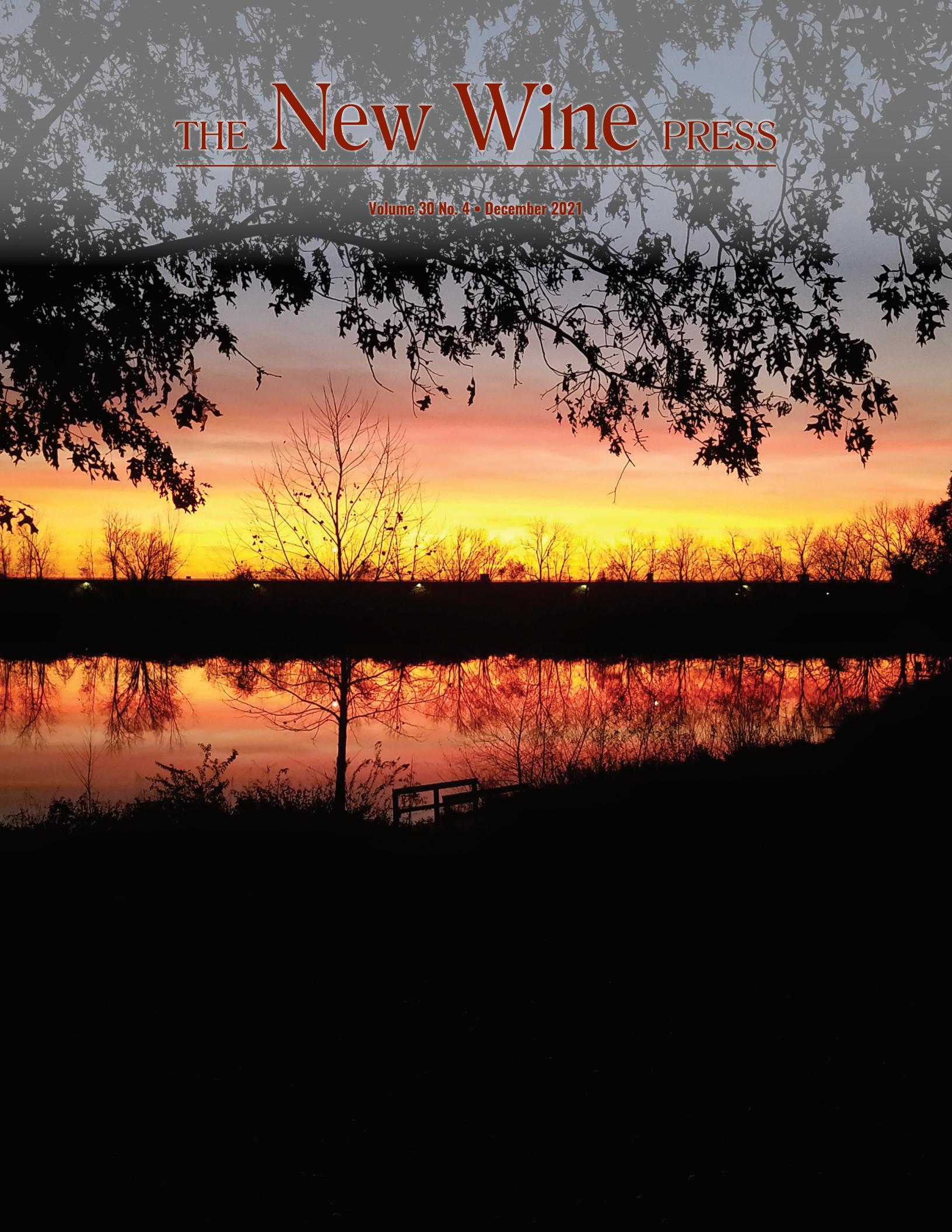


THE New Wine PRESS

Volume 30 No. 4 • December 2021



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



Precious Blood Volunteers
preciousbloodvolunteers.org

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Front cover: View of the lake at Precious Blood Center, photograph taken by Fr. Ron Will, C.P.P.S.

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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Education or Invitation?

by Margaret Haik, Director of Communications

For about eight years, I served as a youth director for my parish. I was in charge of making sure our high school students received the prescribed education prior to receiving the sacrament of Confirmation. I found that high school students were less interested in sacramental preparation than they were in going out into the world and helping others. I saw the greatest spiritual growth out of the students who participated in our yearly service trips. They would spend the school year working on each of the points of Catholic Social Justice Teaching and doing related service projects. Then they would spend a week in the summer doing a big service project through Young Neighbors in Action.

My son, who is almost 18, expressed his frustration with religious education at his high school. He told me how his current religion teacher is very focused on assignments and tests. He said he preferred his teacher from last year who was more interested in inviting the students into the Catholic faith than seeing what they could remember in time for the final exam.

In this month's *New Wine Press*, Fr. Garry Richmeier refers to a shift in the priorities of young people; one in which they are searching outside of the traditional church setting for their spirituality. As we continue to grow in our own spirituality and outreach, how best can we reach out to the younger population as they search for a spiritual home? Will our efforts draw them near or push them away?

Our other articles this month focus on social and racial justice. "Justice and peace are two of the signs of the Kingdom of God," we are reminded by Gabino Zavala. Fr. Denny Kinderman shares his experience of sharing in the faith journey of James Walker, an inmate in an Illinois prison. Tim Deveney, who recently attended the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice, announces that the Precious Blood Volunteers program will expand a discernment process to become a more racially just organization.

Perhaps the key to attracting young people to St. Gaspar's spirituality is to put our faith into action and build upon the work of reconciliation that PBMR focuses on. Inviting young people, not just post-college students, but also high school students and current college students into lives of service may offer better learning opportunities than can be achieved in homilies or religious education classes. ♦

Spiritual Home Making

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

A broad description of our mission as a religious community is helping to provide a spiritual home for people, where all are welcome to experience and share God's love. We do this first of all through our compassionate and caring personal encounters with people. We do this through our corporate stances, and how we speak out in many ways about how everyone is included in God's love. We do this through our financial support of the people and organizations which are sometimes left out in the cold.



But traditionally we have put most of our human and financial resources into parishes, helping to make them spiritual homes for people. We have celebrated new life in communities as we have baptized children. We have helped parents teach children about the faith through our Catholic schools and religious education programs. We have shared God's forgiveness through reconciliation, witnessed the commitment of love between people in the sacrament of marriage, and mourned with parish families at the funerals of loved ones. Perhaps most importantly, we have gathered people around the table of the Eucharist as the family of God. Many have found a spiritual home due, in part, to our efforts.

We continue this challenging work despite getting older as a community. But judging from the average age of people coming to church, and the number of candidates for priesthood and religious life, people younger than us are not finding a spiritual home there, generally speaking. Various studies and surveys tell us it is not because younger people do not want a spiritual home, but rather they are looking for such a home in places other than organized religion.

This puts us in a strange spot as a community whose mission is to help build spiritual homes for people. One analogy would be that we are really good at building great log cabins (mainly middle-class parishes). People who have grown up in log cabins, who are used to them, and find them comforting (parishioners our age), are glad to have us working with them (administering sacraments, promoting parish life, etc.), and do not want us to leave. Log cabins serve a good purpose, and we can choose to continue to help build them for as long as people want them.

Younger people do not seem interested in living in log cabins these days, and are looking for a different kind of home. Instead of a cabin in one spot (church building), they may be more interested in a home they

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The Call to Justice and Peace

by Gabino Zavala, Justice and Peace Director

The season of Advent marks the beginning of the Church's liturgical year with the anticipation of the birth of Jesus. Advent means coming. Thus we are celebrating the coming of God in Christ at the first Christmas and we anticipate the coming of Emmanuel in our lives again every day. This Advent we follow the themes of hope, peace, justice, joy, and love in the Gospel of Luke. The Jesus who comes into our lives is the source of hope, joy, and love. The Jesus we await and long for brings us justice and peace.

I have had a passion for justice and peace since my earliest recollections of living out my faith. It has given me a passion to lend my voice to issues of peace and justice as I try to live out my faith and give witness to the Gospel. Over the years many of us who are called to work in the area of justice and peace have received criticism by many of our sisters and brothers in the pews. I have heard more times than I can recount the admonition that I should "Stick with saving souls and stay away from politics!"

I'm unapologetic about promoting social justice, because it was and is the mission of Jesus. As we

look around our communities and our world we see great poverty, violence, an assault on the dignity of people, insufficient access to healthcare, and systemic racism, to name just a few issues. This is where the radical message of Jesus is truly needed. I believe that advocating for an end to the death penalty is the mission of a disciple of Jesus. I believe that working to end gun violence is working to save souls and is not politics. I believe that working for just and comprehensive reform of our severely broken immigration system is the mission of the Church. That is why these issues are the corporate stances of our Kansas City Province.

When Jesus paid attention to the poor and marginalized and demonstrated mercy to sinners, the powerful rejected him and plotted against him. He was courageous in the face of threats and rejection. We are called to be bold and prophetic as Jesus was.

There will always be tension between those concerned about the voices not being heard, the rights not being respected, the dignity not being upheld, and those who insist we stick to "spiritual things" and not get involved in "politics." If we take Jesus'

message seriously, we cannot remain indifferent to those who suffer in the shadows.

How can we follow Jesus and be unrepentant about systemic racism, not promote life from conception to natural death, be unwelcoming to the stranger, remain unmoved by the needs of the poor, uncaring about the rampant gun violence in our schools and neighborhoods, not promoting the dignity of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters, unconcerned about care of our common home, uninterested in the common good?

Justice and peace are two of the signs of the Kingdom of God. It is essential to our baptismal calling to work for justice and peace. This is the work of God. I also believe that it is at the heart who we are as a Precious Blood community. St. Gaspar had a heart full of love for the poor and marginalized. He saw Christ in those in need. He brought the Blood of Christ out of the sanctuary and into the streets. He was impelled by the love of Christ, especially in Christ's shedding his blood for us.

St. Gaspar responded to the political situations of his times out of his faith in Jesus. He created the Precious Blood Community by and for preaching the Word of God. It was a preaching of the Gospel that spoke to the lives of the poor and those most in need. In that spirit I look forward to the New Creation that will continue to have at its heart the justice and peace of Christ. ♣

Leadership, continued from page 3

can tap into anywhere (the virtual world). Instead of a log cabin that can hold a few people (only Catholics), they may be looking for a space that holds many different people, religions, and cultures. Instead of doing the work to keep the log cabin in shape (parish activities), they may be wanting to work in the wider world to help others have a home too. No one may be certain as to exactly what kind of spiritual home younger people are looking for. The one thing that does seem certain is that they are not looking for a log cabin.

But as a community we seem to be comfortable with how and where we minister, how we do



leadership, how we look at and do vocation work, and how/with whom we live community. There does not seem to be a lot of energy or desire to shift from building log cabins to building spiritual homes that would be inviting to a younger (and larger) crowd.

Of course, we will continue to help build spiritual homes for people. That is who we are. We may choose to continue to build what we are familiar with—log cabins—until no one wants them anymore, and then our work will come to an end. Or we may choose to learn how to build spiritual homes that are inviting to more people. This would involve truly listening to people and learning what they are hungering for. It probably would require us to move outside the institutional church walls to meet people where they are at. It could mean creating totally different ways people could belong to our community. It would mean reallocating our human resources for different kinds of work. If we chose this riskier and more challenging path, it would truly be creating and becoming something new. ♣

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Oh Freedom

by Fr. Denny Kinderman, C.P.P.S., PBMR

“Happy Birthday Father Denny” asserts a greeting card, designed and handmade in prison, comparable to anything Hallmark could create. Handwritten inside: *It's been ten years or so since Shobha introduced us. I'm glad she did because a complete stranger turned into a complete honest friend whom I'm glad to know. I wish you B-day Blessings and many more for many years. Love, James E Walker*

It was a typical August day, eleven years ago now, when I made my first trip to the prison in Pontiac, Illinois to meet James E Walker. The hour and forty-five-minute drive south of Chicago found me praying that I would be able to connect with a 44-year-old man who at age 17 was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison without any chance of parole—sentenced to die in prison.

Once in Pontiac, I found the gatehouse, the passageway for visitors to enter the prison. “You don’t have a lawyer’s license or number,” I was told.

Let me explain. Attorney Shobha Mahedev asked if I would be willing to join her team of lawyers at Northwestern Pritzker School of Law in Chicago. She was searching for a person who would visit a prisoner who had been sentenced as a juvenile to Life Without Parole (a JLWOP) to get his life story. After prayerful reflection (I always pray when I don’t know what I might be getting into asking “what would Gaspar do?”) I said yes. How do I explain all that at the gatehouse?

Eventually cleared, I was patted down, told to take off my shoes and sign in with license number etc., and lock up everything but my notebook. Later I found out later that James had to go through a strip search to come visit and also another strip search upon return, even though our visit was in a booth with a heavy glass window between us—so my pat-down really was nothing. This goes on for 91 visits (would have been more if not for a Covid-19 hiatus). The gatehouse folks have caught on that I am a rare bird and are more congenial, sometimes not even asking me to take off my shoes.

That first visit hooked me on James! “I am James Walker,” he said. “And I want everyone to know that I am not the same person I was back then.” He was reading Robin Casarjian’s *Houses of Healing*, and continues to read many self-help and spiritual books. With a glimmer in his eye, he recommends this or that book for the youths he’s come to know

I’m mentoring. James earned a GED, as well as awards and certificates for a variety of programs he attended and workshops he completed.

The route from Chicago to Pontiac goes right past Joliet, his hometown. I’ve stopped in to visit with his parents, and Teddy their dog, any number of times. James always wants me to bring pictures of them. His father has arthritis and his mother is legally blind. James always expresses his longing to be able to help take care of his parents. Twice I brought them with me to visit James—very special times for all of us.



Though not a church-goer, James shares scriptures and TV evangelist T.D. Jakes’ teachings, lighting up the booth like there were no glass between us. I can’t figure out his religion other than Christian, and it doesn’t stop us from praying together.

The 2012 U.S. Supreme Court finding that a mandated sentencing of a juvenile to life without parole is “cruel and unusual punishment” meant that many JLWOPs were now eligible for resentencing. But those



protesting James's appeal in 2014 didn't care. The local Joliet news printed hateful comments from the victim's family and friends. I was at the hearing when Will County judge Robert Livas ruled that Walker will continue to serve a life without parole—resentenced to die in prison.

When the Illinois Court of Appeals heard his case, I was there observing the three sitting judges, and I knew that James' appeal was ill-fated. No one knows the rehabilitated James like I do, but no judge asks me. An appeal to the Illinois Supreme Court is on hold for legal reasons I don't comprehend. The only option left now is to seek clemency from Illinois governor J.D. Pritzker.

I was scheduled for my next visit with James Wednesday, October 27th at 10:00 a.m. when I received a phone call on Saturday the 23rd from his father Charles. He said the warden just called him telling him that at noon James had passed away in the prison hospital. I received an email from the prison later: "Good

morning! I'm writing to cancel Dennis Kinderman's visit with James Walker for Mr. Walker passed away. Thank you."

The day after his passing, the family had plans in place for a 75th Birthday party for Barneta, James' mother. It turned out to be a blessing, as the family came (looked like about 50 people) to surround her and his father with love and laughter. James had always said that he so wanted to stay in touch with his siblings, but it was not a mutual longing. Growing

up with five step sisters and four other siblings, he always felt unwanted and said he couldn't remember ever being hugged.

He was a 55-year-old man who had spent all but three years of his adult life in maximum security prisons. His final three years of incarceration were outside the wall in Pontiac's medium security unit (msu). There he was thrilled to have a toilet with a seat and a cell with a door left open during the day, and visits could be in person, not behind glass.

But his final months were in the prison hospital where I was taken for what I didn't realize then would be our final visit. I've seen better hospitals in third world countries. I've seen homeless men on the streets who appeared healthier and more cared for than James.

James Emmanuel Walker N42753 is a name I will never forget and the person who brought so much depth to my life through our many visits. What a hard yet awe-inspiring life. He told of more than one time the "Orange Crush" (a band of guards in orange jumpsuits with clubs and pepper spray wearing riot helmets) came through throwing everything in their cell on the floor. They took his typewriter. There were times when he didn't get his meds; many times he was denied a doctor's visit despite filling out the required request form. At his home-going I told how "I saw expressions of tolerance as he shared what life was like lived incarcerated! Yet he was living his life fully, not letting his years be wasted, but years in which he was growing deeper into his relationship with God and closer to becoming the man God had designed him to be." His was a spiritual journey lived in relationship with a God he believed was near him through the mess of it all.

I felt so sure that his day of freedom was in the offing, that we would overcome each setback, that he would be with us at PBMR with the other returning citizens, that his life journey in prison was schooling him to be a mentor to our youth. I hadn't expected that his freedom would only come beyond this life. Yet I'm thankful that God brought our lives together and I can say James Emmanuel Walker, "honest friend," shout out "Oh freedom" at last. ♣



Precious Blood Volunteer, Raechel Kiesel (center) with other members of the PBMR community.

Rolling Up Our Sleeves

by Tim Deveney, Precious Blood Volunteers Director

In early November I attended the Ignatian Family Teach-in For Justice, which is hosted by the Ignatian Solidarity Network. One of the speakers, Father Greg Boyle, s.j., founder of Homeboy Industries, a gang intervention program in Los Angeles, spoke about our call to practice kinship. In his talk he kept coming back to a note that we all share the same last name. The last name “being.” He continued, “we are all born the same way. Everyone is unshakably good. Everyone belongs to each other.”

The message from Father Greg has been echoing in my prayers and my mind over the last few weeks. We all belong to each other. We are all in God’s family. We are all made in the image and likeness of God, and we are “unshakably good.” This is all true, but do we actually believe it?

Sometimes it’s hard to see that in the middle of a growing catastrophe of human-caused global climate

change, violence that tears the fabric of our communities, the northern hemispheric (and largely white-centric) economic system that leaves billions of folks behind because of where they were born or the color of their skin, and so many other evils in our world. As I was lost in the despair of so much that is wrong in the world, I kept coming back to his encouragement that we are about “obliterating the illusion that we are separate, we are human beings.” His further instruction that we should not “settle for just shaking your fist, roll up your sleeves to create the place where we cherish each other with every breath.” The challenge is to live up to the belief that we are all connected and then point the way to God’s inclusive love.

When I meet with our volunteers, I see them rolling up their sleeves and being part of creating places where all people are cherished. They are in places where they are better able to recognize their family members who share the same last name of “being”

and are children of our loving Creator. I am amazed when I talk to them about what they see and experience with the folks they work and walk with. Instead of just shaking their fists they continue to do the hard work of building a better and more just world. They choose to live out a spirituality of the blood, a spirituality Father Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S. described as a spirituality that “proclaims life in a world where death seems to have the upper hand.”

On a daily basis our volunteers witness the toll that structures which uphold white supremacy and racism takes on the folks they walk with in their placements. It would be easy for our volunteers to point out and shake their fists at these injustices. I know I find myself often shaking my fists at these injustices, and not pointing the way to life. Oftentimes most of us take the easy path of ignoring our own participation in these systems. The hard work of rolling up our sleeves requires us to take a good hard look at our own participation in these structures and commit to breaking them down and building up places where all people are cherished.

We are continuing on with our commitment to the charism of the Precious Blood by making sure we are a welcoming and inclusive community that reflects our charism of reconciliation. Over the next few months we are expanding an effort to examine how the Precious Blood Volunteers Program can proclaim life in this world through being a more racially just program and working for the liberation of all God’s people.

This process will include making sure we are a welcoming and inclusive community that reflects our charism of reconciliation and renewal. It requires some deep questions about how we support our volunteers and alumni of color. In this process we will be looking at how our recruiting practices may unnecessarily exclude people of color. This includes examining how we portray our volunteers and the people they serve in our brochures and website, as well as how we talk about our ministry at recruiting fairs and from where we recruit our volunteers.

We are looking beyond just our own practices to challenge our volunteers and placements to be

pointing towards this way of being together as one family. We will engage with our placements to make sure they are working towards a more just future in their hiring practices, their support of their staff, how they treat the people they serve, and who is leading their organizations. We want to be sure that our volunteers are working for reconciliation, where the lives of the folks they work and walk with are valued. Our volunteers should be using this year as an opportunity to bind up their own liberation with the liberation of the people they work with. In our discernment process and throughout their volunteer year we will need to see how we can better help our volunteers discern their purpose as a way to glorify God through their work and relationships with others.

As people who are committed to a spirituality of the blood, we are called to proclaim life in a world where death appears to have all of the advantages. We are called to point the way towards reconciling the world and bringing ourselves nearer to each other in a radical kinship where we all understand that we share the same last name.

You can watch Father Boyle's talk at <https://www.youtube.com/user/IgnatianSolidarity> along with other videos from the 2021 Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice. ♣

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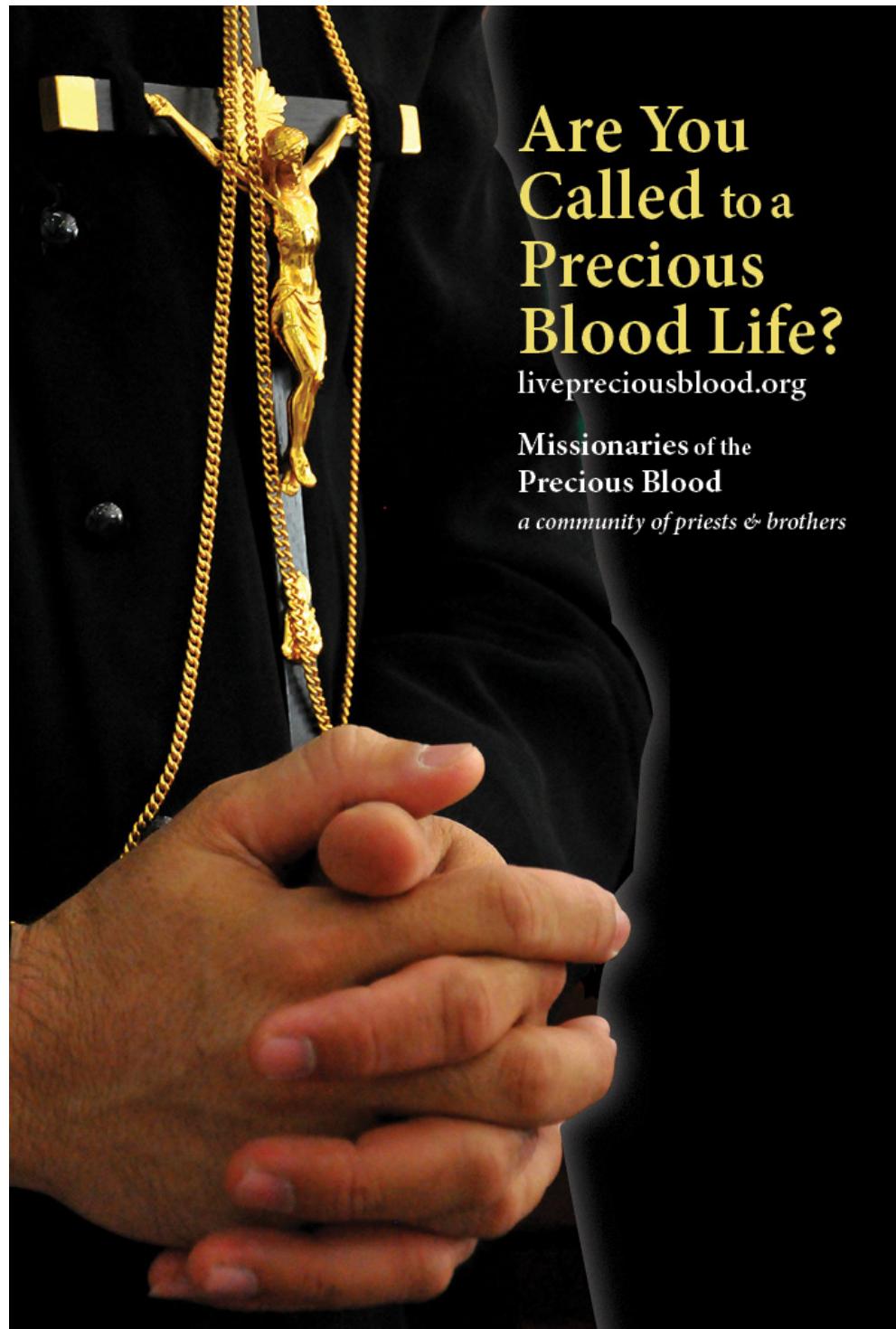
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