

The NEW WINE PRESS

Motivated by the Spirituality of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ

February 2008

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PROVINCE PARISH SUMMIT

On January 21-22, a group of 14 members who are currently serving in parish ministry gathered with the leadership team (several of whom are also in parish ministry) for what was dubbed the province parish summit. This was not a decision-making meeting, but rather an opportunity to seek strength, wisdom, and insight from one another as we look to the future with its challenges, brought on in part by the declining number of people available to serve in parishes.

With the assistance of Dennis Meier, who acted as facilitator, those present shared their stories of becoming acquainted with the community and growing into a recognition of how they have recognized the charism within themselves—and what their individual intentions, hopes and dreams are for the future. Set in the context of our ongoing visioning process, a primary goal of the summit was to develop criteria that will act as a guide in making decisions about those parishes we can or will serve in coming years.



Joe Uecker, C.P.P.S., (l) co-pastor of the Catholic Community of South Odessa, TX and Mike Volkmer, C.P.P.S., pastor of St. Mary Parish, Albia, IA.

7) have a commitment to renewal; 8) offer retirement possibilities; 9) are open to a team ministry model to share the burden of pastoring; and 10) offer members the flexibility to live alone, in community, or in proximity to other parishes or ministry sites.

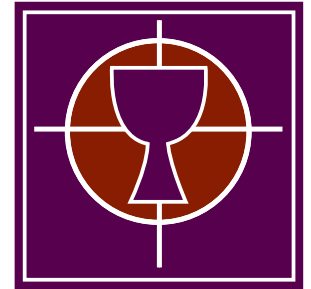
The leadership team has already begun to incorporate these criteria into their deliberations. The process which began successfully at this summit will continue to unfold as the entire community gathers in June for the provincial assembly. ❧



The centerpiece for the meeting included a chalice which belonged to John Hoorman, C.P.P.S., and the mission cross worn by Tony Kraft, C.P.P.S., both former pastors, now deceased.



Bill Walter, C.P.P.S. (l) with Dennis Meier, facilitator of the summit.



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

The Kansas City Province—incorporated members, covenanted companions, and candidates—united in prayer, service and mutual support, characterized by the tradition of its American predecessors, are missionaries of these times with diverse gifts and ministries. In a spirit of joy, we strive to serve all people—especially the poor—with care and compassion, hope and hospitality.

The New Wine Press seeks to remain faithful to the charism of our founder, St. Gaspar, and the spirituality of the Blood of Christ with its emphasis on reconciliation, renewal and refounding. We accept and encourage unsolicited manuscripts and letters to the editor. *The New Wine Press* is published monthly. The submission deadline is the 20th of the month.

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Leadership Notes

Late last November, while walking the four-mile trail through the woods and around the lake at Watkins Mill State Park, I encountered several wild turkeys. My first thought was to offer congratulations for making it through the Thanksgiving holiday unscathed and uncooked. But they were still very skittish and made a noisy retreat into the brush to avoid me.

A couple of days later, I was walking in the woods again and came across another wild turkey that had avoided the carving knife. The late November forest was brown and bare. I often see deer that blend in well with the underbrush. If they remain still, they would go completely unnoticed unless the walker or jogger was on the lookout and paying attention. But this solitary turkey was not a contemplative. Nor did he move very far from the trail. He had a blackish coat of feathers and stood very near a large rotting tree trunk as I approached. At first glance, he looked like an extension of the trunk. Only when he turned his head did I notice his close proximity to the trail. Then he moved quickly behind the trunk and ran off into the underbrush.

I walk in the woods more often for physical exercise than for spiritual enlightenment. But when I do approach the trail as a spiritual exercise, I am less concerned about completing the four mile trek in an hour and more attentive to what I see along the way. When I walk more slowly, I see more clearly—like that turkey trying to camouflage himself beside the fallen tree—and am more appreciative of the changing landscape.

Paying attention to the changing landscape in both our inner world and our outer world is a daily challenge. Certainly change is a word we hear bandied about often during an election cycle. This year, at least for awhile and in certain states, “change” trumped “experience” and soon every candidate was identifying himself or herself as an agent of change. Though candidates often call for cosmic rather than cosmetic changes in their campaigns, they soon discover upon election how difficult it is to implement the changes they propose because of a political system founded on a revolution but resistant to transformation. Soon campaign promises become bipartisan compromises.

Change has been part of the vocabulary of religious experience since Adam said to Eve as they were escorted from the garden, “I guess this means we are entering a time of transition.” As a church, as a religious community, and as human beings, change is a constant in life. The season of Lent comes along early this year to pose the question of what changes we need to make in our inner landscape to become holy and whole, offering the spiritual practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to facilitate our ongoing conversion.

Recently I read about a study of cheetahs in Africa that sought to find out why a whole generation of cheetahs was going blind. The researchers discovered that what appeared to be a rather harmless grass carried in the wind had seeded itself in the path these cheetahs had followed for centuries. As many years passed,

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.

this grass grew into “tall wheat-like stalks which sprout both small berries and thorns.” As the cheetahs raced through these meadows, the thorns scratched their eyes. The researchers found that “this small seed blown from some inner continental winds had inadvertently blinded an entire generation of cheetahs.”

In reflecting on this study, the poet Mark Nepo notes that the cheetahs did not adapt to the changes in the landscape of their lives. But we can't blame the cheetahs or the thorny grass or the winds that carried the seeds. “The tall grass is not evil and the cheetahs are not wrong,” Nepo writes. “In our human case, when change seems painful, we often distract ourselves with the blame game rather than adapt to the shifting nature of experience.”

How often do we play the blame game when it comes to changes in the church and in our own community? A couple of years after I was ordained and working in a parish, one of our older priests who had spent much of his life in North Dakota and Wisconsin was retiring and stopped by on his way to Carthage. He was clearly upset that we were pulling out of many parishes where community members had served for years. He cast the situation not in terms of attrition but in terms of obedience. “Because you younger priests don't obey the provincial and do whatever you damn well please, we have to give back parishes where we have been for fifty years or more.”

Playing the blame game is our favorite noncontact sport. We play the blame game rather than looking for ways to avoid getting our eyes scratched that render us blind. “As emotional beasts,” Nepo writes, “we can often blind ourselves running cheetah-like into the thorns that sprout in our way. Sometimes this is unavoidable, but part of our dance as human beings is to live in full acceptance of that fact that nothing, not even the earth beneath our feet, is standing still.” As spiritual beings, our challenge is to adapt “to the flow of life” that is “more than reacting to things that just seem to happen. It requires our continual attention and movement with the life around us.”

As we look at the landscape of our province, over the last fifteen years or more we have returned the ministry of several parishes where our members have served for years to the care of the diocese. The mathematics of modern ministry is one of subtraction: older members who spent their lives in parish ministry and who retire are not replaced by younger members either because there are not enough young men being ordained today to take their place, or because younger members are being called to ministries that resonate with their particular gifts and that reflect the charism of our founder and spirituality of the Precious Blood. The leadership team convened a summit in late January for those involved in parish ministry to address this reality and to listen to our pastors as we look to our future.

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Life, as Mark Nepo wisely points out, “is a constant work in progress, not a still life, and like it or not, we are constant participants connected to everything in view or not.” As a work in progress, when we face unexpected change, we will “like those cheetahs, either: grow longer legs, change our migration path, in our blindness go extinct, or develop more resilient eyes to survive the cuts of life.”

As a religious community we prefer to be compared to those sleek and strong cheetahs than those wild turkeys I saw walking in the woods. But like those turkeys, we can blend into the landscape and survive for awhile. Or we can be bold by stepping out of the underbrush and walk the trail of transformation shaped by our spirituality, charism, and mission. When we view life through the lens of precious blood spirituality, change is not an option; it is at the center of the call to become a new creation. 🌱

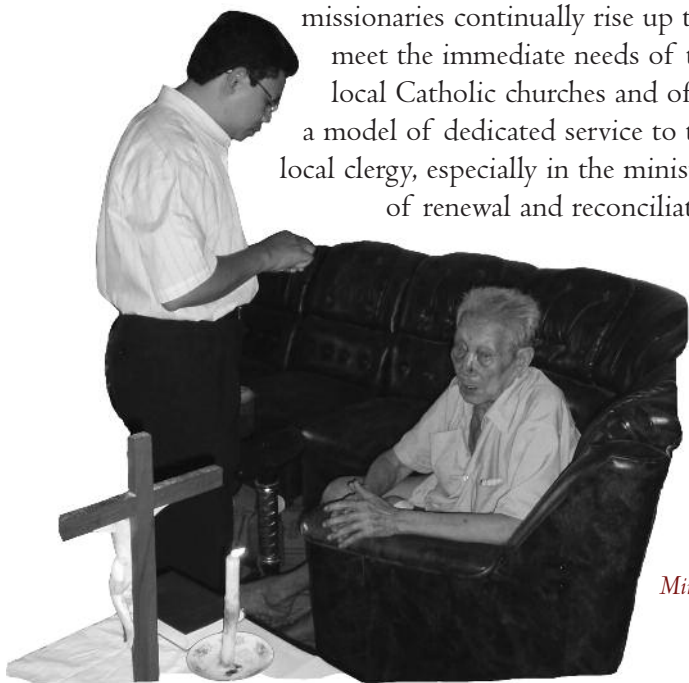
BECOMING A MISSIONARY IN VIETNAM

Joseph Truc Minh Vu

A Vietnamese saying observes “Thứ đêm mới biết đêm dài. Sống lâu mới biết lòng người đồ đen.” What that means is “to know how long the night is one needs to stay up all night. To know the human heart one needs a life-long experience.” We, candidates of the C.P.P.S. in Vietnam, in our frequent gatherings to learn, reflect on, and discern our vocation in the spirituality and charism of the Precious Blood, experience the profound meaning of this saying.

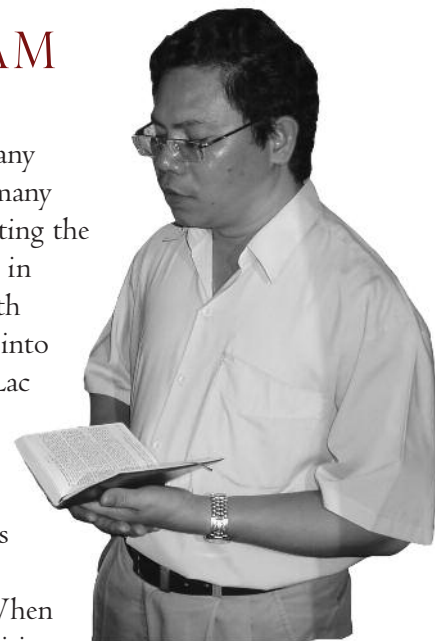
January 21, 2007 was a memorable day for me and two other confreres in formation. It was the day that the C.P.P.S. Mission in Vietnam was officially established. It was on this very day that the three of us were admitted to Initial Formation with the Kansas City Province by the Provincial Director, Fr. Jim Urbanic. It took us three long years of difficulties, challenges and times of discouragement—once or twice we were tempted to withdraw from formation—to arrive at this memorable moment of being accepted into the Initial Formation program. We arrived at this stage of responding to the call only after having endured long years of waiting and experiencing C.P.P.S. spirituality and charism from the C.P.P.S. missionaries whom we have thus far encountered.

The two C.P.P.S. missionaries in Vietnam, Fr. Lac for the last decade and Fr. Dien for the last three years, have spent so much of their spiritual and temporal efforts to explore and prepare a “new mission field” of the C.P.P.S. in Vietnam. Faithful to Saint Gaspar’s legacies, these two missionaries continually rise up to meet the immediate needs of the local Catholic churches and offer a model of dedicated service to the local clergy, especially in the ministries of renewal and reconciliation.



Ministry with shut-ins.

They have made many sacrifices and endured many challenges while promoting the spirit of Saint Gaspar in formation ministry. With endeavors to train men into good missionaries, Frs. Lac and Dien incessantly encouraged and challenged each one of us to better ourselves in faith as well as in knowledge and skills. When they participate in activities among inquirers and candidates, they exert enthusiasm for “the bond of charity” in communal living through their interest and care.



Following graduation from the Paul Nguyễn Văn Bình Theological Institute Father Dien sent me to Bùi-Hiệp Parish in Đồng-Nai Province for one month of helping the parish train its young catechists, an immediate need of the parish. Though busy with the tasks at hand, I was encouraged by Fr. Dien to return to the C.P.P.S. community to participate in community gatherings: monthly day of recollection on the first Sunday of the month, Precious Blood studies on the second Sunday of the month, and the English class every Saturday morning taught by Mr. Daniel Kelley, an American friend of Fr. Dien. Through these experiences I have appreciated Fr. Dien’s care that manifests the three pillars of the Congregation: mission, community, and spirituality. Now I am doing a pastoral year, living and working in the Gò-Dầu Parish in Tây-Ninh Province, not far from the border with Cambodia. This province holds the headquarters of the Cao-Đài religion, therefore most of the populace are non-Catholic.

I hope that in the days ahead I will be able to keep up my efforts to become more of a missionary leading to full membership in the C.P.P.S. The Precious Blood of Christ flowing in my bloodstream keeps beckoning me to keep my best foot forward as I share this reflection in the bond of charity. ✠

A LENTEN JOURNEY TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

William Nordenbrock, C.P.P.S.

“What are you going to do for Lent?” is not a question that I hear as often as in the past, when it was not an unusual conversation starter for Catholics as Lent approached—similar to asking someone if they had made any New Year’s resolutions. It was an indicator that Catholics took serious the possibility that Lent could be a time of renewal and personal transformation.

When I was younger, the answer that nearly everyone gave to that question was about making sacrifice and giving something up. Acts of penance are still part of the recommended observance, although current teaching suggests that penance be combined with the giving of alms, transforming the foregoing of dessert from a mere diet into a religious observance.

Lent is a liturgical season with a particular invitation to reflect on reconciliation. Mostly, the concern is for sinners to be reconciled with God moreso than with each other. In our ministry of reconciliation, we try to highlight the connection between the two, hoping to build awareness that reconciliation is best imagined as a cross where both the horizontal and vertical dimensions are essential. When we link acts of penance with the giving of alms, we are making that connection. When we are motivated by a realization that our consumption is at the expense of others, then penance and almsgiving is an act of solidarity with the poor and can be personally transforming.

For many, “going to confession” is also a part of the plan for Lent. We celebrate the sacrament and we ask for a “fresh start,” with the hope that the grace of the sacrament will help us to overcome those sinful tendencies that have brought us to the sacrament. That sacrament takes on amplified meaning when the desire for forgiveness flows out of a desire to live differently going forward. Then the sacrament can be a transforming act of grace.

We as Precious Blood people in particular should hear the invitation to reflect on reconciliation during Lent—not just to come to a greater understanding of this aspect of our charism, but to allow our Lenten observances to help transform us into a reconciling presence. For us, the better question to ask might be: How will Lent be a time when I journey deeper into and more fully embody our charism?

In the ministry of reconciliation we have learned that the attitude of hospitality and the skills of accompaniment need to be carefully cultivated. Hospitality is about making room for people. Sometimes that is physical space, but in the ministry of reconciliation it is more often about creating the emotional space for people to be welcomed. Are we willing to welcome into our life and “space” those who are not like us? Can those of different ethnicity or nation of origin find in a us a place where they are safe and can be expressive of their cultural identity? Real hospitality is dependent on our willingness to see what is positive in the “other” and to welcome those differences as a gift to us.

As a Lenten practice, hospitality may be as simple (and difficult) as making space in our lives for family, friends and community members. Sometimes we need to recover a hospitable attitude for those we care about, but from whom we have grown distant or to whom we have become emotionally unavailable. Here the practice of hospitality may require that we fast from the things that take our time and emotional energy. Do we need to fast from overwork to be more hospitable and to welcome those who are near to us? Do we need to fast from the narcotics of television or internet surfing to be available to others?

The skills of accompaniment are the skills of relating well to others. At the heart of that is the practice of listening to others with both ears and hearts. I observe that polarization is a dominant characteristic in U.S. culture. Seemingly, across the board from politics to religion, dialogue has been replaced by dueling position statements. This Lent, perhaps we can make a practice of not writing off another’s opinion until we know why they care about their opinion, until we know the value that they are protecting in their opinion. This will require hospitality, making space for another by presuming that they are of good intentions and that they are guided by values—values that we may share despite the difference of opinions.

Lent is a time for renewal and reconciliation, where religious practice can help us remember and respond to a call for personal transformation. Our observance of Lent can cultivate the attitudes and skills that will make us a reconciling presence in the Church and the world. 🕊



The New Creation
REFLECTIONS FROM THE
PRECIOUS BLOOD MINISTRY
OF RECONCILIATION

PARISH MINISTRY AND CHURCH RENEWAL

Ron Will, C.P.P.S.



Somewhere early in my priesthood I learned that as a Precious Blood priest I was supposed to be especially concerned about renewal in the Church. The awareness of that charism in our community has always nudged me to be involved in some form of renewal movement, like Teens Encounter Christ, Charismatic Renewal, and Marriage Encounter Weekends.

As one expression of that renewal, our Constitutions say that we are dedicated to the ministry of the Word. So I have tried to take seriously the responsibility to preach and preside well at Mass and the other sacraments. I want to do more than just go through the motions, but instead create an environment where people experience God. People don't come to worship services because they want to know more about God. They come because they want to experience God. They want to have an emotional connection with the holy.

A few years ago I read and heard Fr. Barry Fischer speak about the "cry of the blood." I started asking myself daily the question: "Where did I hear the cry of the blood today, and how did I respond?" I used that question as sort of a daily examen. Over time the daily question became: "How did I personally encounter God today in a deeper way?" Then the question became: "How can I help others personally encounter God on a deeper level as I do so myself, and inspire others to discover and live their God-given potential?" I know that many people already do encounter God, but I want to provide an opportunity for a deeper encounter and a more personal encounter. Here are some ways that I have tried to do that.

In recent years I have concluded my Sunday homilies with a question and then I sit down for a minute of silence. The fact that I sit down communicates that all present have time to reflect, because I'm not moving on immediately. It invites people not only to reflect on the homily, but to personally talk to Jesus about some question. It helps move the homily message from a head experience to a heart experience. People have told me often enough how much they appreciate the question and the silence that I now know it is helpful. At the end of Mass I try to make a connection with the question in the dismissal rite so

that people remember it and take it home with them into the week.

For quite a few years I have been interested in offering some kind of adult religious education experience in the parish. But in recent years I have moved away from just giving informational facts and moved toward spiritual enrichment experiences that set the stage for encounters with God.

Several years ago I took a group of parishioners to Conception Abbey for a weekend. With the help of several parish leaders, we led a parish retreat entitled "Mount Tabor Retreat." As a result of the retreat several participants formed an ongoing Christian Community, which years later continues to meet every few weeks. I have offered one-day or one-evening retreats for our school faculty or for our parish council. The experience has a lasting effect throughout the year. The experience of this core group spills over and affects the larger parish.

During Advent and Lent, I have led a weekly Spiritual Enrichment Series on different themes. The purpose is to help people personally encounter God on a deeper level. Some of the themes of these series have been: "The Seven Wonders of your Spiritual Life," "The Gift That Just Keeps on Giving," "A Look at the Life of Christ and Our Lives Through the Lens of the Precious Blood," "Called to Faithful Discipleship," and "Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind."

I support opportunities like Marriage Encounter Weekends and various kinds of retreats which can kick-start an encounter with God and spiritual growth. But parish ministry has the advantage of weekly follow-up. It offers many opportunities for renewal because I have consistent and ongoing involvement week after week

with the same people, as opposed to going into a parish for a Mission and then leaving. The advantage of parish ministry is that I can make connections with what I wrote in the bulletin or preached about 3-4 weeks ago and build on

it and move forward. In parish ministry it is a privilege to walk with the same people week after week on their spiritual journey. This ministry is a wonderful vehicle for renewal within the Church! 🌹



PARISH MINISTRY IN LOS ANGELES

Bill Delaney, C.P.P.S.

What's happening at the western outpost of the province at St. Agnes Parish in Los Angeles? How is the spirituality of the Precious Blood resonating at this multi-cultural parish in one of the gateway cities of North America? One good way to answer this question is to describe some of the people who are leaders here and what they are experiencing and doing.

Yolanda is from El Salvador and has been in the parish for over 20 years. She first worked as a baby-sitter for an Iranian woman who also spoke Spanish. After several months at the minimum wage, she asked for a raise. Her employer, the Iranian woman, replied, "Why should I give you a raise, you can't speak English." Yolanda became very angry at this reply and decided she was going to learn English. She started ESL classes at a public school and was determined to get a high school diploma, rather than just a GED. She kept going to night classes while baby-sitting during the day. While going to night school she saw information about being a nurse's aid. Meanwhile she applied for amnesty in the late 80s. After receiving amnesty, she received her permission to work. Five years after receiving this document she applied for and received her permanent residency and five years later her citizenship. She is now a naturalized U.S. citizen with a high school diploma working as a nurse's aid with Alzheimer patients at St. John of God Hospital located within St. Agnes Parish. She continues to take math and science classes hoping one day to become an R.N.

All during her stay here she has been active at St. Agnes. She is currently the director for the quinceanera program, in which she conducts classes every Sunday morning for young girls between 14-16. In these classes she instructs them about what it means to be a young woman who is trying to be a follower of Christ. She conducts all of the rehearsals for their masses on Friday evenings and is here for the quinceanera masses every Saturday. In addition she is one of the lectors for our largest Sunday morning mass. She and her sister and brother were able to make a down payment on a four unit apartment complex in St. Agnes Parish 10 years ago. Being bi-lingual, she is now a role model for immigrants who need to learn English and better their work situation.

Elena was living in El Salvador with her husband and two children. During the armed conflict against which Archbishop Oscar Romero constantly spoke, her husband was killed. Her children were teenagers at the time. A few years later Elena had her children move in with the family of her deceased husband and she migrated to Los Angeles. She worked at several low paying jobs and eventually met another Salvadoran man here who was relatively her age. They began living together and had two children of their own. The family began attending St. Agnes, became involved in the Precious Blood Prayer Group and were married in the church. They are now Eucharistic ministers, have taken several bible study classes and participate in all parish activities.



Members of the Young Adult group during the annual Volunteer appreciation party.

Bulmaro came to Los Angeles from Mexico. Looking for community he discovered St. Agnes Church. He began coming regularly on Sundays and on Wednesday evenings to the Precious Blood Prayer Group. In that group he met Ester whom he married seven years ago. He has worked in a garment factory for over 15 years. Since he is undocumented he only receives fifty cents more than the minimum wage. He and his wife sing in the Precious Blood Prayer Group choir and are part of the leadership team for the prayer group.



Hector and Celia Marmol with Fr. Bill Delaney during Las Posadas.

Maura is a tall, black woman from Honduras. She was married but is separated from her husband. She has been active in the Precious Blood Prayer Group and has served as a Eucharistic Minister for over 15 years. About ten years ago she completed the Archdiocesan course for bereavement ministry. (Shortly after completing this course, torrential rains pounded Honduras. Five members of her extended family were killed in the flooding that followed.) She conducts most of our wake services for funerals and often

See Los Angeles, continued on page 9...

THANKS BE TO GOD: OUR LENTEN RESPONSE

Dianne Bergant, C.S.A.

For many people, Lent is a time to meditate on the suffering and death of Jesus and to commit oneself to a program of mortification and penance. While such religious sentiments do indeed correspond with much of the theology that surrounds this liturgical season, they do not flow from the message found in the Sunday readings of the Lectionary. A careful look at those readings shows that, with the exception of the selection of the passion which is read on Palm Sunday, the suffering of Jesus is not the focus of the readings. These Sunday readings certainly can be understood from the perspective of Jesus' passion and death. However, when we read them in this way, we are interpreting them from a context that originates from outside of the liturgical readings themselves.

If we consider the Sunday readings from within their new liturgical context rather than from their original biblical literary context, one theme surfaces again and again. That theme is the graciousness of God despite our sinfulness. A careful reading will show that, without in any way minimizing the heinousness of human sinfulness, the readings really concentrate on divine graciousness. In fact, human sinfulness actually serves to emphasize that graciousness. With the exception of the readings for Palm Sunday, which prepare us for the drama that will unfold during Holy Week, the readings do not even mention the suffering and death of Jesus.

The first readings provide a sketch of the goodness of God. This begins on the 1st Sunday with creation itself. Despite divine graciousness, the first humans sinned. The first readings for the next four Sundays give examples of God's loving providence in the face of human sinfulness. Abram is chosen by God to be both the beneficiary of God's blessing and the agent of blessing for others. God's graciousness is evident on the 3rd Sunday where we find those who were brought out of Egypt murmuring against the God who saved them. Despite their ingratitude, God gives them the refreshment that they demand. The anointing of David as king demonstrates God's continued care for this people. Finally, on the 5th Sunday we read that God promises to re-create the people,

to open their graves and fill them with God's own spirit so that they might live. The ultimate example of God's graciousness is seen in the reading for Palm Sunday. There we behold the willingness of the prophetic figure to allow himself to be the object of the hatred of others.

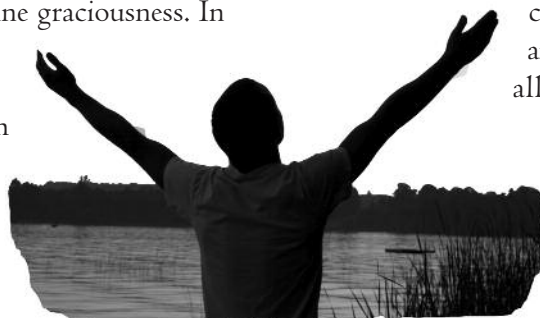
Read together, the Lenten gospels invite us to fix our attention on some aspect of the personality of Jesus. His temptation in the wilderness shows that he himself exerted definite power over the devil. His transfiguration in the company of Moses and Elijah situates him squarely within the major traditions of the Jewish people. During his encounter with the woman of Samaria he revealed himself as the messiah. After he gave sight to the man born blind, he revealed himself as the Son of Man. Finally, at the raising of Lazarus from the dead, he revealed himself as the resurrection and the life. When one reads these stories of the extraordinary nature and miraculous power of Jesus, the account of his passion takes on a very different character. Such reading shows that Jesus was not a powerless victim of treachery or

circumstances. Instead, his suffering and death occurred only because he allowed them to happen. This is precisely the message we find in the passion narrated on Palm Sunday.

Turning now to the Epistle selections, we see very clearly the major Lenten theme mentioned above: the unconditional love that

God has for us as demonstrated in the salvation won for us by Christ. In these readings we are assured that sin cannot impede grace. Rather, the obedience of Jesus has made even sinners righteous (1st Sunday). We are told that God saved us and called us to a life of holiness, and we received this grace through Christ Jesus (2nd Sunday).

Our thoughts next move from the righteousness of Jesus to the love of God that is poured out into our hearts (3rd Sunday). We also see that it is because of Jesus that we can live as children of light (4th Sunday). We are comforted by the news that all of this will be accomplished by the Spirit who dwells within us (5th Sunday). These readings clearly point to divine graciousness as a major theme of the season. Finally, as



This mosaic of readings shows that Lent is a time to consider the graciousness of God toward us despite our own sinfulness. Only after we are seared by the fire of divine love will any kind of penance be seen in its proper light.

with all of the other readings for Palm Sunday, the Epistle selection rivets our attention on Jesus. There the way he humbled himself is offered to us as the model for our own behavior.

This mosaic of readings shows that Lent is a time to consider the graciousness of God toward us despite our own sinfulness. It begins with examples of this goodness evident at various times in the history of the chosen people. It finds its culmination in the blessings won for us by Christ Jesus. Without denying our infidelity, we are invited to contemplate God. Only after we are seared by the fire of divine love will any kind of penance be seen in its proper light. Finally, the passion of Jesus is presented

as the freely given gift of himself for the salvation of all. With this general theme as the primary focus of our Lenten consideration, we can then look at the readings assigned for each individual Sunday in order to discover the particular way divine graciousness is found there. Perhaps our responses to those readings—“Thanks be to God,” “Praise be to you, Lord Jesus Christ”—will take on new meaning. 🌹

Sr. Dianne Bergant is Professor of Old Testament Studies at CTU and a long-time friend of the Precious Blood Community.

Los Angeles, continued from page 7...

conducts novena prayer services following the funeral. She is part of the leadership team of the Precious Blood Prayer Group.

Patricio came to Los Angeles over 30 years ago with his wife and small children. He had participated in Pastoral Ministry training in Mexico. He has played the guitar since childhood. In the mid 80s he organized an Hispanic folk choir, “El Coro Alfa y Omega.” Since he has a beautiful voice, people began attending the mass at which his choir played. When the charismatic prayer group was organized in the mid 80s his choir volunteered to play for the prayer meeting every week for two hours. When retreats were held they played for the entire two day weekend retreat. He now leads two choirs which play at two of the five Spanish masses every Sunday. Over the years he has composed many songs, most of which are biblically based. In this regard he has composed over 10 songs devoted to the Precious Blood. He also composed a hymn to St. Agnes which we use every year for the Feast of St. Agnes—which we are celebrating this year on the third Sunday of January with a big parish fiesta. These songs have very catchy rhythms and are easily learned by the congregation. He is the main musician-cantor for all of our weddings, funerals and quinceaneras. In addition, he is a very competent preacher and preaches at the Wednesday night prayer meetings as well as at retreats.



Patricio Villavazo and Coro Alfa y Omega during the annual Parish Concert.

Orinio was born in Los Angeles to a Filipina mother and an Afro-American father over 60 years ago. He attended St. Agnes grade school and high school. After graduating from college he became a primary school teacher for the Los Angeles Unified School District. When Fr. C.J. Farabaugh began community organizing efforts in the early 80s, Orinio became one of the leaders. He organized parishioners for campaigns to diminish the number of liquor stores in the community, raise the minimum wage, build a supermarket across the street from the church, formulate an anti-gang strategy called “Hope in Youth” and many other actions over the years. He is one of the leaders of ONE L.A.-IAF, the community-based organization now active in St. Agnes. He relates very well to the immigrant community as well as to those who were born in the U.S. He is also the leader of the choir for the English Mass on Sundays.

In the multicultural community of St. Agnes all are welcome. We seek out the gifts and talents people have and empower people to use those talents to build up our local community and better their own lives and the lives of their families. By sharing stories with one another we get to know one another better and discover the gifts that are present in this diverse community. It is constantly obvious that our people have been deeply affected by the natural disasters and human-made tragedies that occur in their native lands. Their response to these tragedies is a real witness to what it means to live the spirituality of the Precious Blood. We seek to make real the words of Paul to the Ephesians, “But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have become near by the blood of Christ.” 🌹

Vocations Office

As the newest member of the Vocations Office, allow me to introduce myself. I am a farm girl, born and raised in rural Monroe County, Iowa. My home parish is St. Patrick's Church at Georgetown, Iowa. The majority of the time you will find me next door in my ministry position at St. Mary's Church in Albia.

After college, I worked several years as a legal secretary during the day to afford "my passion," which was parish ministry (done at all other hours of the day, night and weekend). There finally came a point when I began to juggle three ministry positions to make this my fulltime career. In addition, several years ago I realized that "my passion" was actually a "calling" about which I felt "passionate"! I have a pastoral theology certificate from Creighton University and have completed the Lay Ministry Program for the Diocese of Davenport.

My vocation has been that of the single life, and I now feel that God directed me in this way of life so that

NEW TEAM MEMBER

Sharon Crall

I might have a large extended family in my church family.

My favorite activities outside of ministry involve my ten nieces and nephews, friends, gardening, reading, and my Irish heritage.

I acquired another passion about fifteen years ago. My Precious Blood story begins with the influence of Marie Trout, who was a neighboring religious education director in Centerville, Iowa. As we shared the joys and challenges of ministry, she also shared her experience of being a Precious Blood Companion. Later, Fr. Joseph Nassal preached a mission for the parishes of Albia and Georgetown, and I began to enjoy his writings. I became acquainted with Fr. Al Ebach as pastor of Centerville, and then with his successor, Fr. Joe Miller. When Fr. Miller was appointed Dean of our regional area, I served as Deanery Council Secretary for seven years.

Through these associations I learned much about the Society of the Precious Blood and their charism. It seemed only natural then for me to accept the invitation to become a Precious Blood Companion, extended to me by our first C.P.P.S. pastor at Albia, Fr. Bill Walter. I try to live out that privilege every day of my life. I am



Continued page 11...

Fr. Joe Bathke and I have been preparing for our trip to Viet Nam in February. We leave on Thursday, February 7, and will be there for two weeks, walking with our candidates about half the time as we lead them on retreat—and half of the time sight seeing!

The one thing I have not done yet is pack, but I am trying to find out what I should take. It will be different from when I packed to go home to Ohio last December. I drove to Ohio, and it did not take me long to pack since I had a car and plenty of room. I seem to always take extras, things I "might" need, just because I have the room in the car. I usually always take extra baggage home when I drive.

Well, going to Viet Nam will be different. I need to look at what I need and see how little I can take without having extra baggage. We leave the day after Ash Wednesday. As I was thinking of taking no extra baggage, I thought of Lent and how it is a good season to look at the extra baggage we carry around weighing down our lives every day.

EXTRA BAGGAGE

Joe Miller, C.P.P.S.

I ask myself: what extra baggage am I carrying that gets in the way of my living out my vocation as God calls me to live it out? I see Lent as a great time for all of us to try to deal with the extra baggage that we are carrying. At times that baggage, whether that be hurts, anger, grudges, resentment, pride, greed, selfishness, lust, an addiction, or whatever gets in the way of us seeing our vocation or living it out as we are called to do.

May this Lent be a time for all of us to leave behind our extra baggage. I leave us with a challenge to look within ourselves to see what we are carrying. Let us pray for each other as we journey this Lenten season so that each one of us can live more fully our vocation and be an example and source of encouragement to one another and all who see us.

Thank you for your prayers and support as Fr. Joe Bathke and I leave for our adventure in Viet Nam. It is new and exciting for us and for our province. 🌸

LIFE AT CTU

Mark Yates

My first semester at Catholic Theological Union is completed. It has been a challenging and a rewarding time for me in the midst of the adjustment of moving to Chicago.



It was challenging in having to relearn theological terminology that I had not used or had forgotten in the last twenty years. The course readings and papers were also demanding.

It was rewarding in that I was able to reflect on some of my past experiences theologically—learning to find meaning in experience through the lens of my religious heritage. We all “do” theology, even though we may not use the terminology, and this semester has helped me to understand that and to apply it.

Adjusting to the noise and rushed pace of Chicago has taken some time getting used to; I am not sure I have completely adjusted. It is much different than my experiences of living in Chama, NM or even my year of Special Formation at St. Francis Xavier in St. Joseph, MO. Our formation house is about a mile from CTU and hardly a day goes by, for example, that someone does not ask for money when I am walking to or from school.

At the house, we all share the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning and leading prayer. Each of us cooks two to three times a month; we are each assigned an area of the house to keep clean; and we lead morning prayer and read at Mass two to three times monthly.

Each Thursday is Community Night, which includes discussion of different topics about community and spirituality. The 2nd Thursday of the month is a gathering of members from various men’s religious communities, a time for prayer and conversation and discussion. Some topics discussed this past semester were stress, charisms, transitioning into community living, generational issues in community, and statistics on vocations and church attendance—and an Advent Penance service.

Steve Heckadon and I also met with Fr. Joe Bathke several times this past semester. On two of those occasions, we discussed the Provincial Statutes. Fr. Bill Hubmann joined Fr. Joe, Steve and I for an early Christmas dinner in December.

Thank you for your prayers and know that we are also praying for you: members, companions, benefactors, friends and family members. 🌹

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currently the Convener of the Albia Companions under the direction of our pastor, Fr. Mike Volkmer. My life and spirituality have been truly enhanced by meeting and developing friendships with Precious Blood members and companions. My Precious Blood spirituality has seen me through many family and ministry joys and struggles.

Now my journey continues with a new role as a member of the Vocations Office. I see this in part as an opportunity to give back to the Society of the Precious Blood some of what I have received as a spiritual gift from them. I will be on site at Precious Blood Center about twice monthly, while working on projects at home and traveling to meetings and retreats when necessary.

The Vocations Office is now building on the leadership of the past. I find myself working with Fr. Joe Miller again, and together we work with Fr. Joe Bathke, Province Formation Director, and the Provincial Leadership Team—with hope in the future, dreaming and creating about how to best serve the Church and our Community. We are a work in progress. I ask for your prayers and support as we seek to meet the challenges, and urge you to help us bring about hope and promise in vocation work for our Province. 🌹

Updated HDF (Human Development Fund) forms are now available. Please let your organization(s) know they are to contact Fr. Al Ebach directly to be mailed a form. The new due date is April 1, 2008.

WE COMMEND TO GOD

+Jim Charron, uncle of Br. Daryl Charron and brother to Bishop Joe Charron.

+Fr. Clement Kuhns, C.P.P.S., of the Cincinnati Province.

+Bill Schrader, brother of Fr. Jim Schrader.

MY BACK PAGES *Richard Bayuk, C.P.P.S.*

Two hunters hired a bush pilot to fly them to a remote lake in the Alaskan wilderness. The pilot arranged to meet them a week later at the same spot to bring them out—and the hunters were dutifully waiting when he returned at the designated time. The first thing the pilot saw when he taxied to the shore was the two large moose that the hunters had bagged. “There’s no way I can carry both those animals out of here in this plane,” he said. But the hunters protested, asserting loudly that the pilot they had the year before was willing to do it. “Ok,” he relented, “tie one to each of the pontoons.”

They all climbed aboard, the plane went to the downwind end of the lake, firewalled it, and finally lifted off just at the far shore. It struggled to climb, but the terrain rose faster. They went into the trees about two minutes into the flight. When the noise quieted down and the two hunters emerged in a daze from the wreckage, one said to the other, “Do you have any idea where we are?” The other replied, “It looks like we’re about 500 feet from where we crashed last year.”

This year the season of Lent comes only 5 short weeks after New Year’s Day. For many people, both are embraced as an opportunity to begin again, to make resolutions which will lead to desired changes. For some of us, Ash Wednesday is quite timely, because we find ourselves walking around the wreckage of our resolutions and best intentions of January 1st, and perhaps wondering why the landscape looks so familiar. Oh, that’s right, I’ve been here before!

A number of authors in this issue speak about change in some form. We are all experts in this area, of course, since we really do know deep down how it comes about.

As much as we would like to believe it’s possible to have a perfect body by responding to the 2 a.m. infomercial, to achieve spiritual perfection through the latest self-help book, or to bring about political utopia by electing the right person, we are aware that real change doesn’t occur until we alter the basic patterns, attitudes, behaviors and responses which continue to bring us the same disappointing results. The plane simply cannot fly with both moose strapped to the pontoons.

All change is resisted by the entrenched powers that are threatened by it. Often that power is within us; we have a theological name for it: sin. It’s a part of us that doesn’t want to relinquish control—and it’s no different from what pushes back at a politician coming to Washington with new ideas, or at those who are perceived as a threat to religious establishments because of a desire for change and renewal.

Gandhi said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” It starts with us—but it cannot end there. To paraphrase, “Be the change you want to see in your family, your community, your country, and yes, yourself.” It can’t only be about trying to change others, the government, the church, the community. (As someone once noted, “The only time anyone changed me was when I wore diapers.”) Leave the second moose behind this time. It’s the only way to make it back home without a long walk in the wilderness. 🍷

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