



# The New Wine Press

*Motivated by the Spirituality of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ*

Volume 23 No. 4  
December 2013



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## Living Inside Our Hope

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

The Advent into Christmas season comes along each year to remind us that we are people of hope. No matter what kind of year it has been, no matter how much darkness or despair has smothered the light and hope of last year's expectations, this year's season of incarnation invites us to hope again.

So, what do we hope for? "Here's what I've decided," Barbara Kingsolver writes in her novel, *Animal Dreams*, "the very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live in it, under its roof." This is often the problem with what we hope for: we name it, admire it from a distance, maybe even find the courage to move in with it for a time, but then life happens—a tragic loss of a loved one, a terrorist bombing, a dream deferred, a door slams in our face, a friend betrays—and we forget that we were moving in with hope to live under her roof.

One of the adventurers of hope that this season moves to center stage—even if he would prefer to stay on the sidelines—is John the Baptist. He identified what he hoped for early on and lived inside that hope in the great outdoors of the desert for the rest of his life. When people came to ask him his identity, he defined himself with his hope: "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, *continued on next page*



“Make straight the way of the Lord” (John 1: 23). John’s hope is found in “the One who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am unworthy to untie” (John 1: 27).

Our hope is rooted in the same source: a God whose hope in human beings and in the earth itself is so large that the Divine One is willing to become small: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, God is with us” (Matthew 1: 23). In Jesus, we sense how God still hopes in us. Now, we are challenged to live inside this same hope as we envision our future as people claimed by his precious blood.

At the XX General Assembly in Rome in July, the delegates discerned a vision for the future of the Congregation as we prepare to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our founding in 2015. In its vision statement, the Assembly underscored how we are “rooted in the Spirituality of the Precious Blood and the Ministry of the Word,” and therefore “our mission is to be a prophetic witness for the renewal of the Church and the transformation of world.” Specifically, in its “provocative

proposition for living our mission,” the Assembly said:

Energized by the vision of the Second Vatican Council and Catholic Social Teaching, we beckon all the baptized to unite with us in living the universal call to holiness and mission. In creative fidelity to our founder, St. Gaspar, we offer the Spirituality of the Precious Blood for the renewal of the Church, especially the clergy and other ministers.

Among the action steps for implementing the vision for mission, the XX General Assembly challenged each unit to “develop and begin to implement a plan for reaching out and offering spiritual, human, and ministerial renewal to the local clergy and the local church within their given context.”

We have begun implementing this vision at Precious Blood Center in Liberty as we have offered and hosted private and small group retreats and opportunities for renewal and reconciliation, including listening and healing circles for clergy and lay ministers in the diocese. But we have had to turn down several requests for larger groups because our space is limited.

So in this season when we celebrate the story of the savior who was born “in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2: 7), the Provincial Council proposes how we as a province might live inside the hope of this season as we seek to incarnate the vision of the XX General Assembly. We would like to explore the possibility of building a larger center for renewal and reconciliation on the grounds of Precious Blood Center. We see this as a particular need, especially in the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph where the Center for Pastoral Ministry—which was recognized nationally for its programs for training lay ministers and adult faith formation in the vision of Vatican II—was closed several years ago. There is a deep hunger for a safe place where such opportunities could be offered once again. As a community claiming the charism of renewal and reconciliation through the blood of Christ, we are a natural fit to promote, produce, and provide a home for such programs.

On this holy ground, our mission houses will continue to serve the needs of our members who are active in retreat, renewal, hospitality, justice and peace ministries, and members who are retired but who continue to serve the congregation and local church as their health allows. In Gaspar’s vision of the mission house, these spaces would continue to provide for smaller groups, especially healing and listening circles for victims of violence, those who walk in the valley of grief and sorrow, those who

feel betrayed by institutions or individuals, those who are angry and those whose apathy has left them in search of a new spark.

But a larger space is needed for adult faith formation, ministerial training, high school and college catechesis, theological reflection, and retreats for groups too large for us to accommodate presently. In this new sacred space, we would continue to renew the charism of our congregation by offering days of prayer, lectures, and retreat opportunities for clergy and lay ministers, justice and peace advocates, and ecumenical groups.

As we try to live inside this hope, this dream, we envision Precious Blood Center to be an oasis for those who are looking for a safe and sacred place to catch their breath, drink deeply from the chalice of their hearts of their own experiences, find their thirst for justice quenched in the wellspring of precious blood spirituality as they gather the courage to return to the daily grind and grace of reign making and kingdom-building.

As Barbara Kingsolver reminds, this Christmas season the very least we can do is figure out what we hope for. Now comes the hard part: can we live inside our hope?

#### Advent Psalm

### Living with Hope

Gracious God,  
as the day draws near  
when we celebrate the birth  
of our savior Jesus Christ,  
may your hope grow inside of us.

Come, Lord Jesus,  
give us new courage  
to hope again  
as we trust in your dreams of peace  
for our world so often  
scared by war.

May your grace flow freely  
as we prepare for Hope  
to take up space  
in our waiting hearts.

By your coming,  
May all peoples of the earth find rest  
in the shelter of your Divine Heart.

+ Amen.

*Written by Fr. Joe Nassal, C.PPS.*

### The New Wine Press

*Missionaries of the Precious Blood*

Kansas City Province

[www.kcprovince.org](http://www.kcprovince.org)

The Society of the Precious Blood

is a fraternal community

of priests and brothers

founded by St. Gaspar in 1815.

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by a promise of fidelity,

we are prayerfully motivated

by the spirituality of the

precious blood of Jesus Christ

to serve the needs of the Church

as discerned through

the signs of the times and in

the light of the Gospel.

The Kansas City Province—

incorporated members,

covenanted companions,

and candidates—

united in prayer, service

and mutual support,

characterized by the tradition

of its American predecessors,

are missionaries of these times

with diverse gifts and ministries.

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we strive to serve all people—

especially the poor—

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hope and hospitality.

*The New Wine Press*

seeks to remain faithful

to the charism of our founder,

St. Gaspar, and the spirituality

of the Blood of Christ

with its emphasis on reconciliation,

renewal and refounding.

We accept and encourage

unsolicited manuscripts

and letters to the editor.

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## *The Art of Relationship*

by Garry Richmeier, C.PPS.

“Fred” was an abusive spouse. Most of the time he looked and acted like any other married man. But seemingly minor irritations could send him into a rage, and he would physically and/or emotionally batter his wife. The legal system eventually forced him into counseling. He didn’t want to do counseling and he didn’t trust the therapist. The therapist, knowing he could not help Fred without some level of trust, began by asking how it “helped” Fred to take his anger out on his wife. Fred began to describe how it helped him feel in control of at least part of his life. Fred described how he always felt that his life was like a house of cards, always on the edge of falling apart, and he was helpless to stop it. So any small failure or problem seemed like the whole thing was coming apart at the seams. Abusing his wife was control, and it felt like that last bit of control was all he had left.

The therapist then knew and understood the reasons for Fred’s behavior, and communicated that to Fred. Only then could Fred trust the therapist enough to consider whatever else the therapist would say or suggest, including different ways to feel in control of his life.

This story about Fred is an example of establishing/building the counseling relationship between the client and the therapist. But it highlights what is essential for constructive relationships of any kind.

Good relationships begin with a premise: We all do what we do for the same reasons. Most human motivation, if you boil it down, has something to do with assuring one’s safety. I may try to assure my emotional safety by having friends. I may think I can assure my future physical safety by having a retirement plan. I may think I can assure my safety in the hereafter by doing whatever my religion tells me to do. The loudest,

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most-photographed, most “in your face,” “type A” personality CEO is motivated by the same thing as a quiet recluse no one knows about—both believe what they do keeps them safe.

We often doubt that what motivates others is the same as what motivates us, so we have difficulty creating quality relationships. Examples of this are all around us. “They’re just crazy,” we often hear. Or “They don’t value freedom like we do.” Or “My political opponents just want to destroy this country.” Or “He just wants to make my life hell.” With such perceptions we are apt to distance ourselves from others, write them off, attack them, or get rid of them in some way.

Knowing/believing that people’s motivations are the same is only the beginning of creating good relationships. We must then do what the therapist did with Fred. We have to listen to the other person’s story and then effectively communicate to them that we understand the good they are trying to accomplish through their behavior, the safety they are trying to achieve. We don’t have to agree with their tactics, but we do need to understand. This takes time and effort, and is often messy, which is why we don’t like to do it. Often we will sacrifice a relationship rather than do the required work. Or we may try to take a short cut and simply tell the person what they must do to be in relationship with us. This often includes informing the person of what they need to “fix” in themselves if we are to be in relationship with them. Needless to say, this is not

conducive to healthy relationships, but we often seem to end up doing it anyway.

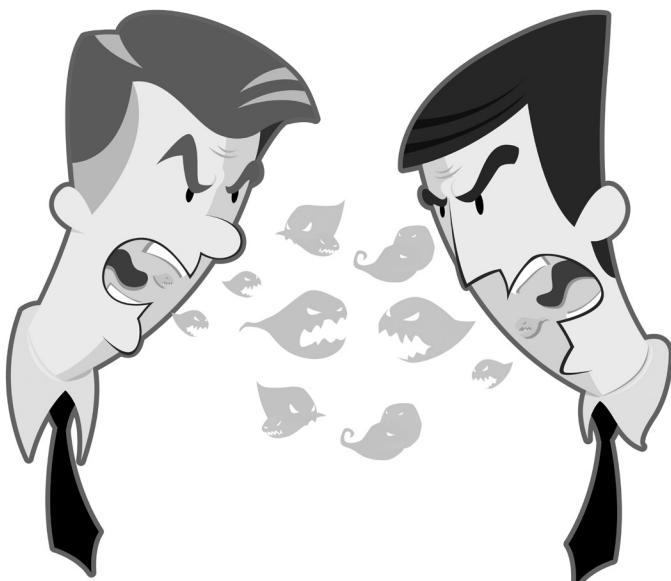
Congress has recently been doing a good job of avoiding constructive relationships. One reason is that each side is demonizing the other’s motivations rather than putting time and effort into listening, understanding, and affirming what the other side is trying to accomplish. It is the age-old “tit for tat” dynamic: “If you don’t understand and care about my efforts, I don’t care about yours.”

The institutional church is finding itself in a similar position these days with those who disagree with some of its teachings. It does not seem interested in listening to the disgruntled members, understanding their motivations for holding their views, and communicating that understanding to them. If it did this, more than likely it would invite those who disagree to listen more carefully to what the church leaders have to say. Instead the hierarchy seems to assume that those who disagree have bad motivations, and it labels them “unfaithful.” It seems the hierarchy’s response of choice is simply to tell members what they are to believe and do, which results in unhealthy, dysfunctional relationships with its members. This is also resulting in the ending of many people’s relationship with the church as they leave to find other more nourishing religious relationships. Some in the church see nothing wrong with this, which implies that being in relationship with each other in the church is not the priority for them.

As a religious community in the church we have the opportunity to proclaim a different message, one that challenges what seems to be the trend in the church today. We can choose to be in relationship with people regardless of their agreement with us, with the church, with the government, with whomever. But we have to believe that we are all basically the same, and be willing to do the messy work of listening to people’s stories and let them know that they are just like us in what drives them.

It has been suggested that God is really relationship, the “in-between” all things, that which holds all things in the universe together. In that sense, relationship is the point, and everything else is secondary. As we do the difficult and messy work of creating and maintaining caring relationships, we are making God present. Each relationship then is a piece of the reign of God.

*Fr. Garry Richmeier, C.P.P.S. is a licensed family therapist in Kansas City, Missouri.*





## *Companion Retreat at Conception Abbey*

by Judy Keisling, Liberty, Missouri Companion

Imagine leaving the stresses of everyday life behind and going to a place where you can get away from all worries, dissension, work and other stressors.

Precious Blood Companions of the Kansas City Province had that opportunity in October as they retreated to the solitude of the monastery known as Conception Abbey in Conception, Missouri. From this location we were surrounded by acres of green fields, orchards, gardens, lakes and wind turbines turning lazily upon their stilts high in the sky—a most peaceful environment where one could indeed leave stresses behind.

And so it was that on October 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> I found myself with Companion Director Fr. David Matz, C.P.P.S. and 48 other Companions on the spiritual journey called a retreat.

The focal point of this experience was a series of presentations by retreat director Fr. Jerry Stack, C.P.P.S. that reflected on St. Gasper's charism—spirituality, community, and mission.

Saturday morning began with prayer and song. The words of the song “Belong” reminded us that God is our light and salvation, our shelter, refuge, and protection and ended with the affirmation that each of us belongs to God. During the reflection we were reminded that Peter said “God shows no partiality” and that all are welcomed in the circle of God’s covenant of love. We closed our eyes and pictured a “circle of love” that began with those closest to us, widened to include those with whom we have no particular depth of relationship, those we encounter everywhere, and finally stretching to our country, our world, and beyond.

Saturday morning Fr. Jerry focused on “Living Precious Blood Spirituality.” We heard how, by embracing our own woundedness, we are a committed presence in the midst of a suffering world and are to enter into healing relationships with those who cry out for reconciliation and liberation. During small group breakouts we shared what we are doing to integrate this spirituality into our lives.

In the afternoon, Fr. Jerry discussed “Living Our Community Life,” pointing out that our communities are sacred spaces of deep dialogue where we share our joys, sorrows, hopes and dreams in an atmosphere of trust, respect and love. We again broke into small groups to share our experiences.

A reconciliation prayer service followed Saturday evening’s dinner. During this prayerful time, we listened to a meditation on the chalice adapted from a writing by Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S. As the cup was filled with wine during the meditation we were called to place all that we are and hope to be into it, along with our family, friends, community, joyful memories, failures, fears, sadness, and sins. Fr. Jerry, along with Precious Blood priests, Fr. Timothy Armbruster, Fr. Jack McClure, and Fr. Bill Walter, were on hand to hear our individual confessions. When all had returned to the chapel, the wine-filled chalice was passed as we were invited to drink of the chalice filled with the wine of our lives.

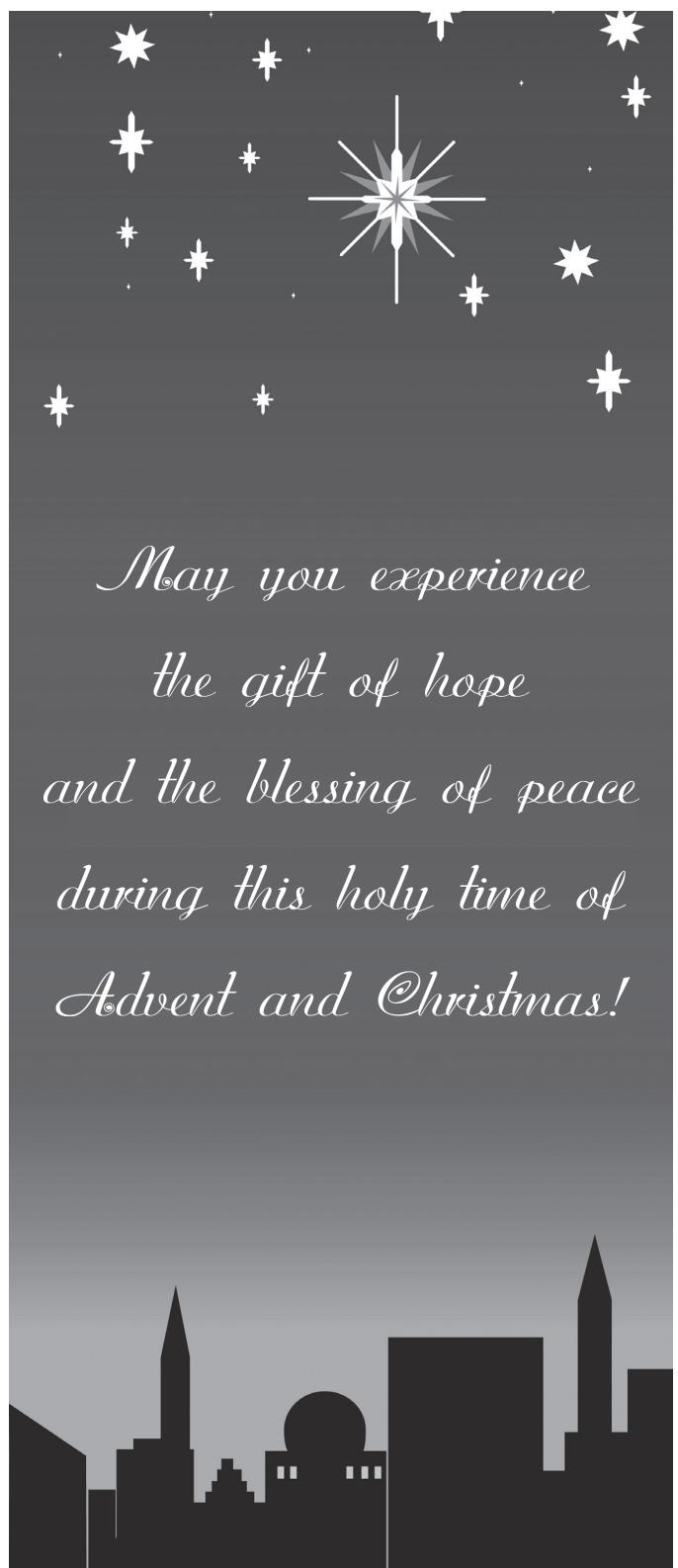
Fr. Jerry’s presentation on Sunday morning was centered on “Living Our Mission.” He pointed out that we are prophetic missionaries who are a reconciling presence in the midst of conflict and division. He noted that from the earliest years of St. Gasper’s life he was dedicated to helping build the Reign of God—he lived a life of mission that has been entrusted to us. During small group breakouts we were challenged to discuss how we could initiate or expand a ministry with those on the edge and the marginalized.

The retreat ended with Mass celebrated by Fr. Joe Nassal. The gathering song, “All Are Welcome,” was symbolic of our weekend as we sang, “All are welcome in this place.”

The retreat was a special time in other ways. We renewed old acquaintances, met new friends, gathered on Saturday night to socialize with food, drink, and good conversation. We even picked apples to take home from trees in the Monastery’s orchard whose branches were so overladen that they almost touched the ground.

Next year’s retreat will be held in September, also at Conception Abbey. If you weren’t able to attend this one,

I encourage you to attend next year. For me, it was a rejuvenation of spirit and a deeper appreciation of Precious Blood spirituality.



*May you experience  
the gift of hope  
and the blessing of peace  
during this holy time of  
Advent and Christmas!*



## *Putting Passion Into Action*

by Nora O'Connell, Precious Blood Volunteer

I am passionate about God. I am passionate about calling my parents every day just to say "Hi." I am passionate about never forgetting friends' birthdays. I am passionate about saying thank you. I am passionate about finding a cure for cancer. I am passionate about Grumpy Cat. I am passionate about listening. I am passionate about educating children. I am passionate about helping others. I am passionate about sports. I am passionate about smiling. I have so many passions that I can't even list them all here.

I have always known that I wanted to pursue a career that followed my passions. I have always wanted my future career to be something that I loved every single day. Easier said than done—unless I can get paid to call and annoy my mother every day!

When I first made the decision to participate in a post-grad service program, I knew that it would give me the opportunity to pursue one of my passions without fully committing to a line of work, while also opening my eyes to new opportunities and things that I had never experienced before. I have always known that I wanted to learn more about and work with the resources available that can help the poor and marginalized in large cities.

Serving at St. James Place in midtown Kansas City has helped me to make this passion a reality. I spend mornings helping our food pantry operate and evenings serving dinner in our community kitchen. I spend afternoons assigning Christmas families to donors and helping clients with their short term medical needs as a Kansas City Medicine Cabinet caseworker. No matter what role I am playing, I always have the opportunity to talk to people and listen to their story. Every day is a constant reminder to meet people where they are at in life.

I knew when I started this program that my service at St. James Place wouldn't fulfill all of the needs in my heart. There were so many things I wanted to do and so many people I wanted to help, which led me to another volunteer experience. I spend my Wednesday evenings and some Saturday mornings at Gilda's Club, which is a cancer support community in Kansas City. I help them clean the clubhouse, set up for Wednesday potluck dinners, and answer the door among other things. I may not be able to find the cure to cancer myself, even though that is one of my passions, but through this organization

*continued on page 11*

# Making a Difference

by Tim Deveney, Director of Precious Blood Volunteers

My fall schedule was filled with recruitment events at Catholic universities throughout the Midwest and this year included a side trip to the Catholic University of America. These recruitment trips are great because I get the opportunity to visit with college students and talk to them about becoming a member of the Precious Blood community as a volunteer and talk about how they can change their lives through prayer, community and service. It is also wonderful to visit with the Precious Blood communities in Chicago and Dayton.

At the end of the recruiting season, the Catholic Volunteer Network (CVN) hosts their annual conference. CVN is the national membership organization of Christian volunteer and mission programs, including Precious Blood Volunteers. This year's conference was a celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of CVN. As part of the 50th Anniversary, CVN commissioned the Center for the Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University (CARA) to do a survey of former volunteers.

This study was aimed at finding out about the transformative effect of the volunteer experience on spiritual growth, human development, career and vocational choices, and civic involvement. It is important because our program, like many of the other volunteer programs, strives to form volunteers in their faith through prayer, service and community. They also were working to find out the demographics of former volunteers and what their volunteer experience was like. The findings of the study were interesting, but not entirely surprising.

My assumptions about former volunteers from the Catholic Volunteer Network membership groups were largely confirmed in respect to their spiritual and religious practices. The surveyed revealed the good news that alumni of CVN programs are engaged in a journey of faith, considered religious life or ordained ministry, and have generally bucked the cultural trend of not being part of a faith community. Here are some of the findings that the survey found about former volunteers and their spiritual practices:

- Almost nine in ten volunteers consider spirituality to be either a "somewhat" or "very" important value in their life.
- Eight of ten responding former volunteers who were raised Catholic are also Catholic today. In

comparison less than two thirds of the adult U.S. population (65%) who were Catholic at the age of 16 report being Catholic today.

- Former volunteers attend religious services much more regularly than U.S. Catholics in general. 72% of former volunteers report that they attend religious services at least once a month, compared to only 50% of U.S. Catholics. This is even more striking in that 46% of former volunteers reported that they attend church at least once a week compared to only 25% of U.S. Catholics.
- Three times more former male volunteers have considered a vocation to ordained ministry or religious life than their generational counterparts. Former female volunteers were twice as likely as other Catholic adults to have considered becoming a nun or religious sister.
- The average overall amount given by former volunteers in the last 12 months to charitable organizations (including churches) was just under \$2100. The average amount given to a parish or religious congregation was just under \$1100.
- 63% of respondents consider organized religion somewhat important in their life. The Jesuit priest from CARA who gave the report said that this is striking because in most surveys the phrase "organized religion" usually struggles to get out of the teens.
- The only surprising piece of this section of the survey was that former volunteers were just slightly more likely to pray at least once a week than this general U.S. population (81% vs. 75%). My assumption was that former volunteers would be much more likely to pray at least once a week than the general U.S. population. That being said the survey respondents are largely younger people. In comparison to comparable age groups they are much more likely to pray at least once a week.

Another fascinating part about this study was about the type of lives and activities former volunteers engage in. Overall almost all of the respondents said that they were "fairly" or "very" happy with their lives in general. More *continued on page 11*

# A Subversive Act

by Sr. Diana Rawlings, ASC, LGBT Committee Interim Co-Director



The story goes like this. Once there was a small village, which was home to about 200 people. As in many villages, lots of fighting, insults, bickering and holding onto grudges occurred over the years. One day a visitor came and began to tell people that he had met God in one of the town's residents but could not say exactly who the person was or how it had happened. Word raced through town that God was among them. Since no one knew for sure, and just to be safe, the town folks began treating every one they met as if they were God. Although it took several months for change to occur, the transformation was astonishing. Family members became reconciled, the fighting stopped, and the bickering ceased. Everyone, whether they belonged in the town or were traveling through, was treated as though they were God—because who knew for sure?

This story echoes what we read in Hebrews 13:2, “Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.”

Most of the Church’s history shows hospitality as a vibrant tradition in which needy strangers, angels and even Jesus were welcomed, and through which people were transformed. Hospitality addresses the physical needs of food, shelter and protection. But hospitality also radically affirms the high worth and common humanity of all people. Historically, Christian hospitality was a

subversive act that obliterated societal barriers involving gender, race, sexual orientation, economic condition, and citizenship status and directly attacked the often deadly devaluing of the personhood of “undesirables.”

As women and men committed to Precious Blood spirituality this seems to be a profound call to the virtue of hospitality most especially in affirming the value of each person, specifically those whom society deems “undesirables.” For several years now this idea has been caught in our phrase “all blood is precious.”

How does one nurture the virtue of hospitality in Precious Blood spirituality? Welcoming people into our homes, offering food and drink, and overnight accommodations is certainly important. Often this means an intrusion into our regular schedule and sometimes we have to put our own plans on hold.

Deepening this virtue might begin by identifying for myself who is my “undesirable” person and who among them I have welcomed into my home? Once they are in my home, what is the conversation and personal attention I give to the guest? Am I able to listen with my full attention without inserting my own agenda.

The stranger I most recently encountered was a woman who wanted to share her coming out story with me. I was aware of offering hospitality by listening to her personal story. And then, really, I blew it. I found myself jumping in and telling her, from my experience, that I knew exactly what she was saying as I proceeded to share my story. I failed in the virtue of hospitality by grabbing away time for her story so I could share mine. I had been welcoming to her with food and a safe space to tell her story, but failed in treating her with a deeper respect that comes with listening. Later I was aware that I had missed God. Had I been aware that God was in my midst, I would have kept my mouth shut and listened to every word being spoken. Who knows, this might have been a transformational moment.

Christmas season is fast approaching and above all else, the season is about hospitality. We welcome into our home family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors and often we offer our time serving Christmas dinner in shelters. As people of the Precious Blood, let us radically affirm the high worth and common humanity of all people in our actions and especially in our listening.

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### *Precious Blood Volunteers, continued from page 9*

than eight in ten former volunteers say that they have volunteered time, donated money or property, or both in the past 12 months. Only 9% of the former volunteers surveyed reported that have been divorced compared to 31% of the U.S. population. Additionally more than two-thirds of former volunteers say their volunteer service was either “somewhat” or “very” important in influencing their choice of career.

These results give me a great deal of hope that our program has the potential to offer this kind of outcome in the type of individuals who serve as Precious Blood Volunteers. Our volunteers and former volunteers have provided anecdotal evidence that this study provided statistically. Through continued work inviting people to walk with us in service I am confident that we will help form lay Christians in Precious Blood spirituality.

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### *PBMR, continued from page 12*

done. However, in a retributive system, what we create is an environment where the parties are told to deny any responsibility and only be concerned with their own needs. Both Malik’s lawyer and the state’s attorney were seeking only what was in the interest of their respective clients. The very system that pretends to act in order that people be held accountable thwarts the very thing it claims to support.

Malik was willing to be held accountable, but was rejected at every juncture. True accountability is inseparably linked with a commitment toward others. It is the willingness to speak the truth with no expectation of something in return. But it has to be in an environment that values the persons involved, encourages truth, seeks repair for the harm done, and works toward reconciliation/healing.

It is often said that restorative justice is how you would want it to be if it were your child. I believe most of us want our children to be held accountable, but in such a way that it doesn’t demean them or label them a menace to society. Too many think that restorative justice seeks to diminish responsibility, when the truth is it values responsibility. Restorative justice focuses on the harm done and seeks ways to repair that harm. It holds those responsible for causing the harm accountable and strives to pave a way toward healing and reconciliation.

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### *Putting Passion Into Action, continued from page 8*

I have been able to walk with others who have been affected by cancer in various ways. I have been able to just talk and be myself with the members of Gilda’s Club, and most of the time these people make my day so much brighter, even more than the little effect I could possibly have on one of them.

I have learned so much by spending my time at these two organizations. I see so much potential in both of them, and am honored that I get to be a part of the big picture. Most of the people I encounter every day have more faith in their left hand than I do in my whole body. Every day I am reminded of how much I see God in these two places, and the importance of truly being intentionally present to all that we serve.

Being a part of the Precious Blood Volunteers has helped me to learn how to see my passions and translate them into every day work. I may not be able to put that I am passionate about hugs on a resume, but I can translate my strong feelings about them into other things and show my passion in other ways. Each person I have met here has taught me some sort of lesson about my future and myself—even if I don’t know exactly what it is or what it will be.

I know that throughout the course of my life, some passions will change and some will grow stronger. Following your passions can be a challenge, but if they’re important it’s worth it. Remember, there’s always something to smile about!



*Nora O’Connell graduated in 2013 from the University of Dayton. She lives at Gaspar Mission House in Kansas City.*

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## The New Wine Press

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*Change Service Requested*

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## PBMR: The New Creation

# *Accountability, More Than Just a Word*

by Fr. Dave Kelly, C.P.P.S., Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation Director

He wanted to apologize, but his lawyer said “absolutely not!” He wanted to admit that he did it and wanted to say how sorry he was. His lawyer refused to allow him to say anything, yet alone admitting to any wrongdoing. He explained to Malik, a 15 year-old youth from the south side of Chicago, that he’s to deny any knowledge of the incident. He was being charged as an adult for robbery.

Malik sat with 10 other youth in a drumming circle in Cook County Juvenile Detention Center. Even though he was being charged as an adult, his age meant that he would be housed in the Juvenile Detention until his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. On that day, he would be transferred to an adult facility. In the drumming circle Malik said that he wanted to tell the victim—a middle aged man—that he was sorry. The others in that circle nodded their heads as if to say that they understood. They, too, had thought a lot about the wrongs they did and how they wanted to change.

A couple of months prior, Malik had robbed the man of his phone. He didn’t have a weapon, but still was charged as an adult with aggravated robbery—a felony. As he sat in Circle, looking even younger than his 15 years, he spoke softly about how he wanted to change. He spoke of the pain he had caused his mother and younger brothers and sisters.

Malik really didn’t understand the severity of his case and the amount of time that he could spend in prison. He kept saying over and over that he was not a bad person. Some of the other youth who sat in that Circle, who were also held as adults, assured him that he was not alone and that they understood his anxiety. They too have been told over and over how they were bad, a menace to society.

When the time came for sentencing over a year later (Malik had pled guilty), the prosecuting attorney spoke harshly about how he was an uncaring “thug” and a menace to society. He went on to stress how he lacked any remorse for the crime he committed. “Never once,” he said, “did this young man admit that he did anything wrong!” The prosecutor repeated several times, “At no time did this defendant express any remorse for his crime.” Of course nothing could have been further from the truth, but no one would ever hear the story of Malik or of the man whose phone was taken. Only how a law had been broken and the person who was deemed guilty would be punished.

As a society, we speak about accountability, and rightfully so. We want people to own up to the harm they have

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