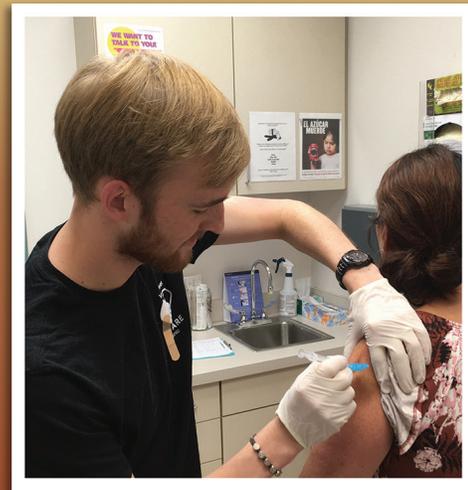


# THE **New Wine** PRESS

Volume 28 No. 6 • February 2020



**Grow in your faith.  
Build community.  
Walk with those who suffer.  
Seek reconciliation.**



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# THE New Wine PRESS

Volume 28 No. 6 • February 2020

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*Front cover image: Tip-off for a game at YYI at St. Michael's in Chicago*

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

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## What Will Your Legacy Be?

by Margaret Haik, Director of Communications

On January 26<sup>th</sup>, retired LA Lakers basketball phenom Kobe Bryant, his 13-year old daughter, and seven other people died in a helicopter crash in California. As the media covers this sad event, they continue to talk about Bryant's legacy. It is mostly good: a prodigious athlete, humanitarian, dedicated father, mentor to many young people. He also had negatives to overcome, namely a period of time when he was unfaithful to his marriage. A devoted Catholic, he appeared to work to overcome that and other struggles, adding to the legacy of a man who tried to not only do well, but to do good.

It is coincidental that Fr. Daniel Torson, C.P.P.S. sent us an article this month written by Michael Fedoruk that focused on basketball as a ministry. Michael is the director and Fr. Dan is on the board of Yards Youth Initiative at St. Michael's in the Back of the Yards neighborhood of Chicago. YUI was a recipient of the Kansas City Province's Human Development Fund in 2019. The program offers supervised activities to give youth a safe escape from the lure of gang activity in the Southside of Chicago—a worthy legacy for the HDF.

As Volunteer Director Tim Deveney ponders our legacy following this time of darkness in our country, he says, "We should be planting the seeds of peace, mercy, justice, and forgiveness in our homes, our workplaces, our communities, and in our world during the darkest nights."

Precious Blood Volunteers alum and current PBMR staff member Hector Avitia spent part of his Christmas break working along our nation's southern border. While there, Hector saw the effects of our current national administration's Migrant Protection Protocol policy, which has further stymied the efforts of those seeking asylum from violence, political turmoil, and poverty in their home countries. Our country is the land built on immigration. What will the legacy be as a result of this and other discriminatory policies?

Fr. Keith Branson, C.P.P.S. recently led a retreat at St. Charles Center in Ohio. During one of the evenings, he showed the group the movie *Invictus*. Starring Morgan Freeman as Nelson Mandela and Matt Damon as François Pienaar, it is the story of Mandela's beginning as the president of South Africa. He sought to help the country overcome their legacy of Apartheid; one of his strategies was to help the country find a rallying point around

*continued on page 4*

# Change and Something New

by Fr. Garry Richmeier, C.P.P.S., Provincial Director

When discussing the need to change, it is good to be clear on what kind of change we are talking about. Change can be cosmetic, or it can be systemic. It can be a matter of rearranging the furniture in a room, or it can mean taking out walls to create a new arrangement of rooms.

People have coined the terms “First order” and “Second order” change to help distinguish between different levels of change.

First order change tends to be less drastic, easier, and requires less work. It usually means doing more or less of something, making an existing process better or more accurate, and making incremental changes. With first order change, the basic philosophy or world view or goal of the person or organization does not change—only the way they try to reach the goal. This type of change works best when the “problem” to be solved is simple and has a single cause. However, it tends to address symptoms of the problem and its immediate cause, rather than looking at the systemic source of the problem.

Second order change is often described as transformational, revolutionary, or discontinuous. It involves challenging assumptions and seeing the world in a different way. It usually requires new ways of doing things, changing values and goals, and structural changes in organizations. Second order change requires much more work. It is also scarier for most people because it requires much more “letting go” of the familiar and embracing something not so familiar.

An example of first order change in a marital relationship is when one person simply (and reluctantly) changes a behavior that annoys their spouse. Second order change would be changing the behavior *and* understanding and empathizing with the spouse’s desires.

Another example: first order change might be a company which decides to change its plastic packaging material to biodegradable material in order to appeal to public concern. The company hopes this will sell more product and it will make more money. Second order change might be that the company decides to be a more eco-conscious company and changing plastic packaging is simply one of many changes which enables it to become a different kind of company. The company changes, not just the packaging.



*continued on page 4*

### *Leadership, continued from page 3*

As a community, we are considering creating something new. This implies change, but we probably have different ideas of what kind of change we are talking about. Maybe using the concepts of “first order” and “second order” change could help in the discussion. To this end, I offer a few examples which might help clarify the different kinds of change we may or may not be up for.

Regarding vocations, first order change might be finding new ways to publicize, promote, and invite people to join us, as a male, celibate community with Companions. This could mean using more state-of-the-art communication technology, living together in mission houses to better exemplify supportive community, and being more vocal about who we are as a community in general. Second order change might be revisioning who we are as a community which we present to others. It could mean creating new ways to belong, including permanent and temporary belonging. It might also include new ways of making governing decisions together to demonstrate ownership and belonging.

Regarding ministry, first order change could mean making our ministries more inviting, focusing our energy on fewer ministries to help those thrive, and imagining new ways to do our ministries. Second order change would be more like asking people “out there” what we need to be doing to be helpful and life-giving. It might mean working outside “church” ministries and church structure and involving ourselves in ministries that people (especially younger people) see a need for, and which they might more readily join us in doing.

Regarding church, first order change might be making our liturgies more inviting, providing more services in parishes, and doing more evangelization. Second order change might be identifying/celebrating “church” outside our church buildings, inviting people to be “church” with us regardless of their religion, and assuring people that they are the true ministers of God’s grace to each other.

I doubt that first order change (making changes, upgrades, or improvements to what we have been

doing) will get us to a new creation. The “problems” we are trying to solve regarding society and religion and religious life are too complex, have no simple answers, and are not likely to be affected by our making first order changes.

Second order change is really the only way to create something new. But it is much more difficult. To even consider such change, it first takes great faith and trust that the new creation will be good/better. Then it takes much time, energy, imagination, courage, and many resources. If any of these are in short supply, people/organizations will usually turn to first order change by default, hoping that will make a difference.

Change is a given. We get no choice about that. As a community, if we want a choice regarding what we change into (e.g. a new creation), we must be up for second order change. †

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### *Communication, continued from page 3*

the sport of rugby. He enlisted Pienaar, a rugby star, to help him through community events to encourage interest in the national rugby team. Thankfully, the team won the Rugby World Cup and Mandela was successful in changing the direction of the legacy of his country.

Companion Maureen Lahiff shares what she learned about working to change the legacy of racism in the U.S. through two books, *Just Mercy* (which was recently released as a movie of the same title) and *How to be an Anti-Racist*.

Provincial Director Fr. Garry Richmeier challenges readers to consider the legacy of the New Creation. Will the Kansas City and Cincinnati Provinces limit themselves to the easy tasks that some think are real change, but end up being only surface level alterations? Perhaps the provinces will tackle the more difficult changes that deal with identity, culture, and ministry to truly become a New Creation.

So, this issue of the *New Wine Press* seems to be all about legacy. Just as the media reflects on the legacy of Kobe Bryant, when we are gone, when the New Creation is completed, what will the Precious Blood legacy be? †

# Being Stonecatchers and Anti-Racists

by Maureen Lahiff, Alameda, California Companion

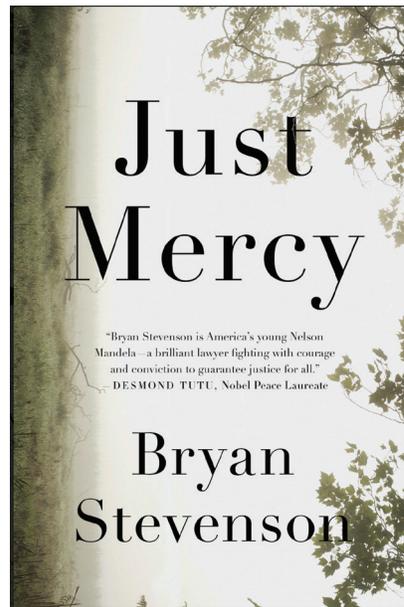
My late summer reading included two remarkable books. I learned about Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* from my students in the college program at San Quentin. Stevenson had recently visited the prison to speak with the men. I find *Just Mercy* a highly evocative title for Precious Blood people. I learned about Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist* from the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at University of California, Berkeley where I work. As part of Berkeley's commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the enforced arrival of enslaved African people in the English North American colonies, the Haas Institute brought Professor Kendi to campus to speak last September. We came close to filling Zellerbach Hall, which seats over 2,500 people.

Bryan Stevenson is the executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative (eji.org) in Montgomery, Alabama, and a professor of law at New York University Law School. *Just Mercy*, published in 2015, chronicles his journey from a law and public policy student at Harvard to a life of service as a public interest lawyer and anti-death penalty advocate.

Ibram X. Kendi is professor of history and international relations at American University in Washington, DC, where he directs the Antiracist Research and Policy Center. He earned a PhD in African American Studies from Temple University in Philadelphia. He is searchingly honest about his own journey, which provides a compelling grounding for the messages of *How to Be an Antiracist*, which appeared in August 2019.

In the last chapter of *Just Mercy*, "The Stonecatcher's Song of Sorrow," Stevenson recounts an encounter on a courthouse steps with an elderly African American woman who had been attending a trial where he was the lead defense attorney. This woman was not related to his clients, or to anyone else involved in the case.

When he asked her about her relationship to the case, the woman replied, "It's what I'm supposed to do, so I do it." Her 16-year-old grandson had been



*Author's note:*  
When I began to write this piece, I did not know that one of the stories woven throughout *Just Mercy* was being made into a major motion picture for general release in January 2020. I recommend the book, in addition to the movie.

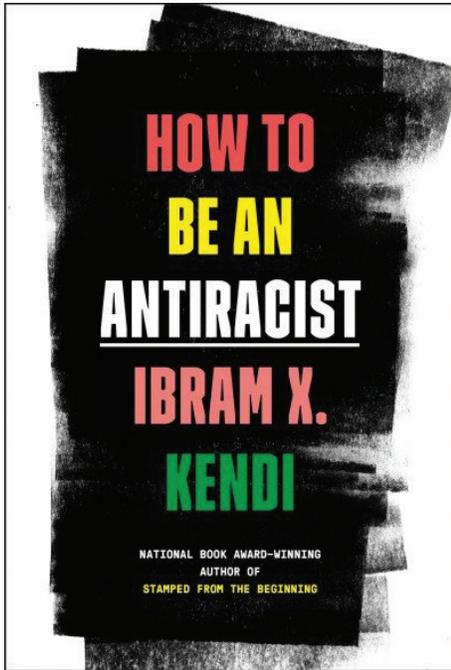
murdered 15 years ago. She continued, "I went to the trial of my grandson's killers. The killers were found guilty of killing my grandson, and the judge sent them away to prison forever. I thought it would make me feel better, but it made me feel worse. I sat in the courtroom and just cried and cried. A lady came over to me and let me lean on her...we didn't neither one of us say a word. It felt so good to lean on [someone]...I've never forgotten that woman. I just felt maybe I could be someone, you know, that somebody hurting could lean on...I decided that I was supposed to be here to catch some of the stones people cast at each other."

Stevenson does not report the woman's name, just this encounter that touched him deeply.

She told him that stonecatching was hard work, but that singing helped her live with sorrow.

In a talk at a near-by church, Stevenson comments about the story we typically call "the woman caught in adultery" in John 8: "The woman's accusers retreated, and Jesus forgave her and urged her to sin no more. But today, our self-righteousness, our fear, and our anger have caused even the Christians to hurl stones at the people who fall, even when we know we

*continued on page 6*



should forgive or show compassion. I told the congregation that we can't simply watch that happen. I told them we have to be stonecatchers."

Stevenson is talking about exactly the sort of action to which we are called by

Precious Blood charism. So is Kendi. There is so much in *How to Be an Antiracist* that there is no way I can do justice to the book in a short space. The points I select and the points I leave out say a lot about me, so I encourage everyone to read the book and to seek out the recording of his UC Berkeley talk on you tube. The essence of being an antiracist is the perspective that racial groups are held back by bad policy, not their bad behavior. For those of us in the U.S., a prime example of a racist policy is the exclusion of African American veterans from the benefits of the GI Bill after World War II, especially VA mortgages.

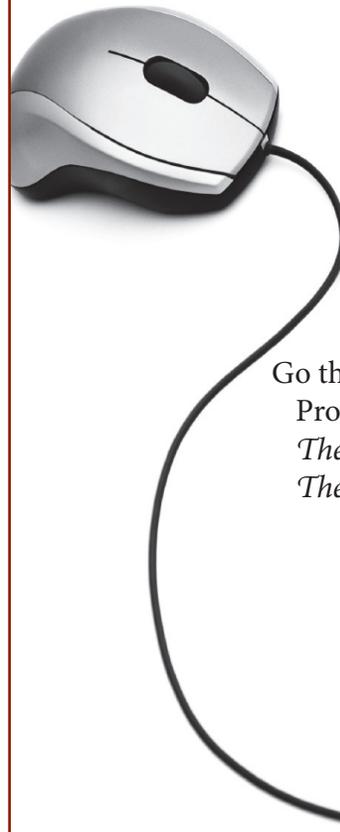
Progressives have long described race is a social construct, that there are no biological, physical, or intellectual differences between the racial and ethnic groups as we have arbitrarily defined them. Kendi goes beyond this to define racism as a power construct. He points out that before Africans were enslaved in the 15th century, people saw color but did not group the colors into races or "attach positive or negative characteristics to those colors and rank the races to justify racial inequity." He asserts that is one of the reasons that racism and capitalism are inextricably linked, that they are "conjoined twins."

Kendi sees cultural racism as the successor of biological racism, saying "whoever makes the

cultural standard makes the cultural hierarchy." As I understand him, Kendi is challenging us to give up judging cultures, that all cultures are simply on the same level. Those of us who draw on our religious values to critique cultures are likely to disagree. And we are not the only ones; feminists have a lot to say about cultures that practice female genital mutilation, for example.

Kendi holds that all "isms" are of a piece, that one cannot be an antiracist if one holds prejudices that are anti-feminist or homophobic or based on education and economic class. Near the end of *How to Be an Antiracist*, Kendi characterizes racism as a cancer, linking his life's work with his own experience of cancer. Racism, like cancer can be treated. But "racism is one of the fastest-spreading and most fatal cancers humanity has ever known." †

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*Nelson Mandela and François Piennar at the award ceremony for the 1995 Rugby World Cup*

# INVICTUS

*by Fr. Keith Branson, C.P.P.S., Avila University*

As we move forward to a new creation, there's a movie I think will help in our reflections: *Invictus*. Directed by Clint Eastwood and starring Morgan Freeman and Matt Damon, it is the story of how Nelson Mandela was able to bring post-Apartheid South Africa together through a rugby team. I showed it as part of the retreat I gave at St. Charles, Carthage in January, and I think it would be good for all of us to watch now. It is a profound lesson in making reconciliation and unity real.

For me, the first great sequence of the movie is when Mandela first takes office. The white civil servants are packing, assuming they're going to be fired. Mandela gathers them together and tells them that although they have a right to leave if they wish, if they feel they can stay and work with the new government, their country needs them to stay, challenging to do their best. Then, while his bodyguards bemoan not

having enough men, four white Secret Branch men report for duty, with orders signed by the President. The chief sees Mandela immediately, indignant. Mandela says he wants to be seen with white guards, and when the chief protests that men like them were hunting them not too long ago, Mandela says "forgiveness begins now as well." He also says: "Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon."

The national sports commission votes unanimously to disband the Springboks, an Afrikaner rugby team popular with the whites (but not the blacks), but Mandela comes to their meeting late, challenging them to change their minds:

*On Robben Island, in Pollsmoor Prison, all of my jailers were Afrikaners. For 27 years, I studied them. I*  
*continued on page 8*

*learned their language, read their books, their poetry. I had to know my enemy before I could prevail against him. And we DID prevail, did we not? All of us here...we prevailed. Our enemy is no longer the Afrikaner. They are our fellow South Africans, our partners in democracy. And they treasure Springbok rugby. If we take that away, we lose them. We prove that we are what they feared we would be. We have to be better than that. We have to surprise them with compassion, with restraint and generosity. I know all of the things they denied us. But this is no time to celebrate petty revenge. This is the time to build our nation using every single brick available to us, even if that brick comes wrapped in green and gold.*

François Pienaar, the captain of the Springboks, is amazed at the new president's support for his team, and the personal friendship Mandela cultivates with him. The Springboks host the Rugby World Cup in 1995, and they are longshots. With hard work, civic involvement, and determination they make it to the finals. The day before the game they take a trip to Robben Island. Pienaar sits in the cell Mandela once occupied, imagining him read the poem "Invictus" by William Ernest Henley. Later, the night before the big match, Pienaar says to his girlfriend that he didn't understand how someone could spend 27 years in that small space, and come out ready to forgive the people who put him there.

It is an exciting sports movie, better than most because it tells a true story. There are so many touches—especially how Mandela relates to everyone around him—that offer lessons in ordinary humanity and peacemaking. Mandela was baptized and raised a Methodist; their schools gave him his primary and secondary education. The rugby team was one part of his agenda—along with the Truth and Reconciliation commissions headed by Archbishop Tutu—and his predecessor DeKlerk said: "Mandela won the hearts of millions of white rugby fans."

Soon we will have a great challenge: to help reconcile our polarized country. Polarized societies do not last. At some point in time the energy loss brings the combatants to seek peace out of exhaustion, if nothing else. Things aren't as bad as the South Africa that Mandela led. However, the deep divides will be

a challenge to bridge, and we must be ready for it. Giving in to the desire for retribution and punishment will only keep wounds festering and toxic. Our spirituality and charism offer much to our country and our world needs. We must not shy away from the call of Blood to be peacemakers and reconcilers. Christ gives us the model of the Kingdom and calls us to proclaim redemption and healing for the world.

We are the masters of our fate, we are the captains of our soul. Our new creation will have this mission of healing when this world is ready to lay hostile sound bites, ugly tweets, and fake news aside. We can learn much from Nelson Mandela and François Pienaar's quest of 1995, even though we may not see now what the unifying force will be. The Blood of Christ runs through the veins of the world, and we are witnesses of its hope.

*Invictus* by William Ernest Henley

*Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.  
In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.  
Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.  
It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul. †*

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event happening?***

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Send submissions to:  
**[communications@preciousbloodkc.org](mailto:communications@preciousbloodkc.org)**



Refugee camp, istockphoto.com

# Division, Dehumanization, and Death: From Chicago to Matamoros

by Hector Avitia, PBMR Staff

“I am not so much afraid for your safety as I am for the possibility that you might not come back to us. You will see things that may be too powerful for you just to leave behind.”

Sister Donna could see it in my eyes as I was saying my goodbyes, my see-you-next-years, and my Merry Christmases—and preparing for my journey to the southwest. She could see in me that just because I had a round-trip ticket didn’t mean I would use all of it.

At PBMR, I have the incredible opportunity to coordinate the screen-printing program where I work with young men from the Back of the Yards neighborhood in Chicago. It has been incredible how much I have learned and grown since I have been exposed to the African American community and been able to walk with participants in their journey, first as a Precious Blood Volunteer and now as a PBMR staff member. Even though the exposure to this newness has been transformational, I still long for familiarity. To be in places that smell like home, look like my past, sound like my family, and taste like the good medicine of my ancestors.

I was able to carve out a four-day block during my winter break during which I would spend time at a homeless shelter in Brownsville, Texas that opened its doors to the asylum seekers who made it to the U.S. side of the Mexican border, and at the camp in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, where asylum

seekers now wait for their U.S. immigration proceedings. The boom in the number of asylum seekers that are not having their basic needs met is due in large part to the year-old Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) policy of the Trump Administration, also commonly referred to as the Remain in Mexico policy. Under MPP, asylum seekers are no longer allowed to wait in the U.S. while their asylum cases are being processed. Instead, they are, for all intents and purposes, forced to stay in border cities where they are easy prey for human traffickers and the cartels. Tamaulipas, the state where Matamoros is situated, has been flagged by the U.S. government as a “Do Not Travel” area due to the high rates of crime and kidnapping. The policy has created a separation between the asylum seekers and much of the resources they need. The Mexican government, like the U.S., is putting policies into practice that will break down the spirit and resiliency of the asylum seekers until they decide to leave on their own, back into the dangerous and life-threatening environments that they escaped in the first place. I could not help but think of all the similar systems in Chicago that have also marginalized vulnerable people and have kept them from real opportunity: segregation, redlining, defunding social programs, over policing, harsh penalties for low level crimes.

The people I met, the stories I heard, and my own first-hand account of the conditions in the camp hit

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me like a large stone dropped from a cliff. The shock happened even though I was somewhat prepared by the prior experiences of other volunteers from the group “Inlakesh Chicago,” which was founded last summer to support the asylum seeker families waiting at the border.

In that time span of four days, I was able to work with other volunteers in cooking dinner for about 1,000 people, transport the food across the Gateway International Bridge, and serve it from six white foldable tables at the edge of the tent camp. It was raining most of the time, adding another layer of desperation and complication to the lives of the asylum seekers. Families are living in camping tents, some set up on top of wood pallets and a cement basketball court, but most were laid out side-to-side on the dirt ground. Stepping into the rain to get in line for this meal meant that their clothes and shoes would be wet until it stopped raining and the sun came out. Even though the food was free, it still required some sacrifice to their health. Many times one family member would be the one to make the trip and wait in line for food in the hopes that they could bring back enough for everyone in the tent, only to be denied because of a “one meal per person” rule that the volunteers have established to make sure everyone in line gets a meal.

If that wasn't enough, one volunteer, who has been doing the work for almost a year consistently, brought about 40 “dolls” to hand out to the kids. These dolls, which were just small pillows with animal faces, were being handed out by the volunteer with one hand while the other handheld the phone that was on Facebook live. She could not hand out these dolls or record her saintly act at the same time. Like the meals, mothers would come out of their tents to get a doll for their daughters, only to be grilled and their honesty questioned by the volunteer.

How often do we try to boost our social media presence or give ourselves that pat on the back from the pain and suffering of others? The volunteer wanted to make sure that the pillows made it to the hands of the kids, the deserving, and not others who they were not intended for. She expressed to me that she had a responsibility to the hard-working volunteers

that put together these dolls. Isn't this the same kind of thinking that has made migration into the U.S. so difficult for families, that we want to make sure no drug dealers, rapists, or criminals come across? Isn't this the thought process behind making stricter work requirements for food stamps? How can we be bringing peace and rehumanizing people when we set up tests, barriers, and cookie-cutter requirements for people to prove their dignity to the gatekeepers of resources?

On the last day there, I joined a group of teachers that give a one-hour general education class to the asylum seeker children. The children are limited to one hour a week of formalized education. One hour. A week. This is to protect the established school systems with the proper credentials and licenses to operate. Almost all families cannot afford to send their kids to a brick-and-mortar school, so they rely on the volunteer teachers of the Sidewalk School for their education. The sight of children sitting in groups of about 30 on blue tarps on the ground, shoes lined on the perimeter to keep mud out, and their faces and eyes hungry for learning and attention, was almost too much to handle. To protect the kids from getting attached to their teachers, teachers would normally rotate to a new group every 15 minutes. Today was different; I had the same group for the entire hour. Later that day, children would pass by and yell “Hola Profel!” and when I would not recognize them or hear them, they would come up to me and say it right at me. The amount of trauma and life-long pain that we are punishing children with around the world is sickening. How is it fair to punish children for things that are completely out of their control, and many times outside of their spectrum of comprehension?

Sister Donna was right, there was a real fear that I would not return to Chicago. That fear became reality. A part of me is still there, near the Rio Grande, walking through the mud and makeshift shelters, scraping past the tall grass littered with diapers and overfilled trash bags, the smell of smoke coming from the “kitchens,” the laughter of children playing soccer with goals made of green plastic coated wire, and all the amazing stories of journey, struggle, and hope. ✦

# Planting Hope

by Tim Deveney, *Precious Blood* Volunteers Director

“Life to death, death to life—like seeds, like soil, like stars. No wonder Mary Magdalene mistook the risen Jesus for a gardener. A new Tree of Life has broken through the soil and is stretching up toward the sun.”—Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church*

Every year on December 21<sup>st</sup> I plant garlic in my home garden. This is contrary to what most people say to do with garlic. All the gardening references and the seed company I buy my garlic bulbs from recommend planting them between November 15<sup>th</sup> and December 15<sup>th</sup> in northwestern Missouri. This stretch of time also usually falls well after the first hard frost.

I do not usually ignore the advice of people who have more experience than me, but I do have a solid reason for doing it this way. December 21<sup>st</sup> is the winter solstice. My paternal grandpa, who like me was a hobby gardener, told me that the winter solstice is when the Irish traditionally plant garlic. Who am I to get in the way of tradition? I often end up plugging my garlic cloves in the ground in the evening or early in the morning, since the days are short and the Advent season is filled with so many activities at school, church, work, and home. So, it is dark,



and usually cold, when I trudge outside with a headlamp on to peel away the individual bulbs, then open up the earth to bury them under a thick layer of soil and mulch.

Planting garlic is one of my favorite spiritual practices. I have found moments of great consolation in the darkness and in the soil of my home garden. It’s a time of quiet for me to be alone with my thoughts and with our God. It is one of those all too brief moments of time where I can feel a connection to God, my ancestors, all people who have touched the earth with love and tenderness, and to all of creation. I feel like I am looking straight into the darkness of the night, the darkness of the soil, and the stark reality of the death that winter brings to plants—then telling the darkness and death that they do not have the final say. There is hope coming. This tiny clove of garlic will slowly give way to new life. This seemingly dead soil will send forth life in the spring. The long darkness of December in the northern hemisphere will yield to the light that starts slowly reappearing as the new year rolls over.

We are faced with a lot of darkness in our lives. The United States has been in a constant state of war since 2001. The people of Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan have borne the brunt of these wars with violence, insecurity, and death, not to mention the U.S. service members who are put into harm’s way and sacrifice the young part of their lives for seemingly endless war. Communities in the United States continue to suffer from the scourges of gun violence, drug addiction, and poverty. Our world is having to come to terms with the climate crisis and the wide-ranging impacts it is having on our common home. People continue to leave their homes in search of better lives for themselves and their children—and when they are turned away, leaving them without homes and often separated from each other out of fear and cruelty.

When I plant my garlic, I reflect on that little bit of hope that is there. Amid this darkness we are called to be bearers of Christ’s love. We should be planting the seeds of peace, mercy, justice, and forgiveness in our homes, our workplaces, our communities, and in our world during the darkest nights. The nights when it seems that violence, racism, hatred, and greed are having their way we need to be answering back that the hope of God’s love will overcome all. ✦



## Hoops in the Yard

by Michael Fedoruk, Director, Yards Youth Initiative, Chicago

As we reach a new year here in Chicago primed for growth, change and prosperity, those on Chicago's southwest side continue to work for healing and hope. The everyday struggles of life within Chicago's Southside, inner-city neighborhoods continue to call for the holy presence of those devoted to bringing the healing power of Christ to members experiencing the pain that life can at times throw our way. For a growing group of community organizers, residents, teachers, and concerned clergy within the Back of the Yards neighborhood, a youthful energy can be felt. We at the Yards Youth Initiative (YYI) have found a healing presence by banding together as a community to work to "demonstrate God's abounding love" for all his children.

The idea for the YYI began in the summer of 2017 when neighborhood teachers, pastors, and community organizers along with concerned parents and their teenage children gathered together in the basement of St. Michael the Archangel Church at the corner of 48<sup>th</sup> and Damen on Chicago's Southwest Side, with the focus of addressing the issue of urban violence and a need for a safe place to play for kids and teenagers in the Back of the Yards neighborhood. Leaving from the meeting a small group of

volunteers was granted permission to reopen the St. Michael's Social Center and Gym, which had been a beloved gathering space for neighborhood youth in years past, but was forced to end programming due to the lack of supervision and the overwhelming gang presence. It was the mission of the volunteers to foster youth leadership within Back of the Yards through a safe place to play and increase the peace in the neighborhood by connecting a neglected population through friendships built around sports. YYI is dedicated to the development of teenagers and young adults within Back of the Yards. Our program offers young people opportunities for personal development, community building and leadership training through sports and immersion experiences.

*Teams preparing to play at YYI at St. Michael's*





*"Shorties" at YYI*

Now two years later, with a team of ten committed board members, an organized vision and funding to back up the work, YYI was able to offer quality fall programming. YYI's "OG" 18 and Over Men's Basketball League brought young men from all over Back of the Yards together Wednesday nights in the spirit of competition, community building and neighborhood pride. The title of an "OG" is a respected name given to older individuals who spread knowledge and life wisdom to the younger generation ("shorties"). Six teams battled throughout the season running from October to early December for a shot at being champion of the inaugural season. Recruited from the "OG" teams were a group of young leaders who were asked to coach, mentor, and facilitate our Saturday morning, middle school "Shorty" League running simultaneously with the "OG" League. The youth league packed the St. Michael's gym with families, students, teachers and athletes from across Back of the Yards on Saturday mornings in the fall to watch neighborhood "shorties" go head-to-head on the basketball court. Over 50 middle school athletes from five different neighborhood schools participated in YYI's youth basketball league. Each youth team had members of the men's league to show support and help coach. The fall leagues brought together over 100 youth and young adults ranging from 12-36 years old, from different sections of Back of the Yards to play hoops, share wisdom and have fun. Our fall leagues ran peacefully in the spirit of community, competition and hopefulness.

The year 2019 showed neighborhood families that the gym at the corner of 48<sup>th</sup> and Damen was again a place of healing, peace and safety. Several of the young men that participated in our men's league have already taken it upon themselves to hold a fundraiser

and organize eight teams to participate in a spring "OG" League to help support the youth programming we seek to offer. One of those exciting programs is a middle school girls' volleyball camp in collaboration with local high school coaches. The spark has ignited support and vision from neighborhood residents looking to strengthen the neighborhood they love by strengthening the neighborhood youth that live there.

On behalf of the youth and young adults that participated in our fall sports leagues, the board, volunteers and participant families, YYI thanks the Missionaries of the Precious Blood for committing to young people on the Southwest Side of Chicago. We thank Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation and Fr. Dave Kelly for the model, spirit and neighborhood support here in Back of the Yards. Finally, we are truly grateful to be a recipient of the Human Development Grant that allows our YYI team to build future leaders and friendships among youth in Back of the Yards through quality sports programming. ✦

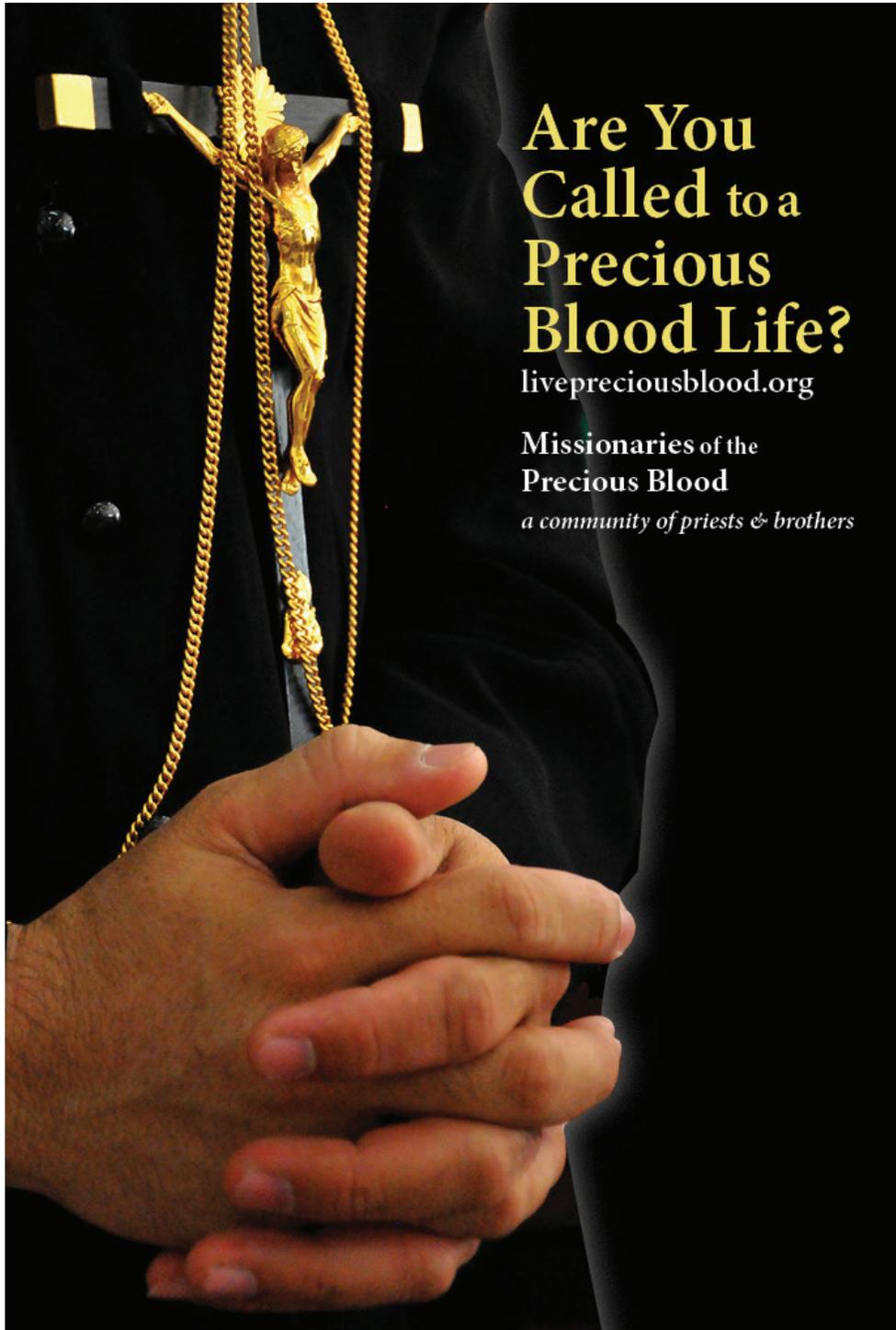
[Article submitted by Fr. Daniel Torson, C.P.P.S., who is the treasurer and a board member of YYI.]

*Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot with two of the YYI participants*



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