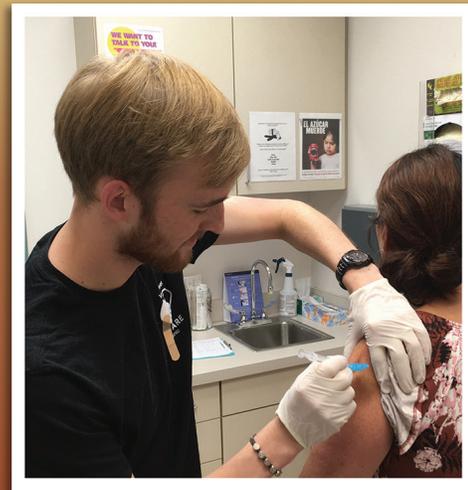


THE New Wine PRESS

Volume 29 No. 9 • May 2021



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



Precious Blood Volunteers
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Front cover: trail near Jerusalem. iStockPhoto.com

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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Breaking Out of Isolation

by Margaret Haik, Director of Communications

The calendar tells me that the new year starts in January, but for me the new year really begins in March or April. That is when I feel the urge to deep clean the house, spruce up the garden, and get ready for a more “on the move” life than I experienced during the winter months.

Last March was a different kind of new beginning because of the pandemic and a new lifestyle for all of us. This March and April, we can see yet a new beginning as vaccinations allow us to begin to gather in person after a year of isolation.

Fr. Keith Branson, in his leadership column, reflects on the New Creation, working together, and the challenges that will come along with it. He points out that many of the Precious Blood priests and brothers have lived in geographical isolation, which will require special effort to overcome in order to achieve the goal of community.

I am familiar with working in isolation. When I taught general music, I was the only person in the school with that specialty. Teachers of any subject or grade level in grammar school settings generally run their own classroom with minimal help from others. They are responsible for creation, delivery, and assessment of student work or performance.

When I moved to a new career, I had to break out of the habit of working in isolation. Although it is more familiar to me, and therefore more comfortable, it has been a relief to be able to turn to my co-ministers (lay and ordained) to rely on their different talents to grow the communication efforts in the Kansas City Province. Two examples: Our ministry directors form an editorial board that encourages writers to submit articles each month for this publication. Members, Companions, ministry directors, Volunteers, and guests have stepped up to make *Tapping the Wine Cellar* possible each week on Facebook.

As the community moves closer and closer to the New Creation, I encourage incorporated members to not work in isolation. Look to the abilities of the wider community of Companions, Volunteers, and staff to carry on the charisma and spirituality of the Precious Blood. †

Working Together

by Fr. Keith Branson, C.P.P.S., Provincial Council

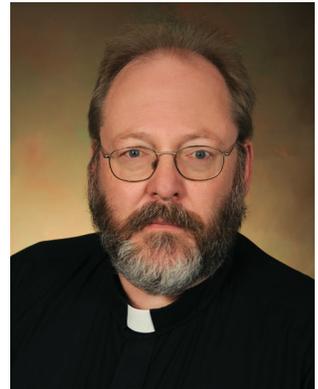
The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need. (Acts 4:32-35)

This was the first reading for the Second Sunday of Easter, and when we were preparing for *Tapping the Wine Cellar*, I reflected on what an ideal this statement represented. These were working people who probably had to keep working to live, and coping with the chaos of all the parallel lives was a challenge. Human beings aren't known for living in peace and harmony for long periods of time, and the disciples were no different. Shortly after this account in Acts, Ananias and Sapphira were stuck down by God for pretending to give more than they did, and Simon Magus offered Peter a bribe to learn how to perform his miracles. The disciples had to resolve a very divisive question: whether to accept Gentile believers who weren't following Judaic practice or require all Christians to be fully initiated Jews. The Spirit was with them, for they survived and grew: they were able to keep working together because of their shared beliefs and commitment to one another. I believe the Church then as the Church now is the work of God precisely because it manages to survive what happens to it.

In the early days of the Kansas City Province, there was a shortage of money, and the members had to work hard to cope with it. I remember looking at the old province newsletters in the archives one day and came across a letter from the provincial asking the members who smoked to give up the habit: not only was it a grave health risk, but it was also money that was almost literally going up in flames that could be used better. Perhaps some of our readers can tell us how well that worked out! However, thanks to the hard work of those members, good leadership, and good fortune, we have been blessed with stable finances, an important security.

This year is a challenge for us as we see community changing for both our religious community and our national community. We

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Harnessing the Energies of Love

by Alameda, California Companion Maureen Lahiff

Someday, after we have harnessed the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity, we will harness for God the energies of love. Then, for the second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire.

- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Evolution of Chastity," 1934

As I began to read *Love Tenderly*, I knew I had to track down the Teilhard de Chardin quote about harnessing the energies of love. One of the essays near the end of the book, entitled, "The Ongoing Discovery of Fire," draws its title from Teilhard de Chardin and concludes by quoting him.

Love Tenderly: Sacred Stories of Lesbian and Queer Religious draws its title from Micah 6:8. It is a collection of brief biographical essays by 23 women who are vowed members of religious communities. They were invited to use a common set of reflection questions to tell their stories and share their growth in understanding of celibate chastity. They come from all sorts of family backgrounds and experiences of Catholic schools and parish life. They range in age, in the age at which they became religious sisters, in their experiences of coming to know themselves as lesbian or queer, and in their experiences of sharing who God made them to be with the members of their congregations.

As each of these women tell their stories, several important themes emerge. Gender and sexual identity are an essential part of being human. God gave each of us sexual desire and energy as a gift. Human beings are made for relationships and for intimacy. Intimacy, at its heart, is being vulnerable and open to others, the deep sharing of oneself. Growth-producing friendships among members of a religious community further the emotional and spiritual development of the individuals involved and strengthen their ability to serve the people of God.

Love Tenderly is important for all of us. Catholics often ask, "Why are issues of gender and sexual identity important for members of religious communities? They're not supposed to have sex, right?" A very brief answer to this question is: celibate does not mean asexual. For a much better answer, I pulled *Tender Fires: The Spiritual Promise of Sexuality* by

Sister Fran Ferder, FSPA and Father John Heagle off my bookshelf. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in this topic, not only in connection with priests and members of religious communities, but as a resource for thinking about the role of sexuality in spiritual life for everyone, gay or straight, in a committed relationship or not. Teilhard de Chardin's poetic vision, the fire that results from harnessing the energies of love, captures the creativity and generativity released when we integrate sexuality into our psychological and spiritual growth.

*What does God require of you?
To act justly, and to love tenderly,
and walk humbly with your God.*
-Micah 6:8, based on the 1966 Jerusalem Bible

I think *Tender Fires* makes a great dialogue companion for *Love Tenderly* and allows us to talk about same-sex and opposite-sex relationships in a consistent framework. I think the women who tell their stories in *Love Tenderly* would find themselves very much at home in, and very much supported by, the last chapters of Ferder and Heagle, where they lay out a series of vision statements for an emerging spirituality of sexuality. Everyone is called to generativity, the giving of life. For married couples, this is much broader than the nurturing of children. For everyone, sexuality is energy for relationships, for forming connections with others, which fits very closely with the main themes of *Love Tenderly*.

Ferder and Heagle reflect on Matthew 5:48, which is usually translated as "Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect." After exploring the Greek word for perfect and its use in other parts of the New Testament, and I would add, some reflection on the mysteries of Greek verb tenses, they suggest this translation: "You must become whole."

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Academia: Searching for a New Normal

by Fr. Daniel Torson, C.P.P.S., D.Min., Assistant Professor of Theology, Lewis University, Romeoville, Illinois



In addition to full-time teaching, Fr. Dan serves on four boards of not-for-profit organizations in Joliet and the South Side of Chicago areas where he advocates for Mental Health and Minority Youth Opportunities.

Academia finds itself asking many questions that are similar to those of big business: Can people continue to operate and work just as efficiently from home? Should meetings and conferences continue online? How much personal interaction

is necessary to build a team or a sense of unity? One thing is certain: even as COVID mitigations continue to loosen, operations will not return completely to pre-pandemic modes. The complete shut-down of one year ago will have lasting effects.

Two aspects have become clear over the past year from nearly all surveys and research: Traditional age college students do not like or prefer a completely online learning format, and similarly, most professors do not prefer a completely online learning format either. Both groups have come to realize the value of human interaction and that the building of relationships are essential to the learning process. In essence, both groups have grown in appreciation for the in-person learning process. But are both groups willing to give up the convenience of not commuting (or for resident students, walking across campus), not needing to look presentable in public, and truly exerting the energy to engage peers and faculty? For students, it has become much easier to simply crawl out of bed, tune into the class on the computer, and while class is commencing, check social media and take care of personal needs. The hope is that the important material will be picked up, or the student will watch the video recording of the class later. Faculty have perfected methods for online interaction over the course of the last year, but the results of the new methods are not always positive.

So, where does academia go from here? Here, I will be addressing Lewis University specifically, but having said that, I have observed that Lewis has positioned itself clearly in the mainstream of learning and mitigation processes throughout the past year. Thus, for Fall 2021, Lewis will be offering more options with varied formats for both faculty and students. The direction from the Provost's Office was that clearly there needs to be more in-person interaction with students, but varied formats will be welcomed. Thus, I was asked two months ago, "How do I want to teach in the Fall?"

That is a loaded question! I had been teaching hybrid for the past two semesters, which means that I am in-person with all my students for 50 minutes each week with the remainder online. While I clearly acknowledge that 50 minutes per week is not enough, there have been many successes in this format. My students have been forced to take responsibility for their learning, read the assignments (which in theology means reading excerpts from notable theologians such as Aquinas and Schleiermacher), synthesize, and integrate the readings. This has been accomplished and assessed through weekly student submissions of answers to my specified questions, writing short essays, writing discussion boards with references to the theologians, and essay Mid-terms and Final Exams. For the two exams, students can consult the sources and take as much time as they need, in order to produce coherent essays incorporating content, assessment, and application. My top students have produced some excellent and amazing essays, while at the same time, the middle-of-the-academic-spectrum students have been pushed further than they could have imagined! None of my students are theology majors, but they have truly engaged the discipline of theology!

In order to facilitate this process, I check email a half a dozen times a day, and I offered my cell phone number to students for texting and phone calls. My students do not like to call people, so the only time that we have a phone conversation is when we

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Academia, continued from page 5

arrange a specific day and time. But they like to text! So, I frequently get texts to which I can almost immediately respond!

Since my social life during the past year has been extremely limited, I am at home most evenings (cooking and watching sports on TV). So, a text is kind of fun, and I don't get so many that they become burdensome.

As a result, I have decided to teach each of my four classes two days a week in the fall, with Friday as a reading and writing day. I am trying to blend the positives of pre-COVID and COVID strategies. As you would expect, written assignments due for most weeks entail more grading than was the case during pre-COVID times. This will also be the third time that I have re-written my classes (syllabi and online course shells) over the past year. I am looking forward to the challenge, if I can get the results of theological engagement as I have experienced during the past year.

I have found over the past year that college students in general are very "needy." I look into their eyes and see "burden" for many of them. In addition to their own mental health in dealing with the pandemic, many have family issues that are very troubling, and many are still working to support themselves. This is simply not the college environment that I grew up in many years ago. All I had to worry about was getting my studies finished and taking care of myself. The world seemed so carefree with endless possibilities before us back then! It is not the same today.

Academia has gone through numerous challenges over the past year, but we have adapted "on the fly" and still maintained a level of excellence in teaching/learning. Some questions about processes for the fall will be sorted out this summer, but others will remain influx. For certain is the fact that Academia will not completely return to pre-COVID days, but the cooperative efforts of administrators, faculty, staff, and students will create a "new normal." Change is not to be feared but rather embraced! ✠

Leadership, continued from page 3

may not be able to live up to the ideal of the early Apostolic community; however, through working together and offering what we have freely and without reservation, the Church will remain. Isolation from one another has always been a challenge, although the past year has brought that into focus as never before. Community life through most of the experience of our provinces has been a challenge, as many of us have usually lived in solitary postings away from frequent contact with each other. Our society acts as if true unity is an impossible task without coercion and tries to reinforce polarized attitudes as the norm. Living with one mind and one heart has always been a challenge—however, one our founder was always attentive to and sought to promote in our community life. Throughout the history of the community, working together has kept us going.

The Kansas City and Cincinnati Provinces were founded 55 years ago, and as we look forward, let us remember what we have learned from our journeys, mindful of how God has blessed us and blessed the work of our hands. Having one mind and one heart isn't always easy, and God will bring it about as long as we are committed to working together. ✠

Harnessing the Energies of Love, continued from page 4

This translation defines a much more achievable life project for Christians, and a goal that sums up the journeys of the women who courageously write in *Love Tenderly*.

Love Tenderly: Sacred Stories of Lesbian and Queer Religious, edited by Grace Surdovel, IHM with a Foreword by Jeannine Gramick, SL. Published by New Ways Ministries, 2021.

Tender Fires: The Spiritual Promise of Sexuality, by Fran Ferder, FSPA and John Heagle. Published by The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002.

Maureen Lahiff lives in Oakland, California. She is a member of the Alameda Companions and serves on the Kansas City Province Justice and Peace Committee. ✠

Leading with a Servant Heart

by Allison Spraul, Precious Blood Volunteer

I've known I have a call to become a physician for many years, and while the basic underlying facts that drive this calling have not changed—my love of biology and science, call to help and accompany others, and desire to build community—my understanding of what that role can look like has evolved, especially over this last year of service with Precious Blood Volunteers at KC CARE Health Center. I've been reflecting on leadership.

Doctors are leaders of healthcare teams, often leaders within clinics or hospitals, and can become leaders in their wider community outside of the healthcare system, a role emphasized by the pandemic of the past year. But leadership styles are as individualized as each person who is called upon to fill the role, and I have been thinking about what kind of leader I will become, influenced by my experiences with health care and formation in faith of the past year. I have been comparing the leadership qualities of Jesus Christ shown throughout the Gospels, and examples I have seen over the past eight months the healthcare providers I work with day in and day out. There are many qualities I have seen in these role models that I hope to incorporate as I grow into my own.

I want to be a leader whose actions and words align. To me, it speaks of authenticity and of true commitment, and it is easier to ask others to follow when you practice what you preach. I have seen providers I work with be vaccinated and share their personal experiences with patients, and lead healthy lives to model behaviors they encourage in patients. Jesus asks much from his followers, but he also healed the sick, dined with sinners, and eventually died on the cross, proving he is not merely the source of teachings on how to live as a child of God, but also the perfect example to follow for living a holy and moral life every day.

I want to be a leader who can call the best out of the others who work around me. I work with providers who I see give their best every day when taking care of patients, and that inspires and pushes me to give my best as well. These providers support me and others that we work with, answering questions and being encouraging leaders. Similarly, Jesus called qualities out of people

that they did not previously know they possessed. He called fishermen and tax collectors to serve as his trusted apostles and expressed his belief in the ability of the overlooked—children, Gentiles, lepers—to serve as models of faith.



Allison Spraul is a Precious Blood Volunteer serving at KC CARE Health Center in Kansas City, Missouri.

Perhaps most importantly, I want to be a leader with a “servant heart.” In the Gospel account we hear on Holy Thursday, Jesus humbles himself by putting himself in the position of a servant, washes the feet of his disciples, and then tells them, “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” In a Bible full of metaphors, allegory, and poetic prose, this stands out as a stark example followed by a straightforward command.

This means that this is something to which we should pay close attention. I want to be a leader who seeks to benefit others and better their lives without seeking something in return, like the model Jesus puts forth in the Passover story. I can also see this in the providers at KC CARE. They see patients who the system overlooks, a medically complex population, when they could be better paid working elsewhere. They are leaders who do not put their own status or privilege first but center the good of their teams and those they serve.

I think that like many things in life, I will continue to explore what kind of physician and leader I want to be and grow into what that best looks like for me and my values. But this past year of service at KC CARE, and the reflection on my faith I've done has given me a solid foundation and incredible models to look up to in order to become a leader who is authentic, inspiring, and centered by a servant heart. †

Let's Talk About Justice

by Mike Price, Precious Blood Volunteer

On April 20, 2021, many people had been holding their breath for nearly a year since the murder of George Perry Floyd Jr. in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25, 2020. After today's verdict many people were able to exhale or even breathe for the first time.

Soon after I heard the verdict, I said this little prayer to myself: "We give thanks to the Lord for hearing the cry of your people for justice. We pray that racial and social justice continues to be in the hearts of all of your people as we work towards healing our broken world together."

I believe that the Lord heard the cry of His people over the last year, even though many more black women, men, and children have been murdered by those who are supposed to serve and protect all lives. The phrase "cry of the people" is familiar to many of us. We hear this in various forms all throughout the Bible—the cry of the poor (Proverbs 21:13, Job 34:28), He does not forget the cry of the afflicted (Psalm 9:12), and so on. Many people of color expected the verdict to be in favor of former Officer Derek Chauvin. I believe the Lord heard the cry of His people and touched the hearts of the jurors and the nation, which could be a catalyst for further movement in the right direction for racial and social justice. People of color have been plagued by injustice far too long, which has been very evident in the United States through various forms of media. People of color have been crying out to only have a breath that allows them to have a voice that speaks to the truth of injustice in the United States.

After former Officer Derek Chauvin was escorted out of the courtroom in handcuffs, the following statement was made by Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, "I would not call today's verdict justice, however, because justice implies true restoration. But it is accountability, which is the first step towards justice, and now the cause of justice is in your hands."

That powerful statement helped me to better understand the difference between justice and accountability. I have to admit, I have a bachelor's degree in Catholic theology, and sadly up to this point in my life, I am not

sure if I truly understood what justice meant until Attorney General Ellison used it in this context. No matter how many degrees one holds, one still must have real-world encounters and applications that can make the content applicable for true integration for oneself.



Mike Price is serving as a Precious Blood Volunteer at Most Holy Redeemer Church and Immaculate Conception Academy in San Francisco, California.

Former President Barack Obama said, "True justice requires that we come to terms with the fact that Black Americans are treated differently, every day. It requires us to recognize that millions of our friends, family, and fellow citizens live in fear." For the lives of those who have been murdered, this is a call to action. It is a call for all who believe, pray, and talk about social and racial justice to stand with our sisters and brothers of color. Obviously, this verdict doesn't resolve or fix everything. This is where "the cause of justice is in your hands."

On one piece of news coverage, a national reporter approached a white bystander and inquired why was he at the courthouse? He quickly responded that he had to do something, so he Googled what to do and showing up was one step he could do to show support to a hurting people of color community. He heard the cry of the people of color in his community; he recognized that people of color are treated differently. This was huge for someone who Googled, "how to help," only to wind up on national news to acknowledge the cries and the injustices which are imposed on people of color.

I encourage you to engage your friends of color no matter how uncomfortable it may be to listen to their experiences and encounters. As a person of color in his thirties, I have only recently started reflecting and

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Remaining Hopeful During These Times

by Fr. Dave Kelly, C.P.P.S., PBMR Director

Even at 102 years old, Timuel Black is an activist. He recently sat with a group of youth from PBMR in a series called “Conversations with the Elders.” One young man among the group kept looking at Timuel’s hands. He would later remark that he could only imagine all the things those hands had done; the multitude of times and realities this one man has experienced.

Timuel’s attitude was one of appreciation for the opportunity to speak with the youth of today; he valued these young men who gathered with him in his home on the south side of Chicago. Timuel carries a long legacy of social activism, but what carries him is a deeply rooted belief in the goodness of people. He recalled his long fight for justice and the ways he never gave up hope that the true nature of people would one day overwhelm the negativity and division. After all that he has witnessed, even at the age of 102, he still exuberates hope.

The young people who gathered didn’t see an aged activist, rather, they saw the embodiment of hope. Like the risen Jesus, he carried many scars—some visible and many not seen—but these marks of pain only remind us that the story is still unfolding toward justice.

During these turbulent times, it is this sort of hope that carries us. It doesn’t deny the pain and the disappointment of the violence and betrayal, but sees beyond the brokenness to the possibility of a new reality. It is important to recognize the injustices and wrongs that are all around us, but not to allow those injustices to define us.

Today, I sat with a young man who lost his sister to gun violence. As he sat there, overwhelmed by the senselessness and cruelty of that violence, words failed him. His emotions were all over the place. His reflections were full of “whys” and the “what-ifs.” His heart and mind were heavy with the inexplicable pain of a stolen life.

This evening several of us from PBMR joined with his friends and family for a vigil honoring his sister. Tomorrow, there will be another prayer and march at

the site of the killing of a 13-year-old shot by police. We seem to go from one prayer service to another, march after march. As a nation, we struggle to grapple with tragedy after tragedy, mass shooting after mass shooting. There will be those who argue for and against this issue or that. There will be posturing and empty statements, followed by more of the same political verbiage.

How will we respond to the pain, chaos, and injustices that encompass our current reality? Giving in to hopelessness cannot be our response. Pointing fingers and blame is self-defeating. And inaction, of course, gets us nowhere.

At 102 years old, Timuel Black still believes in the goodness of people. I must believe that he maintains this hope because he sees something beyond the pain and the hurt. I must believe he can see through the hatred and poison-like language to our common humanity. As those youngsters who gathered around him recognized, he was a man who took his wounds and transformed them through a lifetime of service and action. My prayer for those youth, as well as us all, is that we never lose this hope. I pray that, like Timuel, we can embrace our call to be builders of justice and peace and together, build the beloved community. ✠

Let’s Talk Justice, continued from page 8

sharing my experiences with a few people in my life, which include my white adoptive parents. Most of my friends are white, of which a very small handful have welcomed some dialogue but still do not understand or allow the dialogue to go beyond a certain point. It is time to create an environment in the Church which allows such dialogue to happen.

There is a lot of work to be done. It is time to put those petitions of prayers for social and racial justice into action. There is a lot of work to be done and we need all our communities to stand with people of color. That’s a fact.

What is your next step? ✠



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Fratelli Tutti Complements Precious Blood Spirituality

by Fr. Ron Will, C.P.P.S.

Our Precious Blood spirituality speaks often about reconciliation, drawing near what was once far off, breaking down walls, and building bridges. In his latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis speaks of these same ideas. He reaches across the walls between world religions and different political groups. Just as he seeks the common ground, he encourages us to do the same. That is what we are supposed to be about as a member or Companion of the Precious Blood Community.

The Precious Blood Renewal Center recently led two different four-week discussion groups on Pope Francis' latest encyclical. The discussions helped take the encyclical off the bookshelf and integrate its teachings into our personal lives and into our circles of influence.

Fratelli Tutti gives me a vision that reveals how God looks at the human family and reminds me that we are really one human family created by God. Therefore, we are called into relationships of respect toward one another. Pope Francis has helped me recognize where I have put up walls between myself and different groups of people—not physical walls, but emotional walls. I acknowledge that I tend to hang out with people like myself and judge those who are different than me as not as good. I put “walls” between us.

Fratelli Tutti gave me a step ladder, so to speak, to look over the wall and see people who are different than myself and see the goodness in them. Pope Francis challenged me to see what I had not seen before.

I learned in grade school that the United States was a “melting pot.” People came here from Germany, England, Spain, China, and many other places. They left behind their native languages, native customs, holiday celebrations, etc., and became “American.” *Fratelli Tutti* taught me that we are more like a “fruit salad,” where each fruit retains its unique flavor, or better like a “mosaic” where colors do not blend but retain their beauty. When we maintain our individual flavor, individual color, we are a gift to the whole human family, not a nuisance. Our unique gift enhances the gifts of others.

Mother Teresa said, “The reason that we do not have peace is that we have forgotten that we belong to one another.” In some ways that summarizes this encyclical. It sounds so simple, but is so difficult to live. Pope Francis challenges me to do that. It is so easy for me to think in terms of “us” and “them” instead of “brothers and sisters” of the same human family.

Studying the encyclical is an experience of the Kingdom of God unfolding in our midst.

Fratelli Tutti helped me put pieces of Jesus’ teaching together and apply them to our contemporary world experience.

When his disciples asked him to teach them to pray, Jesus taught them what we call the “Lord’s Prayer” which says in part: “Our Father who art in heaven...thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.” I pray those words a few times every day, but I do so on automatic pilot. I say the words unconsciously without meaning.

Studying this encyclical was a “light bulb” moment for me in praying the Lord’s Prayer. I am not asking God to impose his kingdom or his influence on us. Rather, I take a stance toward God which opens me up to his influence. I have a responsibility to further the Kingdom of God on Earth, at least in my circles of influence. That was a game changer.

When I was a child, my mother baked homemade bread every week. I watched her as she kneaded yeast into the dough, turned it over and kneaded it some more, working the yeast into the

dough. I watched it rise while the yeast fermented within it for a time, and then put it in the oven to bake. In a parallel way, we must “knead” God into the world today, work God’s values and vision for relationships into the modern world.

Another “light bulb” moment was when Pope Francis said that politics is a vocation. Politicians are not called to serve themselves, but their constituents. I have a responsibility to remind them that they have a vocation, a high calling. I have become more active in communicating with my representatives, rather than just complaining about what they say or do.

Pope Francis speaks again and again about the importance of dialogue with those of other political parties or religious persuasions. He reminds me about one of the seven habits of highly effective people, about which Stephen Covey wrote: “Seek first to understand, and then to be understood.” Instead of trying to convince the other why I am right, and they are wrong, I am now challenged to begin by saying “Help me understand what you believe and why.” I don’t need to agree with them, but I must be able to understand them so well that I can repeat back to them what they believe. Only then do I ask them to listen to me so well that they understand me. Another tool that we Precious Blood people use are “Circles of Understanding.”

Our call is to work for reconciliation between individuals and groups who do not respect or love one another. That is the way to break down emotional walls and build bridges. That is the way of treating people like we are brothers and sisters.

We have recent memories of mass shootings in Atlanta, Boulder, Kansas City, and other places in the U.S. It is easy to become numb to the pain after a while, take it for granted that that is just the way we are. Pope Francis says: “That is not God’s Plan!” That is not the way we are created. We are created for fraternity and social friendship. †



Jose (center front) and his classmates step outdoors for a light-hearted photo. Providing a supportive family atmosphere is a constant goal for teachers in the English Language Learner program.

On the Emmaus Road, 2021

by St. Joseph, Missouri Companion Nancy Clisbee

*We give you thanks, God of all goodness,
For you gather peoples of every race and culture,
And unite them on an uncommon journey
Of truth and tenderness, compassion and care.*

These days we hear news of many journeys—reports of ever-increasing numbers of adults and unaccompanied minors arriving at our southern border. It’s easy to picture them as a mass of faceless trouble. We do worry for them, but we quickly feel overwhelmed. Surely they need to be turned back, don’t they? Who are they really, anyway? It’s helpful to focus not on the mob, but to share one story to help us all “catch the dream” of one person, one family. May we “open our hearts to the fullness of their hopes.”

Jose is a student in one of our beginning classes for English Language Learners in St. Joseph. I met him in February during the class registration process

and was surprised when he produced his “verification of release from Federal custody” document from the Division of Unaccompanied Children Operations (DUCO). He’s a great looking teenager, already much enjoyed by students and staff alike. His English is limited, but with a few assists from Google translate, I didn’t need a Spanish translator to interview him. My first impression was of a well-loved, well-educated, middle-class young man. Our conversation revealed a different story.

Jose is from El Salvador. He was sent from home two years ago, in April 2019. Along with some friends and relatives—a group of adults and young people hoping to make their cases for asylum—he walked and took a series of buses 1600+ miles over the course of 11 days to reach an area near Laredo, Texas. It was a frightening journey. The succession of men who led them were armed and rough. All were

fearful of attackers, especially inside Mexico. Once at the border, they crossed the bridge over the Rio Grande. Immediately, the Border Patrol picked them up. (This, of course, was the plan. An individual arrives in the U.S. by any means. Once here, they apply for asylum, proving that they meet the international definition of a “refugee.” Refugees are unable to return home due to past persecution, or a well-founded fear of being persecuted “on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion.”) Jose and another minor from his group were walked to a holding area about ten minutes away. The adults were sent a different direction. Jose stayed in that facility for four days with many other kids. Then he was moved to Topeka to a facility “where good people took care of (him)” and maybe 60 other youth. He stayed there for two months, feeling quite safe. At last he was released to his aunt, a St. Joseph resident, who drove to Topeka to pick him up.

*This holy band of pilgrim people
are alive through your Spirit.
Resplendent as a sign of the unity
You desire for all women and men,
You invite us to give witness to your love
As we walk this road of peace together.*

I asked about Jose’s family. They are Catholic, as is 50 percent of the population of El Salvador. All his immediate family remain there. His father Carlos is a farmer, helping to raise corn and beans. Jose pointedly told me they have no “house” as he now understands the word. He said the family “lives in the fields,” without electricity or running water. From the internet he identified a structure (which looked like a farm outbuilding) as being similar to where he lived. He has an older brother, named Carlos for his father, now 19, who has been mute from birth, who “can’t walk, and can’t go to school.” His mother Martina cares for her oldest son and her daughters, and helps in the fields when she can. Jose has three sisters, Rose 16, Lilian 13, and Lorena 7. The two younger girls remain with their parents and brother. Jose’s dad and the family are terrified of the gangs. El Salvador suffers from low employment, poverty, and easy access to alcohol, drugs, and arms. Carlos saw no other path for Jose beyond being pulled into these groups who live only by stealing, kidnapping, threats

to others, and worse. Jose himself had been threatened. Desperate to save his son from that life, Carlos and Martina sent Jose on the long and risky trek to the U.S.

In St. Joseph, Jose enjoys living with his aunt and three cousins in a good middle-class neighborhood with a large park nearby, and he enjoys his English classes at Webster. Occasionally the family attends Spanish services at St. Patrick’s Parish. He has a part time job at a national chain restaurant, though his permission to work is cloudy. Already he has sent money home to his family, and shares with his aunt.

My impression of Jose from our conversation was of a typical, very bright, well-educated young person. I was amazed when he told me his prior education went only to grade six. His goal is to learn English, get his HiSet degree (the new GED), and go to college—a goal that’s daunting for sure, but doable with perseverance and good support. He’s interested in physics and chemistry. He pictures himself working for a good company in the U.S. as an adult. As he spoke about this dream, I could see it myself.

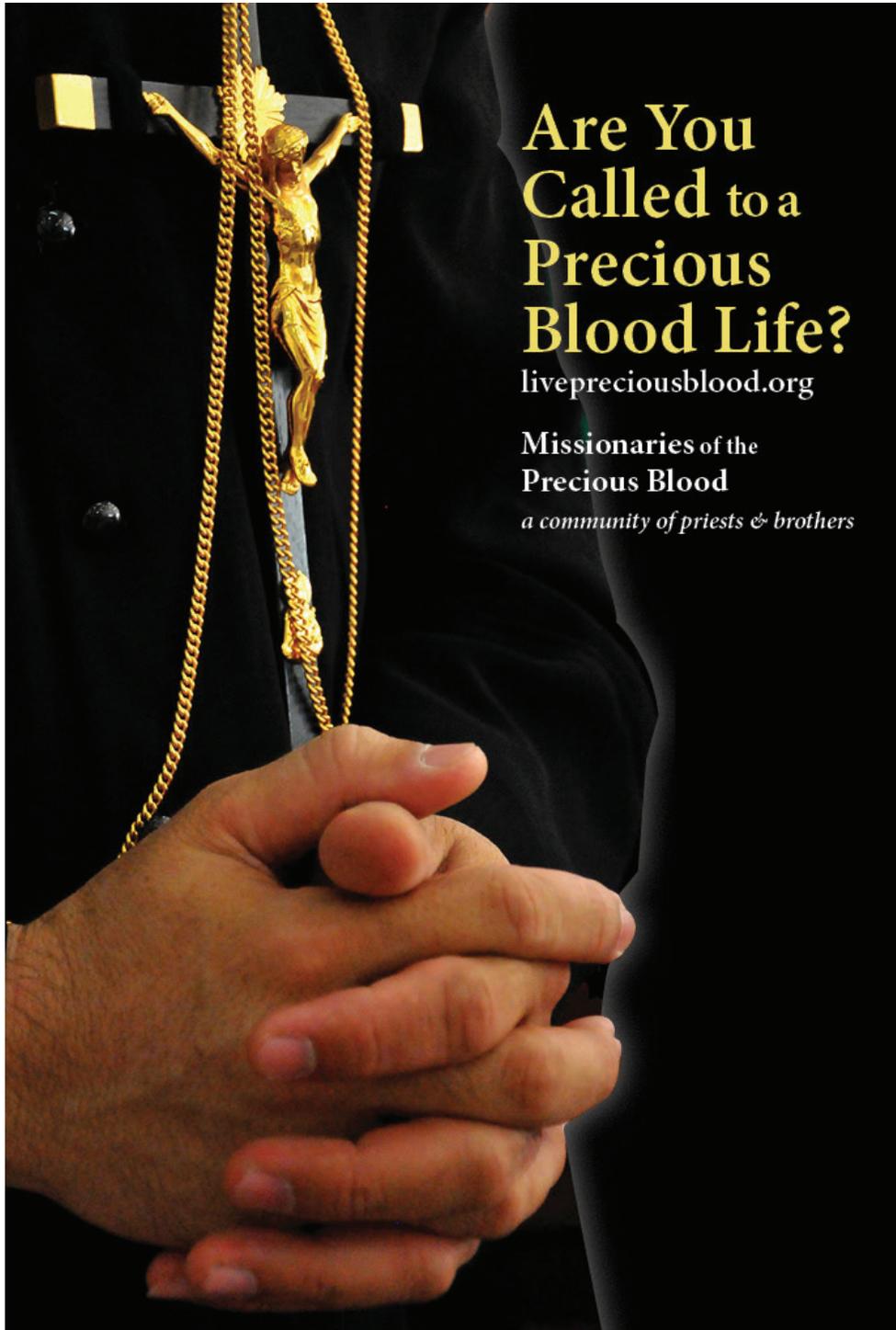
In the shorter term, Jose will have a court hearing in Kansas City in September. As an unaccompanied minor, removal proceedings have been filed against him in Immigration Court. He’ll likely request asylum status and more time to make his case. Possibly with good representation he’ll have the chance to prove his qualification as an asylum seeker, which provides an eventual path to citizenship. Maybe he’ll be able to remain in the U.S. to fulfill the family’s dream for him. Someday Jose may be able to expand his dream to include bringing his family to a place of safety, education, and opportunity. Time will tell. There is hope.

*Along the way, you invite us to share the stories,
to catch the dreams,
to open our hearts to the fullness of your hope.*

Verse one and two from “Prayer on the Emmaus Road,” by Joseph Nassal, C.P.P.S., *A Kaleidoscope of Precious Blood Prayer*, April 2009. Used with permission. ✠

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