

THE New Wine PRESS

Volume 27 No. 3 • November 2018





Let us serve God with holy joy.

-St. Gaspar del Bufalo, founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood

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Cover photo: MERLAP IV participants at Giano, Italy

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

Missionaries of the Precious Blood
Kansas City Province

Precious Blood Center
P.O. Box 339
Liberty, MO 64069-0339
816.781.4344
www.preciousbloodkc.org

Editor
Richard Bayuk, C.P.P.S.
rbayukcpps@mac.com

Layout & Design
Margaret Haik
communications@preciousbloodkc.org

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Won't You Be My Neighbor?

by Fr. Richard Bayuk, C.P.P.S., Editor

It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood, A beautiful day for a neighbor. Would you be mine?

Could you be mine? I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you. I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you. Please won't you be my neighbor? –Mr. Roger's Neighborhood

The 2018 documentary “Won't You Be My Neighbor” is an intimate look at the life, legacy, and guiding philosophy of Fred Rogers, the host and creator of the long-running (1968-2001), influential, and well-liked children's program, “Mr. Roger's Neighborhood.” One reviewer described it as “an emotional and moving film [that] takes us beyond the zip-up cardigans and the land of make-believe, and into the heart of a creative genius who inspired generations of children with compassion and limitless imagination.”

“Mr. Roger's Neighborhood” was a quiet celebration of humanity, diversity, equality, compassion, family, and decency—and being neighbors to one another. Our politics and public discourse, on the other hand, seem to have gone toxic and, as one commentator put it, “the culture seems to have congealed into a permanent state of outrage, vulgarity, and mutual intolerance.” Watching this movie feels like being wrapped in a security blanket of empathy and kindness, while listening to an appeal for civility.

What did being a neighbor mean for Mr. Rogers? In the premier episode of the show, the leader of the Neighborhood of Make-Believe—a “benevolent monarch” named King Friday XIII—announces a plan to build a wall around his kingdom to keep out the “undesirables” and the “changers.” In a later—and influential—episode, Mr. Rogers is soaking his feet in a small basin of water on a hot day and invites recurring character Officer Clemmons, who is African-American, to join him (this at a time of segregated swimming pools in parts of the U.S.). “I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you,” Mr. Rogers sings as they sit side by side.

His last show aired several months before 9-11. When later called upon to speak about the attacks, Fred Rogers was—according to his wife Joanne—filled with doubt that despite his efforts, the world seemed not to have heard a word he had said for the past 30 years. And yet, this was his message: “No matter what our particular job, especially in our world today, we are all called to be *tikkun olam*, ‘repairers of creation.’ Thank you for whatever you do, wherever you are, to bring joy and light and hope and faith and pardon and love to your neighbor and to yourself.”

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What Images Are Guiding Our Conversations?

by Fr. Mark Miller, C.P.P.S., Provincial Councilor

The question continues to be asked, “What might this new creation look like?” Of course, if we knew the answer we could stop talking to one another and simply implement what has been decided. However, we are not yet at that point. But what might be some criteria to move us to that illusive answer?

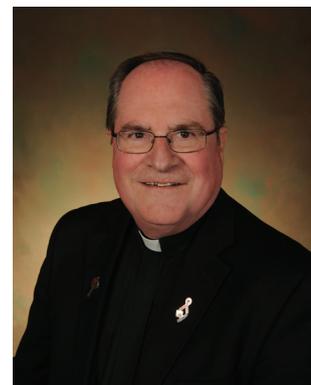
The question has often been asked, “What would Gaspar do if he were living today?” Assuming that he would be consistent with what he did in the past, it seems to me he would be reflecting upon areas such as: who are the “bandits” of today? No longer are people refusing to serve in the military but there are many who are trying to escape the horrors of dictator governments and death squads. Who are the ones who have been shut out, pushed down, walked over, or relegated to the edges of society? Who are the ones who are living in the caves, under the bridges, in abandoned buildings in our cities, in our prisons? Who are the ones who need to hear a message of hope and of dignity? Who are the ones who need to hear a message of inclusivity and of acceptance?

I am reminded of the summer I spent in Detroit living in the rectory of St. Anthony parish. Our whole class went there while in theology to minister as tutors in the public schools in the area or to work in the youth center. It was the first time I smelled marijuana. No, I didn’t smoke it or inhale, but the youth director wanted us to be able to detect it in case it was in the youth center. Here we were, living in community, but ministering to those whom others wanted to relegate to the edges of society. Even though most of us saw it as more of an adventure at the time, it was indeed a faithful response to what Gaspar would have done. Are we still in ministries that would parallel that experience in Detroit?

Another image that might help us move to the new creation is: “With whom do we stand?” Are we willing to stand with the undocumented, with those who belong to the LGBTQ community, the imprisoned on death row, those who are living with AIDS, or those suffering from mental illness who feel all alone? There are reasons why the number of suicides is increasing in our day. Too many people, young and old, feel they have reached the end of their rope, and instead of tying a knot and hanging on they turn it into a noose of one kind or another. With whom do we stand? With whom would Gaspar stand if he were living today?

Our spirituality calls us to express its universality within our ministries. Those of us who minister in parishes know how difficult it

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Father Thomas Albers, C.P.P.S. May 4, 1940 – September 30, 2018

Funeral Homily, October 4, 2018

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

Servant Leadership

In 1970, Robert Greenleaf published an essay called, “The Servant as Leader.” It was not a new concept—Jesus taught his disciples about servant leadership often in the gospels and modeled it clearly on the night before he died when he washed the feet of his disciples—but Greenleaf introduced the idea into the corporate world because he believed that “large institutions were not doing a good job of serving individuals or the larger society.” In his essay, which later became a series of books, he proposed “that the best leaders were servants first” who through their gifts of listening, intuition, and persuasion, focus “primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong.”

The test of a good servant leader, Greenleaf said, is to ask, “Do those served grow as persons? Do they become healthier, wiser, freer, and more likely themselves to become servants?” By this measure, I would propose that Fr. Tom Albers was a great servant leader. Fr. Tom had what Greenleaf describes as “the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first.”

One of my first memories of Tom’s gifts for servant leadership, and especially his ability to listen and his persuasive personality, was when he invited me to lunch a couple of months after he was elected provincial. He asked me to consider becoming director of formation for the province. At the time, I was very happy in Sedalia and wanted to resist the invitation. But Tom listened intently as we shared a vision for the future of our formation of members and expanding the circle of our belonging that included what has become our Companions movement—and it was difficult to say no.

As provincial, Fr. Tom was collaborative, compassionate, and creative—the very definition of the servant leader who, in Greenleaf’s words, “shares power, puts the needs of others first,” and helps people grow in their potential to be servant leaders. He certainly helped me those eight years I worked with



him on the council. Though we didn’t always agree, Tom listened and all of us on the council felt heard.

A Listening Heart

The qualities of servant leadership that Fr. Tom embraced in his life are reflected in the familiar gospel of Jesus encountering the two distraught disciples on the road to Emmaus. Notice how Jesus “drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.” As he accompanies them, Jesus asks them what they are discussing, and the disciples stop in their tracks. They are startled that he had not heard the news. One of them says, “Are you the only person in Jerusalem who does not know of the things that took place in Jerusalem?” I can imagine the other saying, “Where have you been—in a cave all weekend?” And Jesus replying, “Well, as a matter of fact, that’s exactly where I’ve been.”

But Jesus listened to their pain, their confusion, their doubts, and their fears. And then, he breaks open for them the stories that shaped their lives of faith. Something begins to stir within them and as they reach their destination, they urge Jesus, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.”

This story captures a spirituality of accompaniment that is so essential for servant leaders. Fr. Tom attuned the ear of his heart in his many years as a hospital chaplain in Chicago. He listened to the anxieties and fears of patients facing life-threatening health issues, and the sighs and cries of relatives and friends whose loved ones’ lives hung in the balance. He ministered

with doctors, nurses, hospital staff, and other chaplains. Indeed, his skills as servant leader led to his election as president of the National Catholic Hospital Chaplains' Association in the 1970s.

Later, his listening heart served him well as provincial, pastor, and preacher. Tom loved to study Scripture, to break open the Word with parishioners and community members, to listen to the stories of those with whom he journeyed, and then to preach with passion that connected the people in the pew. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?"

On the road to Emmaus, the ears and hearts of the disciples were burning as Jesus broke open the word. But it wasn't until they sat down at table with Jesus that their eyes were opened when Jesus "took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them." This ritual of remembrance, of memory and hope, which he celebrated with his friends on the night before he died, we celebrate at every Eucharist and it captures the essence of what priesthood meant to Tom.

For 51 years as a priest, Fr. Tom loved the Eucharist and presided with great dignity and devotion. He loved to sing the Eucharistic prayers, and in this mingling of melody and memory—whether it was with five around that table at the college formation house at Rockhurst University or five hundred around the altars at St. James, Sacred Heart or St. Patrick—Tom prayerfully served all who gathered around the table.

A New Creation Groaning

As we commend Fr. Tom to the Lord today, we do so with gratitude to God for the many gifts the Divine One bestowed on him in this life, starting with his family, his parents, his beloved sister, Janet, and his nieces Kay, Chris, and Susan. We are grateful to you for sharing your brother and uncle with the Missionaries of the Precious Blood all these years. Tom's identity as priest and missionary was shaped first in the faith and love of his family.

St. Paul in his letter to the Romans reminds us today of our true identity: "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." As God's children, we form a family of faith who seek to live in a holy communion with one another and all of creation. As

our congregation is engaged in the process of becoming a new creation in the United States and throughout the world as we seek to respond to the signs of these times—a process Tom was keenly interested in and offered his ideas and insights to me several times—we are aware, as Paul says, that this new creation will not happen without significant labor pains.

This theme of identity was the focus of the eight years Tom served as provincial of the Kansas City Province in the late 1980s through the mid-1990s. For our community's bicentennial three years ago, which was also the 50th anniversary of the provinces in the United States, Tom reflected on those years. "A continuing theme for the membership revolved around identity, a theme common to religious orders following a call to renewal of religious life," he wrote. "For that purpose, the province called an Assembly every year, instead of every other year as previously practiced. Themes of the Assemblies generally centered around identity issues."

An annual Assembly to strengthen the bonds of our community life was just one of the many new initiatives that planted the seeds of the new creation we are seeking to become today. During Tom's tenure as servant leader,

the Companions movement began with our Moderator General, Fr. Bill Nordenbrock, as the first director. "This has proved to be a major factor in reassessing our



Fr. Tom at the 2012 Provincial Assembly

identity," Father Tom wrote. More than 25 years later, the Companions are actively engaged in the life of our community in becoming a new creation.

Among the other lasting legacies that occurred with Tom's unwavering support as provincial was the ongoing development and deepening of our understanding of Precious Blood spirituality through various publications like the *New Wine Press* and the *Wine Cellar*; the Precious Blood Congresses that brought together members, Companions, and

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associates from women's and men's communities who claim the name and charism of the Precious Blood; and a spirit of collaboration with these communities that led to the founding of the Precious Blood Leadership Conference.

During Tom's tenure as servant leader we started the Human Development Fund to tithe our ordinary income to support programs engaged in justice issues, and, in Tom's words, "dedicated our center to providing sanctuary for undocumented people and refugees who needed it."

Even in the last few years when his body began to fail, his spirit for community and our ongoing renewal never did. Just three months ago when I was here for the feast day celebration, I had a long visit with Tom and he was asking about the progress of the new creation. He loved his family, he loved the community, he loved the church, he loved being a priest. Whether it was betting on the ponies or playing poker or just sitting on the porch in the quiet of an evening, he enjoyed being with those he loved.

So, I can hear Tom whisper to us today as he echoes the words of St. Paul, "I consider the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God." Though Tom suffered greatly these last couple of years and especially these past few months, he is now whole as his wait is over for what Paul called "the redemption of our bodies."

As the book of Wisdom reminds today, "The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them." Rest in peace, friend, brother, uncle, Missionary of the Precious Blood, priest, and servant leader. "As gold in the furnace," God proved you. In the time of your visitation, you shined. For you trusted that God's promises would be fulfilled "and the faithful shall abide with God in love."

Enjoy the fullness of the new creation, Tom, and from your new vantage point, intercede for us and give us the courage, compassion, and commitment we need to become a new creation in the Risen Christ. ✠

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The question "What would Mr. Rogers do and say about what is happening today?" is posed to several people at the end of the movie. His wife says, "I think he would be trying to mend—mend the split. He would be trying to find some way to find something positive." But the final response is: "What would Fred Rogers do?" is not a question that you can answer. The most important question is, "What are you going to do?" ✠

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is to speak a message of justice in our world today. Our news commentators have a greater effect upon many of our parishioners than does the Sunday Gospel. Trying to connect the Gospel message to what is being reported these days is no small task, and when done, we can usually expect some type of "push-back." It is not uncommon for people to object to our interpretation of the Scriptures if it seems to contradict what they heard on one of the TV or radio stations. (This is one reason why I write out my homilies these days, so I can document what I said in a homily.) How might we help our parishioners know that who we used to think of as the minority are soon becoming the majority? The tables are beginning to be turned up-side-down and how will that affect our ministries?

Bob Dylan wrote a song in the 1960s entitled "The Times They Are A-Changin'." Well, our times are a-changing more quickly than we would like. We are called to respond. But is our response one of "circling the wagons" or are we open to view reality in this new context? The conversations we are having about the new creation hopefully will open our minds and hearts to new expressions of our spirituality and community life within our ministries. From what I have observed and heard, there are some life-giving conversations taking place and new possibilities are being considered. Our community came to this country to minister to the German immigrants. Perhaps Gaspar and Maria are calling us to a new expression of responding to those who speak a different language, hold a different cultural perspective, and have lived stories that do not connect with what has been our past experience. How might we be called to converse with others who have come to the "well" to satisfy their thirst? ✠



MERLAP IV participants

What an Adventure!

by John Hess, Dayton, Ohio Companion

What an adventure! Companion group, I was asked to be a delegate to MERLAP IV. This gave my wife Rita—also a Companion—and our son Matt the opportunity to travel with the other delegates to Rome. We arrived in Rome a few days before the start of MERLAP so we could do some sightseeing. From the airport, we dropped our luggage at the hotel and headed to St. Peter's Square. St. Peter's Basilica was just an amazing place with its grand size, architecture, statues, and marble work. Even though the crowds were large and the lines long, once you entered the Basilica it was a peaceful and prayer-filled atmosphere. Over the next several days we visited the Colosseum, Pantheon, St. John

Lateran, St. Paul Outside the Walls, and St. Mary Major. What an exciting opportunity to travel as a family to the four major Basilicas in Rome. The buildings were all beautiful and overwhelming in size and there were so many mosaics and frescoes to take in.

MERLAP IV was held at a lovely hotel called Casa La Salle. It was a convenient ten-minute walk from the Metro. Each morning started with Mass at 7:30 in the chapel. Each province or mission took a turn presiding at Mass, so it was usually a combination of English and Spanish. There was also bilingual

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evening prayer before dinner. This was an enriching experience as it allowed us to hear liturgy and music from other cultures. During the week, we shared our meals in the hotel restaurant. The food was very good, and the conversation was lively. It was interesting to hear how other lay associate programs were formed, how they live their Precious Blood spirituality, and the types of mission work they share in response to the cry of the blood.

The first two days of the meetings were spent listening to reports from the different provinces, missions, and vicariates around the world. Information was shared about the history, organizational structure, and relationship between the lay associates and the C.P.P.S. members. There is a wide variety of activities among the lay associate groups. Precious Blood spirituality activities include reaching out to the marginalized, prayer, retreats, adoration, and parish ministry.

In the middle of the week, the group boarded two buses to make a pilgrimage to San Felice, the first mission house of St. Gaspar. The two-hour bus ride gave us the opportunity to see and enjoy the countryside of Italy. We saw many fields of sunflowers and numerous olive groves. We celebrated the Eucharist at San Felice. It was spiritually moving to celebrate Mass where St. Gaspar founded the congregation. We then shared a traditional Italian lunch. It was delicious, and after several hours we were fed both spiritually and physically.

The last two days of meetings were full of small and large group discussions. One day was spent on developing a profile of a lay associate. The next day was focused on defining elements of a lay associate program. This was done by breaking into small groups to discuss the characteristics of a lay associate and the structure of its program. The information from the small groups was combined to define the profile and the elements of a lay associate program.

On our final day in Rome, we traveled by Metro with the delegation to the Chapel of San Giuseppe where the Relic of the Precious Blood was displayed. This was a privilege and rare opportunity to venerate this relic. Then we walked to Santa Maria in Trivio where we were able to pray and reflect at

the tomb of Saint Gaspar. We continued on by foot to San Nicola in Carcere which is the birthplace of the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. The MERLAP IV group celebrated Eucharist and this concluded our pilgrimage.

What an amazing trip to share with my wife and son. The places we experienced helped to strengthen our faith and our Precious Blood spirituality. MERLAP IV was something that I will never forget—all these lay associates from around the world whose programs may look different but the end result is the same. Precious Blood lay associates serve God, minister to those on the margins, and spread Precious Blood spirituality—all led by St. Gaspar's example. †

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MERLAP IV Participants

Storytelling

by Kathy Mescher, Celina, Ohio Companion

Storytelling is one of the most essential and best-loved of human traditions. Telling stories is enjoyable. Who hasn't sat with a favorite aunt or uncle, captivated by tales of when our parents were young, or spent time with a group of friends, each sharing tales of their summer adventures? Counselors and spiritual directors know there is also a therapeutic value to storytelling, recognizing it as an important tool with benefits for both the teller and the listener. History is preserved through storytelling; much of human history, including sacred Scripture, was passed down orally long before most people could read or write.

The telling of stories creates strong connections among people as they share personal and spiritual experiences. In her 2014 book, *Speak: How Your*

Story Can Change the World, author Nish Weiseth defines story as “the vulnerable sharing of your life experiences with others. It’s everything that you’ve been through in your life, but more importantly, in a Christian context, it also refers to the ways in which God has worked in and through those experiences.”

There is intimacy in sharing life stories and God stories, and this intimacy creates relationships and forms the basis for community. When we truly listen to another person’s story, and when we feel safe enough to share our own, a bond is formed that draws us to each other. We recognize our commonalities, we appreciate the trials the other has faced and empathize with their pain, and we are willing to put aside points

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of disagreement. This kind of relationship-building is exactly what is required within our community to bring about the new creation of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

The Missionaries and Companions of the Precious Blood are a diverse group. Coming from differing backgrounds, serving in a wide array of ministries and with varying lengths of experience in the community, this group possesses a wealth of stories. The New Creation Commission is a fairly representative cross-section of the wider community, and as a member of the Commission, I consider myself blessed to be part of the story-sharing that flows whenever we gather. Our conversations before, during, and after meetings are rich with both reminiscences and recent stories about each one's personal experiences with the C.P.P.S., about our shared call to respond to the cry of the blood, and about the many different forms that response has taken. Those with a longer history in the community share remembrances of the priests and brothers who influenced their lives and who are long gone, and they relate their experiences of change in the community over the years, from one American province to three, then to two. Like many stories, these personal recollections of community history contain both joy and pain. In the stories told by younger commission members, lines between the provinces have become blurred or nonexistent, as they tell of their common formation experience and of many ministries shared between the provinces.

Through these conversations, Commission members have formed close bonds, appreciating each other's strengths while acknowledging our differences. In this experience, we recognized that the telling of stories would be a crucial part of the new creation and that we should get people talking to each other. Every person in the C.P.P.S. family—priest, brother or Companion—has a personal story of how they came to be associated with the community and how Precious Blood spirituality has influenced their life. By sharing these experiences with someone from the next city or on the other side of the country, we discover how our stories complement each other, and the physical and the psychological distance between us is diminished.

The process of connecting people is underway. At the Provincial Assemblies in the spring, the

new creation process was kicked off when those in attendance had the opportunity to express hopes and fears and dreams. Participants spoke of their own experiences and about how they imagine building a new future together as one province. As a follow up to the assemblies, the provincial directors in July invited everyone to continue the conversation in an activity that reached across geographical, cultural, generational, and historical boundaries to let people share their stories. In this outreach activity, everyone was asked to contact other members or Companions whom they may have never met or whom they had not seen in a long time. There were no stipulated instructions for the visits and no one was required to report back. People were just encouraged to share and listen to each other's stories—stories of their ministry, of their experiences with the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, of their hopes and dreams for the future. For some of us this assignment was a stretch beyond our comfort zones, but we were rewarded with new or renewed relationships. If you haven't made contact yet, it's not too late to reach out and build another connection that will enrich the Precious Blood family.

This telling of our stories continues in gatherings around the country from October through February. This year's Companion retreats are planned for members as well, with the hope that everyone in the Community will be able to attend one of the get-togethers and spend time in conversation with others in the C.P.P.S. family. Some of us may meet face to face with our summer contact, and everyone will have the chance to build new relationships.

The new creation of the Precious Blood Community in the United States will be built upon the relationships of all its members, relationships that are in turn built upon our conversations, the telling of our stories, and the sharing of ourselves. The community will be enriched as its members seek out opportunities to share stories with each other. Each person should believe that his or her own story is worth telling and should feel safe in the telling, even as we listen with our heart while others tell theirs. Sharing in this way, we will realize we're not so far apart and our visions for the new creation will begin to coalesce. ✠



Good Samaritan Center in Excelsior Springs, Missouri

Hope for Homeless: Good Samaritan Center

by Denise Murrow, PBRS Director and Martha Buckman, Good Samaritan Center Director

As my journey continues with the ministry of Precious Blood Resource Services (PBRS), I realize how important it is for social service agencies to work side by side with each other to ensure that those in need receive optimal services to lead them to independence and don't fall through the cracks. I reflect on Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." I firmly believe collaboration works and territorialism is an attitude of the past. During my extensive networking with many agencies that provide a multitude of services, I have witnessed dedication to the poor and homeless through admirable collaborative efforts. These agencies not only provide services, but also provide heart and compassion to go with it. One of the agencies PBRS has been blessed to collaborate with is the Good Samaritan Center.

The Good Samaritan Center is located in Excelsior Springs in rural Clay and Ray counties, 30 miles northeast of Kansas City, Missouri. My

first experience with Good Samaritan Center was four years ago when I was an abuse and neglect investigator with the Missouri Division of Senior and Disability Services. I had received a hotline call from Excelsior Springs regarding a homeless man who was missing. As I drove to the call, I wondered how I was going to find a homeless man and help him if he didn't want to be found. My first resource was Good Samaritan Center. I was aware they provided advocacy and assistance to those families and individuals in need.

When I arrived at the center I was greeted by Jennifer Chappell, a very concerned and compassionate caseworker. I observed the staff and volunteers to be dedicated to serving the homeless population, which had become a growing concern in the area. Often people don't realize homelessness exists in rural communities. Jennifer was genuinely worried about the missing man. She showed me the facility and the woods behind the Center where the homeless community

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would often sleep. She educated me on the locations in the city that the homeless would congregate. She also had information on his family. With the information provided to me I was able to locate his family and eventually him. The family re-united and agreed he could stay with them as long as he would accept their support and stay on his medication. There are never any guarantees that these agreements are kept, but I knew that the Good Samaritan Center would be there for him if he needed services.

I am now able to collaborate with the Good Samaritan Center through the ministry of Precious Blood Resource Services. PBRS volunteer and Companion Mary George and volunteer Kathy Wilmes represent PBRS in this new collaboration.

Director Martha Buckman tells the story of The Good Samaritan Center as follows.

Good Samaritan Center began as a response from a single congregation, St. Ann Catholic Church in Excelsior Springs, to assist community members in meeting their food, rent, and utility needs.

Founder Fr. Larry Speichinger recognized that the families coming to the rectory door needed more than a handout. His vision was to have a place where people in need could walk into a compassionate, welcoming site that offered a hand up instead of just a handout. In November of 1986, and with the cooperation of the St. Vincent De Paul Society, Good Samaritan Center was able to open their doors to serve the poor. The group incorporated and received nonprofit status in 1989, allowing the entire community to take ownership in the organization. St. Ann Parish still remains a very strong supporter.

The Excelsior Springs community has a rich history of healing mineral waters and served as a hub for clinics with large boarding houses for people to rent when they would come to this town for treatment. When medical science changed and there was a lack of trust in the springs' health benefits, the town was left with an abundance of low rent housing. The number of low-income people drawn to this housing caused many of the problems that follow families who are struggling to survive each day. Thus was the need for helping the poor.

The original location was on Broadway Street in Excelsior Springs in a small store front, which was a perfect location to serve the poor many who have no transportation. Three years later when the center incorporated, a larger building was purchased just one block away. In a few years, a thrift store was opened to provide financial support to for GSC, and also to offer an inexpensive shopping experience in this low-income neighborhood.

In 1996, property was donated and renovated by volunteers to provide a three-unit apartment building for transitional housing directly behind GSC. This remained one of our programs for about 10 years until our organization made the decision to offer more assistance and case management within our emergency assistance program. I served as director of this program for close to 10 years. Walking so closely with families who are trying to overcome huge barriers, I built relationships that continue to this day. Some clients return to visit, full of pride as they share their accomplishments and occasional setbacks. On my wall hangs a print of the Lion and the Lamb given to me by a client as she was leaving the program.

In 2005, the opportunity arose to purchase an old church and education building, also located on Broadway. This allowed Good Samaritan Center to consolidate all of our programs into one location, and to expand programs and life skill classes, as well as to bring in outside services that were difficult for our clients to access.

From the first day, Good Samaritan Center's spiritual guidance to staff and volunteers has been totally focused on how we serve. To this day, I feel Christ's presence in the building as we strive to welcome all who walk through the doors of Good Samaritan Center. I clearly remember Fr. Larry's advice, "Always look for the face of Christ in every person that walks through our doors; no matter how ugly the person may act."

We continue, with two full-time, seven part-time, and close to 350 volunteer staff to fight homelessness and hunger by providing basic life needs and access to life skills. ✠

Timika: Wrestling with Death and Life

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

This November, Cornelius German—better known as “Cornbread”—would have turned 21, but on April 22, 2013 he was gunned down by a 21-year-old seeking revenge. The gunman later revealed to authorities that he didn’t kill his intended target.



Cornelius German's shoes

Cornbread.” She ran to the site and fell to the ground. “Yes, my baby...gym shoes and jacket...yes, my baby... dead!” Later, witnesses told her that his last words were, “Call my mama!” And she wept.

As she stood there for three hours while police searched the scene, she told of her wrestling with death, with God. Reflecting over her life, she suddenly felt a lifting of her heaviness as if Cornbread was taking her pain, her past, with him. Her life changed in this darkest of moments; she seemed to feel a resurrection, a real God moment. Three weeks later she was baptized at her church and she has not looked back, despite the ongoing challenges of life.

A year after Cornbread was killed, Timika’s sister died. Sometime later, her older son was incarcerated and then her husband Ron struggled for over a year with health issues. Timika did not allow this struggle to disrupt her faithfulness to her new way of living. She continued going to work each day and then to the hospital to be with her husband. On Tuesday, October 9, 2014 Timika called, asking if I could

take her to the hospital. The hospital had called and told her that Ron had suffered a major stroke. As she sat by his bedside weeping, she still looked for hope, but there was none. “I have to let go again”, she whispered, “and let God be God.”

On the way home, I realized how privileged I was to witness such love, strength, and acceptance of God’s plans. Timika is an inspiration to me and others; she does not run away from tragedy but holds her brokenness and lets it do its work: transformation.

Timika is very active in our Mothers programs, especially our monthly healing circles. No matter what she is going through, she can lift the pain of the mother who has just lost a child or have all the mothers doubled over with laughter as she pulls her wig off and shouts, “Halleluiah for wigs!”

The Mission Statement of the Sisters of the Precious Blood includes the phrase, “Be a life-giving presence in a broken world.” Every day I pray that I can be that for our mothers traumatized by the world around them—fearing for the life of their children, struggling with bills, searching for affordable housing, or just needing a bus pass to get to work. They tell of how these killings are dividing their families as they grieve their losses; they come to PBMR for healing, for peace.

PBMR is a home for so many—a place to feel safe, to feel love and acceptance, a place to call when trauma strikes home. PBMR gives each of us opportunities to witness the Paschal Mystery of dying and rising. As Timika so often says, “It took my Cornbread’s death to bring me to life, for I was so lost—and in ways, so dead—but Cornbread’s resurrection gave me resurrection.”

As we reflect on Timika’s story, all of us will continue to wrestle with God and with death and life, but let us stand strong, let go, and let God be God. ✠

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