to Europe and carried them to South America.

The congregation's mission is being carried out in partnership with lay men and women associates, called Partners.

You can learn more about the sisters at their website, [www.cpps-ofallon.org](http://www.cpps-ofallon.org)

## ***DISCUSSION STARTER***

Do you see a common thread in the life of St. Gaspar, Fr. Brunner, St. Maria de Matthias, Mother Brunner and Theresa Weber?

## - Formation -

### Study Chapter

# 6

## FROM GENESIS TO REVELATIONS: A SPIRITUALITY OF COVENANT

By Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.

Companionship in the Congregation of the Precious Blood is about making covenant. In this chapter we will explore the nature of our covenantal relationship with God and with one another by reflecting on the covenant God made with our ancestors in faith as it is expressed in the Hebrew and Christian Testaments. We will trace some of the key moments and rituals that reflect our understanding of covenant that was initiated by God; broken by infidelity; reclaimed through the voices of the prophets; and made new, signed, sealed and delivered in the Blood of Christ.

### Early Signs of the Covenant

In the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, God says, "It is not good for the human to be alone." So God decides to live in each one of us and in all of creation, thereby insuring an experience of community for as long as God lives. God's breath in the form of a mighty wind separated the land from the sea. God's breath in the form of a gentle kiss brought life to the human. The story says we carry within us the very spirit of God. We are God's beloved from the beginning of creation.

But we know what happens next. The time of transition begins when Adam and Eve are not content with who they are in relationship with God; they want

to be God. Because of their breach of covenant, they are escorted to a new home outside the garden of Eden. We've been trying to make our way back to Eden ever since.

Certain mile markers in journey back to the Garden of Eden are worth noting. For example, the story of Noah and his crew of ancient mariners is the first evidence of the covenant God makes with the people. The sign of the covenant is seen in a rainbow creasing the stormy sky. I promise, God says, I will never seek to destroy the earth again. The covenant is signed and tied with a bow.

Later, God chooses Abraham and Sarah, the couple with no children and seemingly no future, to reconnect with a community of believers. With Abraham and Sarah, God once again writes the divine signature reflecting the promise of the covenant in the sky, this time in the stars. But God also authorized the writing of the covenant on the body. Circumcision became a sign of the covenantal relationship with God. Abraham's story suggests that God's covenant is so personal and intimate, it is engraved on one's body. (As we know, this ritual expression of the covenant became a source of conflict much later after Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant and then ascended into heaven. The early Christian community got into the famous family feud regarding whether or

not the new converts had to be circumcised.)

After a series of breakdowns on the part of the people in living the covenant that God made with Abraham and Sarah, and break-ups in the covenantal relationship that must have caused God a few sleepless nights and more than a few heavy sighs, God hears the screams of a certain group of slaves and decides it's time to try again. This time God chooses a shepherd with a charismatic personality, a hot temper, and latent leadership skills. Moses will lead the people out of Egypt on a desert sojourn toward a promised land.

The Exodus stories give us a new way in which God signs the covenant with the people. In both the Passover story when the homes of the chosen ones were marked with the blood of lambs to signify their special relationship with God; and later, in the messy ritual of Moses sprinkling half of the blood of slaughtered animals on the altar and sprinkling the people with the other half, the covenant is now signed in blood. Because blood is the life force within us, this symbol becomes for the people the sign of their freedom from their oppressors and the favor they enjoy in God's eyes. They are God's people; they share the bloodlines that make them a new family of faith.

Because these two stories from Exodus are so central to our

understanding of covenant in the context of Precious Blood spirituality, we pause our journey back to Eden by remembering these stories in more detail.

### **A Passover Ritual and A Sprinkling Rite**

In the story of the Passover from Exodus, God advises Moses to tell the people to observe this ritual as a "perpetual ordinance" (Exodus 12:14). This story of the first Passover shapes and sustains our understanding of Precious Blood spirituality. The Israelites are huddled in their houses. The space is crowded with family and friends who have been told not to spend this night alone. In this crowded space, standing shoulder to shoulder, our ancestors in faith make it through this night of danger and destruction because of the blood that stains the doorposts of their houses. This blood becomes the sign of their deliverance from the death and destruction that whirls about their houses that night. This blood becomes the symbol of their liberation to live God's new dream and new identity for them. They are no longer slaves in a strange land, but pilgrims who would soon be on the move to a promised land. But in their moving, God advises them, do not forget this night. Do not forget this story. That is why they are to celebrate this ritual as a "perpetual ordinance."

In the second story from Exodus,

we read: "Moses took half of the blood and put it in large bowls." (Exodus 24:6). These are the containers that hold the blood of the covenant. In this remarkable ritual, Moses takes half the blood and splashes it on the altar. Then, after the people have heard the Word of God and reply, "All that God has said we will heed and do," Moses sprinkles the people with the blood from the bowls. This sprinkling rite seals the covenant which God has made with the people.

This is the blood that stains the people with an identity: they are God's people. These large bowls of blood hold the sign of life, the symbol of relationship. In the action of the ritual, the people are invited to believe that they are now in a unique and holy relationship with their Creator, a relationship sealed by a sacred bond that is stronger than death. Now they are God's special people and are to live in a new way because of the love God has shared with them. The people themselves become the containers of God's compassion; the vessels which hold this life force captured in this "blood of the covenant."

But this unique and intimate relationship with God becomes too much for the people. The desert is too much for them. Even freedom becomes too much for them. On their long trek across the desert, they begin to lose hope and lose touch with God. This should not surprise us. When the

people are out in the desert, there is no place to hide. Since there is no security, they have to rely completely on God. They complain to Moses that even though they were in slavery in Egypt, at least they had enough to eat. Again, this is a natural reaction since to be freed from slavery is frightening. They had become familiar with what to expect as an oppressed people. Now this sense of freedom they are experiencing is something completely new. They have to become entirely new people!

Again they complain to Moses. Moses meets with God to discern the next step in this evolving relationship. At times, God gets frustrated and threatens to destroy these complaining nomadic children. But Moses intervenes and convinces God to give them just a little more time. After all, what would God look like in the eyes of the Egyptians if God led the people out of slavery with signs and wonders only to destroy them in the desert? God's reputation is at stake here. So God gives in to Moses and puts the covenant down in writing, on tablets, etched in stone, "written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18).

## **Prophets: The New Covenant**

After the people reach the promised land and settle down for

awhile, their "favored nation status" becomes too much for them. They want to be like all the other nations. They want a king. They want a temple instead of a tent in which to worship their God. Again they are forsaking the covenant which is based on the principle that God alone is their ruler. But once again God gives in to their demands.

In wanting to be like all the other nations; in denying their special place in God's heart, they lose sight of the original vision of the covenant. They lose their land and become exiles once again. In their most dire and desperate predicament, the prophets come along to call the people back to covenantal relationship.

What is important for us to remember here is that prophets don't *create* community so much as *remember* community by remembering the covenant. Prophets seek to transform the community to which they belong by drawing upon ancient sources, stories, and symbols that recapture for the people their unique relationship with God.

One of these prophets, Jeremiah, introduces the concept of the new covenant that is no longer written on tablets or carved in stone but is now etched upon the heart of the people [Jeremiah 31]. But the newness of this covenant is actually imbedded in the very old idea outlined in Deuteronomy,

chapter 6, when Moses outlines the first covenant to the people. Namely, "you shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart" (verse 5).

That passage from Deuteronomy which Jeremiah resurrects refreshes the peoples' memory. The words of the covenant are to be taught to the children; are to be talked about in the homes; are to be the subject of conversation as they walk along the way; are to be the first words they think about when they get up in the morning and the last words they remember as they go to sleep at night. "And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand; and you shall write them on the doorpost of your house and on your gates" (Deut. 6:8-9). Again, the implication of this passage is that the covenantal relationship between God and the people is so personal, so intimate, that the words of the covenant are written on the palms of their hands, splashed on their front porches and the gates of their homes.

Jeremiah traces the divine initiative and inspiration of the Mosaic covenant that God chooses a particular people to be God's very own. The prophet reminds the people that this covenant must now be written not *on* the body but *in* the body: on one's heart.

## **The Spacious Vision: A New Covenant in the Blood of Christ**

Jesus takes this notion of the new covenant that is written upon one's heart and draws upon the symbolism of the story about the blood of lambs splashed on porches to identify himself as the Lamb of God whose blood ushers in a new age of relationship with God. He remembers and reverences the story of the first covenant even as he creates this new covenant that is signed in his own blood.

The spaciousness of this covenant is reflected in the story of Jesus' own Passover. On that day before he died, Jesus advises his disciples to go into town to prepare a place for the Passover meal they would celebrate that night. The disciples are shown an "upstairs room, spacious, furnished, and all in order." Notice, that this room is "spacious." Unlike the crowded houses of the Israelites on the first night of Passover, Jesus would celebrate his Passover in a spacious room, furnished, and all in order. Even as the chaos of his own death and destruction is lurking in the shadows of that very night, Jesus finds a room that is spacious. Jesus, the high priest, enters this spacious sanctuary not with the kind of blood his ancestors used to sprinkle the doorpost of their crowded houses,

but with his own blood.

How spacious is this room? Consider the fact that Jesus enters this sanctuary where a new covenant is born, a new creation is conceived, in the company of his friends, one of whom would betray him, another of whom would later that night deny even knowing him. Like his ancestors, this Blood of Christ will become the means of deliverance from all that seeks to destroy humanity. Whatever sin seeks to keep people apart, whatever betrayals and denials threaten to constrict peoples' hearts, the Blood of Christ becomes the means of liberation to live God's new dreams.

The spirituality of covenant in the Blood of Christ offers a spacious vision where all are welcome, where all find a place at the table, where all find room to breathe, to move, and to be truly human and holy. As Companions in the Blood of Christ, we seek to create a community that resembles that upper room where Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples. We fill this house with rituals that celebrate our identity as blood brothers and sisters: we break bread, pour wine, wash feet, dream peace. This house of the new covenant is furnished with forgiveness for those who may betray or deny us and our dreams, or are fearful of

trusting in God's dream for them. In this spacious, inclusive house, there is room for all.

The spaciousness of this sacred challenge is summed up by Jesus in his new commandment: "This I command you, to love one another" (John 15:17). Our relationship with God, our friendship with Jesus, and our companionship with one another is grounded in this commandment to be inclusive: to love one another. This simple command reflects the biblical notion of covenant. It is at the center of our understanding of what it means to be Companions of the Precious Blood.

## **An Inclusive Community: God Shows No Partiality**

Precious Blood spirituality is about becoming new — new community, new covenant, new creation. The primary symptom of the Spirit who makes all things new is that a people of faith pays attention to those who are outside the boundaries of community life.

The spirituality of covenant in the Blood of Christ is inclusive: we are to be an inclusive community of memory and hope. We are open to all peoples, all faith traditions, all ways of life, orientations, political and ecclesial views, and economic circumstances. Through the resurrection of Jesus,

the world was given a new lease on life. This new life, this new covenant, is characterized especially by concern for those who are outside the walls of our “uncommon” life.

One of the primary stories in Scriptures that reflects this experience is the story of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11,18). The conversion of Cornelius signals the beginning of a new era. Cornelius is at prayer when he receives a vision. He instructs two of his servants to go to Peter who is staying with Simon the tanner. By profession, Simon was considered an outcast. Already, then, the inclusivity of the new covenant is seen in Peter as he follows what Jesus would have done: stayed at the home of an outcast.

As the story unfolds, Peter is praying on the roof of the house. His stomach growling with hunger, Peter receives a vision of something like a picnic blanket descending from heaven that is filled with all kinds of non-kosher food. Because of his religious beliefs, Peter says he will not eat this “common” food. But he hears a voice that says, “What God has cleansed, you must not call common.” The Scripture says that Peter was “inwardly perplexed as to what the vision which he had seen might mean.”

Later, when Peter arrives at the home of Cornelius, he says, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to

visit any one of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any one common or unclean.” This is a major breakthrough in Peter’s thinking. He moves from the precepts of the law to the person, focusing his attention on Cornelius and the people who have gathered in his home.

Cornelius shares his vision with Peter as to why he sent for him. And then Peter says, “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God.” Then Peter goes on to tell the story of Jesus and while he was speaking, “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.”

This is the vision that guides the Companion process in the Congregation of the Precious Blood: “God shows no partiality.” To paraphrase something that Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote by placing it in the context of our companionship in the Blood of Christ, we might say that “to be a Companion does not mean following a certain set of rules but to be the person that the Blood of Christ creates in us.”

By making covenant with the Congregation, we acknowledge and affirm the person that the

Blood of Christ is creating within us. By living this covenant that is signed, sealed, and delivered in the Blood of Christ, we call others to the inclusive and expansive covenant of relationship that is found in the Blood of Christ.

As people who have washed our robes, our hopes, our dreams in the blood of the Lamb, we embrace this image of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world — all that seeks to divide us or keep us separate from one another. Jesus, who spent his life looking for and searching out those who were lost, so identifies with the lost sheep of the flock that he becomes the lamb. He is the lamb led to the slaughter. He is the lamb silent before his shearers. The final stage of our journey back to Eden occurs in the book of Revelations when Jesus is seen as the lamb of God who sits in judgment as peoples of all tribes and nations, races and creeds, orientations and ways of life, come before the lamb who was slain. Here in this place, in this holy city without walls or limits, everyone finds a place at the table, a place to call home.

## ***DISCUSSION STARTER***

Fr. Joe Nassal writes, “The spirituality of covenant in the Blood of Christ is inclusive: we are to be an inclusive community of memory and hope. We are open to all peoples, all faith traditions, all ways of life, orientations, political and ecclesial views, and economic circumstances. ... especially ... those who are outside the walls.” Tell of times when you have found it difficult to be inclusive, when you have found the Precious Blood invitation to care for all very difficult to live out. Tell of times when Precious Blood spirituality has helped us see others with new eyes, and accept them in our circle, and ways that this has enriched us all.

## - Formation -

### Study Chapter

# 7

## IS THERE A PRECIOUS BLOOD WAY TO PRAY?

Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.

As the disciples approached Jesus asking him to teach them how to pray, I was wondering if there is a Precious Blood way to pray? What spiritual exercises might we consider to stretch our hearts to be more inclusive? Beyond particular prayers — as we know from the Gospel, Jesus didn't teach the disciples a prayer so much as an attitude, a way to pray — how might people who claim the spirituality of the blood of Christ pray?

I offer a few tentative reflections based on three major images of Precious Blood spirituality: covenant, cross, and chalice.

### COVENANT PRAYER

Since Precious Blood spirituality reflects the new covenant written upon our hearts in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we might consider a symbol of covenant as an ever-expanding sacred circle. In silence, we close our eyes and open our hearts. We picture first those who are closest to us — family members, friends, community members, Companions — who form our most intimate circle of friends. As we picture each face as slides projected on a blank wall, we hold the picture in our soul's eyes for just a moment before moving on to the next one.

Next, picture those we find easy to like but with whom we have no

particular depth of relationship. Here again are some Community members, neighbors, coworkers, acquaintances whose company we enjoy but with whom we would not share the deepest secrets of our hearts. Hold these faces in memory as they flash upon the soul's screen. Remember especially those who you are aware are in need of some special grace from God because of illness, loss, transition, tragedy, or suffering of any sort. Remember also in a spirit of gratitude particular blessings received: the joy of new birth, new job, new home, new love.

As the circle of the covenant prayer grows larger, include all those in our place of ministry, or in the neighborhood, or place of employment. If you drive to work, follow the route you take and include all you pass along the way. Now, as the circle grows larger, include all in the city where you live. Allow the circle to stretch even more as you include all in the state, in the country, in the world, and beyond. And in this great beyond, slow down the slides that flash in your soul's screen to hold the faces of those who have died and are now as stars shining in the night sky.

But this covenant prayer is not quite complete. The circle has grown so large that one can no longer detect any boundaries. But just to be sure, remember those you find most difficult to love. Picture in this circle of covenant

those who have broken promises with you; those who have betrayed you. Hold them there as long as you can. As tempting as it is to skip past these faces quickly, hold them close and sense how the circle is so large you can no longer grasp any edges. If one or two are clinging by a thread to the edge of your circle, lend a hand to bring them closer to the center. Granted, they may never be part of your inner sacred circle. The important thing is don't leave them outside. For if we do, the covenant will so shrink as to make it impossible to pray.

## BLOOD OF THE CROSS PRAYER

The second major symbol of our spirituality is the cross. Specifically, how the blood of the cross has redeemed us, reconciled us, brought us near to one another. Here, the meditation focuses on the suffering of our own lives and uniting our sufferings with those of Christ. In our prayer, we image ourselves standing at the foot of the cross. Like Mary, Woman of the New Covenant, we find the courage to trace our own scars and sense we are not alone.

The intimacy of this prayer is found in the ritual we celebrate on Good Friday: the veneration of the cross. We kiss the cross. In this holy kiss, we unite all that we are with the One who knows our pain. But more than personal or private devotion or a practice of

piety, this prayer also unites us with the suffering ones of our planet. We place here at the foot of the cross those intentions, those people, those places in our world today where violence reigns, where death is epidemic, where chaos becomes the order of the day.

The prayer of the blood of the cross is a prayer of solidarity. We stand with those who like Jesus are experiencing their own crucifixion. We can stand there because we remember our own experiences of crucifixion. We plead on behalf of those who are dying or in dangerous situations.

When we pray before the cross, we come to know that the answer to our prayer is found in our unwavering belief that we are not alone.

## CHALICE PRAYER

Finally, the prayer of the chalice gives us a visual reminder of how our very human lives mingle with the very holiness of God. Again, we image placing in this cup all that we are or all that we hope to be. We fill the chalice with choice, red wine. We see this wine as the fruit of our labors and our love. It is the cup of suffering but also the cup of blessing. Place in the cup our friends, our memories of joy, our hope for the future.

As we do, we say simply:  
*“Blood of Jesus, refresh me”;*  
*“Blood of Jesus, redeem me”;*

*“Blood of Jesus, remind me”;*  
*“Blood of Jesus, reconcile me”;*  
*“Blood of Jesus, inebriate me”*

It doesn't matter so much what words we say as we look into the cup. Choose a phrase that most adequately reflects what you are experiencing in your heart as you begin your time of prayer. Say it slowly, reflectively. Say it over and over, until you no longer are thinking about the words. Personally, I like that last one: **Blood of Christ, inebriate me.** This mantra reminds me that we are to be intoxicated with the Blood of Christ; drunk with the dream of eternity.

When we come to the end of our time of prayer, drink deeply of the love God has for us. And then pass the cup of blessing around.

As Precious Blood people, may we always include in our prayer our deep yearning for reconciliation among all peoples and a deep desire for our ongoing renewal in the blood of Christ.

## RECONCILIATION PRAYER

Reconciliation lies at the very heart of the spirituality of the blood (Col 1:19-20). Fr. Barry Fischer asks us to think of reconciliation as “bringing people and things into their proper relationships.” We might think of reconciliation in this sense on several levels:

- *personal*, in which we are put into proper relation with God;
- *communal*, in which we reestablish the proper relationship with one another;
- *social*, in which we develop the proper relationship among peoples, races, societies;
- *environmental*, by returning to a respectful and proper relationship with our mother earth.”

A prayer of reconciliation reflecting on Colossians 1:19-24:

Loving God, call me to that peace which comes only through the Blood of the cross.

In the Blood of Christ alone we are reconciled.

In the Blood of Christ all who once were alienated you have now made whole.

In the Blood of Christ all who once were hostile in mind because of evil deeds you have now appeased.

In the Blood of Christ you were pleased to win over to yourself all things on earth or in heaven.

In the Blood of Christ we are presented holy, without blemish, and irreproachable before you.

In the Blood of Christ we are able to persevere in the faith, firmly grounded and stable.

In the Blood of Christ we do not stray from the hope of the gospel that we heard.

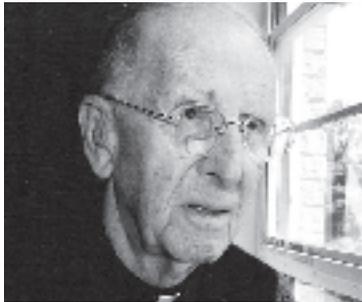
we preach good news to every creature under heaven as ministers of reconciliation.

In the Blood of Christ we now rejoice in our sufferings for the sake of our brothers and sisters. In the Blood of Christ we are filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church.

In and through the blood of Christ we...

*continue to reflect and pray with 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, Ephesians 2:13-16, Romans 5:8-11, and 1 Peter 1:18-19.*

## OUR LIFE IS A PRAYER



As Fr. Harold Diller, C.P.P.S., neared the end of his long life, he was earthbound. An active, happy priest for most of his more than 90 years, in his later years he needed a nap after to give him strength for the end of the day. His eyesight faded and he relied on friends to guide him wherever he walked.

All of these things he accepted with good grace. Being earthbound is part of the human condition. Fr. Diller learned that. But he has also learned that throughout his circumscribed day, his mind and his heart could still soar.

Throughout his life as a priest, he served as a pastor, a teacher, an activist, an administrator, a chaplain and always a missionary, and he tried to adapt to each role with a thankful heart. He was a great and constant friend of the lay associate movement. Retired in his final years at St. Charles Center in Carthage, Ohio, he found himself in one of his most challenging roles: as a person who prays. The holy man was in

constant pursuit of more perfect prayer, and it required, he said, two things above all others: trust and surrender.

“I ask people, ‘Do you know what love is?’ We must be lifted above the sacrilege of calling love anything other than complete surrender and trust. You tell Jesus, ‘I want that kind of relationship with you.’ If you say it to Jesus often enough, your prayer becomes the kind of prayer that John wrote about when he said, ‘Love is of God.’” Steadfast and soaring love was a theme of Fr. Diller’s because he saw it as the cornerstone of all creation.

“God’s being creator doesn’t mean almighty power. It means the ultimate love,” he said. “God created us and stepped back to let us be humans while knowing that we could say no to God. And that’s why I say being creator didn’t take power. It took love.” Love is one thing people can give back to their creator, he said. “Love isn’t a feeling, it’s a decision.”

True love casts out fear, he said; before humans can be free to pray openly and expansively, they must free themselves from the withering force of fear. “We shouldn’t be afraid of anything. And yet, fear is built into us we can’t get rid of it. But you can make it leave when you say to Jesus, ‘I love you.’ Then you are letting the power and energy of Jesus grow in you,” he said.

“Every angel who appeared to a prophet, every angel who appeared to the shepherds, said, ‘Don’t be afraid.’ And remember, when Jesus was awakened in the boat in the midst of the storm, because the men were very afraid. He quieted the storm. And he said to them, ‘Fear is useless. What is needed is trust.’”

“To dispel fear, we must tell Jesus so frequently, so intimately, so trustingly, ‘I want to love you so much, you will live in me. Live in me so much I can’t help myself. I am going to respond to your love like the birds and the flowers, by the energy you put in me by choosing me to feel your intangible presence.’”

“I dreaded retirement. To retire meant to die, I thought. But once I came here and started to live it, I found that St. Gaspar was right when he wrote the most important quality is humility. St. Gaspar believed that humility is the quality which will show you how to deal successfully with the undirected longings of human nature.”

In his years of retirement, Fr. Diller spent his hours contemplating, leading others in prayer, striving for that perfect communion and union with his creator.

“This is my work now,” he said in 2002, just a year before he died. “When we begin to see ourselves as God had in mind for our being

— that our being who we are, aware of the source of our being, and the Jesus who lives in us, then our life is a prayer, because then we show that by our actions we are constantly aware of the fact of that revealing love. That is the reason God had for letting us be: all creation, stars, birds, flowers, each one reveals God's love.”

### ***DISCUSSION STARTER***

Write a prayer or a poem, or in another way create your own expression of one of the Precious Blood themes of cross, cup, covenant, or reconciliation; and share it with the group.

- Formation -

Study Chapter



THE COVENANT  
RELATIONSHIP:  
REFLECTIONS ON  
ASSOCIATE  
COMMITMENT

Commitment - to be responsible for; to entrust; consign; to place officially in custody or confinement; to pledge oneself to a position. Commitment is something with which contemporary Americans are not always comfortable - it's confining, limiting. We like to keep our options open, or at least have our eye on an escape route. Americans don't like to be stuck, to feel boxed in.

Yet commitment is at the very heart of the life of a lay associate. Nearly every religious community with associates requires them to make a commitment, covenant, or contract after an initial period of discernment (for Companions a two-year period of formation). Associates of the Sisters of Bon Secours make a promise to that community for two years. The Benedictine Associates of St. Walberg's Monastery pledge to "seek God through daily conversion, openness, and obedience to the creative changes which the Holy Spirit calls forth" in their one-year covenants. Associates of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word write individual covenants, as do Companions. The Associates of the Sisters of

Charity of New York write individual contracts for commitment. While they are usually three years in length, the associates can ask for longer or shorter times of commitment.

Time-Limited  
Commitment

What sorts of things have you committed yourself to in life? A spouse? A child? A job? A degree program? The PTA? An exercise program? Buying a house?

We are promising  
fidelity to the voice  
of the blood which  
is calling us.  
Fr. Barry Fischer, CPPS

Some commitments are very serious; some, like the commitment to exercise, may last for some people only until the first rainy day. It is the nature of some commitments that you don't un-commit. When you commit to having a child, you make a commitment for life.

Some commitments are time limited, like the commitment to be president of the PTA, or to exercise until we reach a certain goal weight.

Associate commitment is time-limited because people's life circumstances change.

Associate commitment is a commitment to live a certain way

of life –

- oriented to God
- giving witness to Gospel values
- in collaboration with a particular religious congregation.

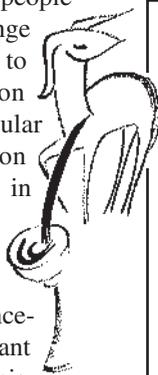
It seems that when an associate reaches the point of wanting to make a commitment as an associate, it is likely to reveal an orientation to life that is not likely to change. It is unlikely that a person who lives life oriented to God and giving witness to Gospel values is one day going to reverse that. But it happens that people move, get married, or change jobs, and are no longer able to collaborate in the mission and ministry of a particular religious congregation because of great changes in one's primary obligations.

Some Companions have asked if they can make a once-and-for-all lifetime covenant with the Community. At this time there is no provision for such a relationship. Re-examining one's relationship with the Community and recommitting oneself with a renewed covenant is a good exercise in spiritual growth.

## Mutuality

The relationship between Companions and the Community is mutual. During a covenant rite, Companions make a pledge to commit themselves to the Community, and the Community returns the pledge. At each

covenant rite, a member of the Community is present to accept the covenants (the provincial director, a member of his leadership team, or an officially designated representative of the province) to signify that the relationship is between the Companion and the Community, not just among Companions. During this rite, Companions and Community members express their willingness to support each other, and to travel together on their faith journeys.



The COVENANT is a written statement of one's pledge or commitment about:

- a) one's area of ministry or mission
- b) one's spiritual life and growth in spirituality
- c) one's community life in relationship with the congregation and Companions.

The commitment to be a Companion involves a commitment to live prayerfully, and to consciously apply the spirituality of the Precious Blood to our everyday words and actions. With our family members, at work and out in the world, our Precious Blood sensibilities come with us, and we bring to the world the vision of

reconciliation that pours out of the Community to which we have pledged ourselves.

## THE COVENANT FOR PRECIOUS BLOOD COMPANIONS

Each Companion puts in writing a commitment, which is a personal pledge or promise. This written statement, presented individually to the provincial director or his representative, is shared with others only if the Companion so chooses. It is presented during the Covenant Rite, a public ceremony, as a dedication of one's life; however, it is only morally binding. Companions normally present their covenants during their province's assembly. First covenants are made for a one-year term. Covenant renewals are made for a three-year period.

The covenant includes the intention for fulfilling one's ministry, for continuing to deepen one's spiritual life and for strengthening one's ties with other Companions and with the incorporated members of the congregation. In this covenantal relationship Companions are assured of the fidelity and care of the congregation in the mutual bond of charity.

May the Holy Spirit, author and mover of this Companion process, lead you in our present discernment with creative powers enabling you to participate in the

new things that Lord is doing among God's people. For our God and Savior has saved us through the baptism of new birth in the blood of Christ and renewal by the holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

## Writing a Covenant

"Our common life and spirituality give direction to our apostolate," says Fr. Mark Miller, C.P.P.S., paraphrasing Gaspar, "and our apostolate gives reflective material to bring back to our spirituality and common life." It is your ministry that will give direction for writing your covenant; and living your covenant will lead you back to prayer. "The responsibility of a missionary is great," Gaspar reminds us, "and hence it requires sanctity and knowledge."

## A Quick Review

Before going any farther it would be good to do a quick review of the study chapters by revisiting your responses to the *discussion starters*. What notes have you written? What have you highlighted or underlined in this booklet? Your responses are material for beginning to formulate your covenant as expressions of things that matter to you. To quote Emerson: "What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us."

For example, did you resonate with Fr. Joe Nassal's: "to be a

Companion does not mean following a certain set of rules but to be the person that the blood of Christ creates in us." Our "rules" come from deep within ourselves; our "commitments" come from our firm convictions.

## Writing a Covenant

Sit down with pen in hand and start writing notes as you read below. Once you get started you will find it easier to overcome the "writer's block" that is a common experience for all who try to write a covenant. Some of the questions and suggestions below may not be for you. Just respond to what resonates with you.

### 1. In your covenant mention your ministry:

*review study chapters 1 and 3 and the fourth deliberation...*

- Looking back at "Reading Between the Lines," where do you put yourself?
- How is your ministry as an expression of the province's mission statement?
- Do you see your ministry in your parish or community as your response to the cry of the blood?
- In what way do you relate to those "outside the walls"?

### 2. In your covenant explain how you hope to develop your growth in spirituality:

*review chapters 2, 4, and 6 and the second and third deliberations...*

- How do you face the question in

chapter 2: "Can you drink this cup?"

- Maybe the "book of the crucifix" (chapter 4) has set you on a new path toward deeper commitment on your spiritual journey.
- How might inclusivity be included in your covenant?
- Though your ministry may seem "ordinary" can you believe it is "transforming"?
- How does "missionary" describe who you are?
- Where are you in your relationship with God?

### 3. In your covenant acknowledge your relationship with the incorporated members:

*review chapter 5 and the first deliberation...*

- Are you praying in a Precious Blood manner ...and for the C.P.P.S. and Companions?
- Tell how you see your association or even collaboration with the C.P.P.S. as part of your commitment.
- Are you living in "faithful creativity" to the Precious Blood charism?
- Where are you in your relationship with the C.P.P.S. and other Companions?

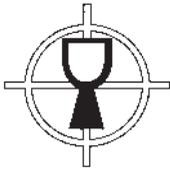
After you have written your covenant, you are invited to share it with your sponsor, your convener or others in your group if you choose.

## COVENANT FORM

You will receive a form from your sponsor or convener for the final draft of your covenant. Please use the form provided and, if possible, type your covenant. Using the form:

- print your name on the top line
- check the correct box for one year for first covenant
- fill in your covenant statement
- sign your name at the bottom.

Later, after the ceremony, your Provincial will sign and date your covenant, keep a photocopy in the Provincial Office and return the original to you.



### **Companion Insignia**

Companions receive an insignia when making first covenant. It images a cross, a cup, and a circle which symbolizes covenant.

## ***DISCUSSION STARTER***

How has the process of writing your covenant helped you define your relationship with this Community?

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## COMPANIONSHIP

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COMPANIONSHIP begins with the Covenant Rite (*celebrated during a Provincial Assembly when possible*).

COMPANIONSHIP includes

- on-going formation
- continuing in active ministry
- taking part in an annual retreat or day of reflection
- and sharing in as many Companion gatherings and provincial events as possible given one's state in life.

COMPANIONSHIP is grounded in Jesus' commandment to be inclusive: "This I command you, to love one another" (John 15:17). This simple command is at the center of our understanding of what it means to be Companions of the Precious Blood.

After first covenant all Companions are equally part of the same group unless they decide to form more than one group. Each group is required to have its own convener and sponsor.

Covenant renewals after the first one-year covenant are for three-year periods.



