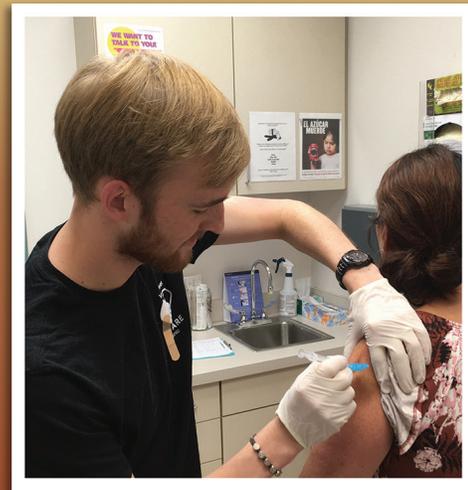


THE **New Wine** PRESS

Volume 31 No. 3 • November 2022



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



Precious Blood Volunteers
preciousbloodvolunteers.org

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Cover image: *Wildflowers at Precious Blood Renewal Center, photo by Tim Deveney*

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 United States Province—incorporated members, covenanted Companions, and candidates—united in prayer, service, and mutual support, characterized by the tradition of its 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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A Mix of Colors

By Margaret Haik, Director of Communications

My neighborhood trees are a beautiful mix of colors today, yet another reminder of how each season reveals new glories (as Tim Deveney points out in his article). Some trees are still green, while the maple right outside my window is a blaze of red, yellow, and orange. As I marvel at their beauty, I am reminded of the beauty inherent in each of us, however uniquely we may manifest it. This month's articles are reminders of how our past and current Companions, members, and volunteers have not only shared their own brilliant colors with the world but are encouraging others to do so as well.

Fr. Ron Will, C.P.P.S., wrote a leadership article in which he reflects on the Day of the Dead celebration. By honoring our ancestors, we bring them into our presence. Perhaps, he says, they can guide us as we continue with the New Creation.

Kevin Considine, the director of the newly established Robert Schrieter Institute at Chicago Theological Union, shares the institute's inaugural events to promote Precious Blood spirituality.

Peace and Justice Director Gabino Zavala recalls his visit with a death row inmate, and reflects on the corporate stance against the death penalty the former Kansas City Province adopted in 1989, reminding us that all life is valuable.

Precious Blood Volunteer Director Tim Deveney shares his observations on care for creation at Precious Blood Renewal Center and calls for all Precious Blood people to practice this in their daily lives.

Former Precious Blood Volunteer Kara McNamera gives us an update on her life and how her experience as a Precious Blood Volunteer has formed her and helped her be present to the needs of others.

Finally, Fr. Denny Kinderman, C.P.P.S., shares some stories about the young people he crosses paths with at the Cook County Temporary Juvenile Detention Center. They are "longing to be led," he says, seeking to shine despite their struggles.

I hope your November celebrations of All Saints and All Souls Days, Thanksgiving, the Feast of Christ the King, and the First Sunday of Advent are blessed and that you bless others with the beauty unique to you. ✠

Calling on Our “Cloud of Witnesses”

By Fr. Ron Will, C.P.P.S., Leadership Council

In Hebrews 12:1, we read: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Those witnesses include our deceased relatives as well as our deceased members and Companions. We wouldn't be here if it were not for the generations before us. When we have community gatherings, stories are told about former leaders and pioneers in our Precious Blood family.

During November, we are especially conscious of those deceased loved ones, and we pray for their eternal rest with God in heaven.

A few years ago, the Disney movie “Coco” made me aware of a custom of our Mexican American brothers and sisters called “Day of the Dead” or “Día de los Muertos.” The movie may not be a completely accurate depiction of the custom, but it describes a very real one.

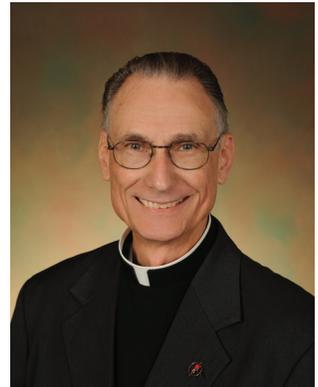
Day of the Dead is a celebration of life and death. Although the holiday originated in Mexico, it is celebrated all over Latin America with colorful calaveras (skulls) and calacas (skeletons).

Day of the Dead combines the ancient Aztec custom of celebrating ancestors with All Souls' Day, a holiday that Spanish invaders brought to Mexico in the early 1500s. The holiday, which is celebrated November 1-2, is like a family reunion—except dead ancestors are the guests of honor.

While Halloween is a dark night of terror and mischief, Day of the Dead festivities unfold over two days in an explosion of color and life-affirming joy.

In our C.P.P.S. houses, we pray daily for those who died on that date in history. We have been praying for them for years, and I am sure many of them are already in heaven and no longer need our prayers. So, I have developed the habit of praying to them to intercede for our present-day members and Companions. You might have a similar practice for your own blood family relatives. They are still part of our

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Schreiter Institute Event: Envisioning a Future for Precious Blood Spirituality

By Kevin P. Considine, Ph.D., Director, The Robert J. Schreiter Institute for Precious Blood Spirituality

Is there a future for Precious Blood spirituality?

Of course, there is. God's gifts are freely given and bear fruit. God remains faithful to us in the work in which we participate.

As St. Paul reminds us, "The One who calls you is faithful and...will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24). God's gift of Precious Blood spirituality is no different. After all, one key aspect of Precious Blood spirituality is "to spread [God's] reconciling love to everyone, especially the lost, the hopeless, the poor, the victims of violence—anyone who feels left out of the circle of God's love."

Part of this is recognizing the cry of the blood wherever it might be heard—not only recognizing the cry, but interpreting, understanding, and responding to it with compassion and solidarity in order to become a sacrament of God's healing presence to another. This is part of the gift and the challenge of Precious Blood spirituality. It is a gift the world desperately needs and a challenge many are willing to undertake.

So, a better question would be: What forms will Precious Blood spirituality assume in the future?

The answer is not at all clear. After all, membership in religious congregations is declining, young people are more and more disaffected with organized religion, and the Church itself is polarized rather than reconciled.

The Schreiter Institute for Precious Blood Spirituality at Catholic Theological Union plans to assist in responding to this important question. On Dec. 2, the Schreiter Institute, in collaboration with the Precious Blood Spirituality Institute will hold its first event: "Looking Backwards, Looking Forwards: Commemorating the 75th Birthday of Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S." The purpose of the event is threefold.

First, it will communally commemorate Schreiter's life, work, and legacy both within and beyond the Precious Blood communities in advance of what



Kevin Considine

would have been his 75th birthday. Second, it will introduce how the Schreiter Institute will attempt to institutionalize that work and carry it forward in a variety of forms into the future. Third, it will facilitate conversations with attendees about their own hopes, concerns, and ideas for how the institute can carry on the work of reconciliation based in Precious Blood spirituality.

"Looking Backward, Looking Forward" will begin with a prayer service of remembrance and introductory remarks by CTU president Barbara Reid. It will continue with reflections on the life and legacy of Robert J. Schreiter, offered by Jeffrey Kirch, C.P.P.S., before focusing on "looking forward."

Here, the event transitions to an overview of the vision of inaugural director Dr. Kevin Considine and his plans for carrying on this legacy. Considine will give an overview of the Institute's mission, goals, early accomplishments, and programming for its inaugural year. Some of these events include:

- Participation in a pilgrimage for racial justice, called Sankofa Journeys.
- The opening of a winter art exhibition at CTU focused on how glassblowing can heal trauma inflicted by violence.
- A two-day spring symposium on a praxis of reconciliation in May 2023.

The event will conclude with a facilitated discussion and Q&A with attendees, who will voice their

own hopes for the Schreiter Institute and the future of Precious Blood spirituality before sitting down together and eating lunch.

The Schreiter Institute for Precious Blood Spirituality is a joint venture between the primary stakeholders of Precious Blood spirituality in the U.S.:

1. Missionaries of the Precious Blood
2. Adorers of the Blood of Christ
3. Sisters of the Precious Blood, Dayton, Ohio
4. Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, O'Fallon, Missouri
5. Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois

Its mission is to promote the development of a practical theology of reconciliation rooted in the spirituality of the Precious Blood through academic scholarship, theological and pastoral education, and restorative practices within society and the Church.

"Looking Backwards, Looking Forwards: Commemorating the 75th Birthday of Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S." will take place on Dec. 2, 2023 at Catholic Theological Union from 9 a.m. until 11 a.m. It will be offered bimodally. ✠

Leadership, continued from page 3

family. They are still interested in our welfare. I especially pray for their intercession during our transition into a new U.S. Province. We are surrounded by this cloud of witnesses.

When we sing the "Holy, Holy, Holy" during Mass, sometimes I close my eyes and visualize my parents, brother, and brothers-in-law who have died. I visualize them gathered around the throne of God singing along with the saints and angels. It brings a smile to my face and to my heart.

Depending on the family, Day of the Dead can be serious or funny, but it is always respectful. It almost always includes stories about the departed and their memorable qualities. Sometimes family members bring gifts to the site where the relative is buried. Often, they create something like an altar in the home, decorated with favorite things of those they

are remembering. They may serve Mexican dishes or fruits, depending on the preference of the departed.

It's always a warm experience. Family is really important to most. Some families have a picnic at the grave. They bring some of the deceased's favorite foods.

Some families set up a small table and place the pictures of family and friends who have died. They pray the rosary at the table during the month of November. The remembrance may last all month, not just the first two days. See the picture below from Gabino Zavala's family table, as an example. Gabino is one of our Companions of Mexican descent.

Today, it has become a much bigger deal because of promotion and media. When Gabino was growing up, the celebration was quieter and less public. For the Indigenous people in Mexico, it has always been an important day to remember. In certain small, rural towns in Mexico, the cemeteries are packed on that day, especially with Indigenous folks. They bring music and food the deceased liked and spend time at the cemetery with their loved ones.

How are you celebrating the "the great cloud of witnesses" that surround you this November? I have made a conscious commitment to call upon them. I encourage you to pray with them as we move into the New Creation of the U.S. Province. ✠

Day of the Dead table, picture by Gabino Zavala



Choose Life!

By Gabino Zavala, Justice and Peace Director

I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

In late April 1999, I led a delegation of people involved in restorative justice to San Quentin prison on behalf of the California Catholic Conference. We were specifically interested in spending some time with men on California's death row.

There are currently approximately 700 men on California's death row and 21 women.

During that 1999 visit, I had the opportunity to meet with Manny Babbitt one-on-one. Babbitt was to be executed May 4, 1999. He was convicted of the first-degree murder of Leah Schendel, 78, during a burglary in Sacramento, California, in 1980. Schendel died from a heart attack after Babbitt beat her and attempted to rape her.

Babbitt was a former marine who had been wounded at the bloody battle of Khe Sanh in Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam. He came home from the war suffering from the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A year before his execution, he was awarded the Purple Heart for the wounds he received at Khe Sanh. Babbitt refused the customary last meal and asked that the allotted \$50 be given to homeless Vietnam veterans.

I spoke to Babbitt just before he was to be put on suicide watch the week before his execution. The state does this so the person sentenced to be executed does not take their own life and the state can carry out its sentence. Babbitt did not dispute that he had assaulted Schendel and caused her death. But he told me he had no memory of this crime or his other crimes. He was executed by lethal injection.

The Kansas City Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood took its first corporate stance in 1989. This corporate stance was against the death penalty:

Motivated by the Blood of Christ and called to be ministers of reconciliation, the Society of the Precious Blood, Kansas City Province, reaffirms its belief in the sacredness of life and thereby takes this position that capital punishment is wrong. To put these words into action, we encourage our priests, brothers, and companions of the Society of the Precious Blood to engage in activities which will end the death penalty in those states where it is still used and to work toward the goal of ending this type of sentence in our nation. Wherever it is deemed appropriate, we encourage our members to preach justice and mercy on behalf of the victim and perpetrator of such horrendous crimes.

A corporate stance is a deliberative position or action in response to the conscious decision of the community. It is a statement that reflects a corporate consciousness resulting from study, prayerful reflection, and the shared values of the community. A corporate stance involves an issue of major importance that touches on the charism and spirituality of the community.

For Precious Blood Missionaries, our corporate stances affect us as Christians, as Precious Blood Missionaries, and as citizens of the world. It is our response to the Gospel and the social teachings of the Church. Our corporate stances allow us to offer deliberate and measured responses to the concerns of our times. As Precious Blood Missionaries, we work for reconciliation and advocate for those who are on the margins.

A lot has changed regarding the death penalty since the Kansas City Province's corporate stance. In 2018 Pope Francis revised the Catechism of the Catholic Church, declaring that the death penalty "is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and the dignity of the person." He further stated that the Church would be working "for its abolition worldwide."

Catholic social teaching helps us understand why the death penalty is deemed inadmissible in

all cases. Its principle “on the life and dignity of the human person” reminds us that every person is endowed with a God-given dignity and, thus, we do not have the authority to destroy life. This is true even in the cases of those who have caused grave harm. The death penalty has also placed the lives of the innocent at risk. In the modern era of capital punishment, more than 185 people condemned to death have been exonerated from death row after being wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death.

The principle of “preferential option for the poor and vulnerable” calls us to care for the marginalized among us. Our system of capital punishment disproportionately targets vulnerable populations, including people of color, the poor, and those with mental illness, mental diminishment, and severe trauma.

Catholic social teaching offers us a framework and principles that guide us to Gospel values and Christ’s teachings. It is clear that the death penalty is contrary to these values and teachings because it violates human dignity, puts innocent lives at risk, and targets the most vulnerable among us.

We have long been strong and vocal about our corporate stance against the death penalty. For decades, we have emphatically opposed the death penalty. We have written articles in opposition to it. We have stood on street corners giving public witness to our opposition on the day of scheduled executions. We have partnered and collaborated with other organizations working to abolish the death penalty.

There is a resurgence of executions in some of those states that still have the death penalty. Despite the scheduling of more execution dates, the nation as a whole is unquestionably moving away from the use of capital punishment in sentencing. To date, 23 states have abolished the death penalty. Three more states have declared a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

Another sign of hope is that more Americans oppose the death penalty than in any other time in the modern history of the death penalty in the United States. Although the corporate stance was taken by

the Kansas City Province and not by the new United States Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, it is still an issue we need to engage with so that we can work to abolish the death penalty.

In 1999, when I visited Manny Babbitt on death row, I had been working for several years in restorative justice, and I had been opposed to the death penalty for some time. What I saw and heard at San Quentin strengthened my opposition to the death penalty. We do not need the death penalty to protect the community. It is not needed to defend innocent life. It is time to end the barbaric use of the death penalty. We are called rather to promote the inherent dignity of every human being. We are called to choose life! †

Events at Precious Blood Renewal Center

Taizé Prayer

First Thursday of the month, 7-8 p.m.
In-person and live streamed

A Morning of Advent Reflection

Saturday, December 3, 10-11:30 a.m.

An Evening of Advent Reflection

Tuesday, December 6, 7-8:30 p.m.

St. Lucy Day Celebration

Wednesday, December 13, 10 a.m.-noon

Out of Darkness, Light: Winter Solstice Celebration

Wednesday, December 21, 6:30-9 p.m.

Visit pbrenewalcenter.org/events
for more information.

All times are Central Time Zone.



Wildflowers at Precious Blood Renewal Center, photo by Tim Deveney

Reconciling with God's Creation

By Tim Deveney, Precious Blood Volunteers Director

Following an unusually hot spell in September, we were blessed with more normal temperatures in Kansas City. It's been a lot nicer to take my post-lunch walk around the grounds of the Precious Blood Renewal Center. I love walking over on the southeast side of the lake. The gravel path follows the grassland that was planted a few years ago, ringed by an ample number of trees.

The seasons reveal different new glories as the growing season moves forward. The spring reveals the greenish blue of the native grasses. These are followed by coneflowers of different hues. In August and September, the sunflowers extol the glory of God with their yellows ringing rich black. Then the goldenrod takes its turn to show off. The natural

beauty of this prairie and forest is in stark contrast with the noise of the interstate and the looming gray ugliness of the newly built warehouse just across the parkway.

One day when I was walking along this path, it struck me that by devoting this section of land to native plants, we are engaging in an act of reconciliation with God's creation. A good chunk of the land we are entrusted with at the Renewal Center is devoted to trees and grasslands. These native prairie grasses and flowers are beautiful and surprisingly resilient. Most important, they do great work in offsetting some of the worst actions we have taken to hurt the Earth and God's creation that inhabits it. These grasslands do not require the hours of



mowing by machines that consume fossil fuels and produce localized pollutants and noise.

This rewilded area supports a biodiverse area for plants and animals. The grasses, flowers, and trees provide expanded habitat for bugs and a surprising number of animals. Since that part of the Renewal Center grounds was converted from lawn to prairie, there has been a notable increase in the fauna there. It is not unusual to see deer, turtles, snakes, coyotes, and birds of all kinds.

These native grasses, flowers, and trees reduce the impact of localized and regional flooding and erosion. They do this by absorbing rainwater into the ground through their own water needs and

channeling water deeper into the ground through their extensive root systems. They also do a more effective job of holding topsoil in the ground than lawn grasses do. These plants can help filter out some manufactured contaminants before they reach surface water.

In addition, these plants effectively absorb greenhouse gasses, which Project Drawdown, an organization working to stop human-caused climate change, describes as a “carbon sink.” They do this much better than a manicured lawn.

Reconciling with the Earth is a small act of reconciliation. It should be a part of broader efforts by

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Volunteer Commitment Is Transformative Experience

By Kara McNamara, Precious Blood Volunteer Alumna

I have always been an avid reader. One of my favorite books is “Jane Eyre” by Charlotte Brontë. When I first read it in high school, I was focused on the dramatic romance between Jane and Mr. Rochester at the center of the Gothic story. Over the years, as I’ve revisited the book, other important themes emerged: autonomy, social class, the hospitality of strangers, mental health, and morality. I have been delighted by the ways in which a story can continue to have new meaning, even when the words remain the same. Every time I read the story, I am different and the lens through which I view it changes.

The same is true for the meaning and impact of my time as a Precious Blood volunteer! I have enjoyed the presence of Precious Blood people and Precious Blood spirituality in my life for nearly 10 years. It amazes me that what started as a six-month commitment as a volunteer on the Navajo reservation has become a formative, transformative experience and way of looking at the world. In that time as a volunteer, I learned so much about myself, spirituality, ministry of presence, and the inherent dignity of the human person. Ten years later, I continue to pursue growth in those areas and to find connections in my everyday life now, long after I left Crownpoint, New Mexico.

This formational time as a volunteer and the resulting connections with Precious Blood members and Companions taught me to recognize and follow “the cry of the blood.” That cry felt (and still feels) like a personal and irresistible invitation from God to be present to the needs of others.

I followed that call into working with youth in the nonprofit sector for several years before returning to graduate school for a master’s degree in counseling. It was obvious to me that in order to further pursue the call to support and serve others, I had some things to learn! I worked as a high school counselor for a few years, and with my professional focus on mental health and trauma-informed care for my students, I truly felt that the tenets of the Precious Blood volunteer program to walk with those who suffer and to build community lived on in my work. The high school

where I worked also implemented restorative practices, and I was extremely interested in the pursuit of reconciliation in that context.



Kara with husband Jack Schlueter, and daughter Clare

This interest led me to my current work for the Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition, which provides training and support to those who minister to people affected by incarceration or detention. I am the communications manager for the organization, which means it is my work to invite people to discover their own call to seek reconciliation, be present to the needs of others, and work for justice.

In doing this work, I truly have felt the ordinary transform into the sacred. I may be working away on a laptop at home, but I am listening to the needs of people, I am helping to train the next generation of prison ministers, and I am working toward the creation of a justice system that upholds the dignity of every human person. It has been simultaneously grounding and energizing.

As an added bonus, after years of following the impact of the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation, I enjoyed the experience of learning from Fr. David Kelly and Sr. Donna Liette through two (excellent) CPMC webinars earlier this year. I am grateful to have a job that aligns my personal values and sense of vocation with my professional tasks.

The story continues. I am grateful for the day I thumbed through the Catholic Volunteer Network catalog and found an opportunity that has brought so much good to my life. I never could have guessed all the joy and community that has flowed from that experience, including the sense of joy and community that is present in my personal life. I married my husband Jack four years ago with Fr. Al Ebach, C.P.P.S.,

presiding. When we welcomed our sweet daughter Clare into the world this summer, we did so knowing that so many others were celebrating with us.

I am so grateful that God connected my story with this community and charism.

“We know that God is everywhere; but certainly we feel His presence most when His works are on the grandest scale spread before us; and it is in the unclouded night-sky, where His worlds wheel their silent course, that we read clearest His infinitude, His omnipotence, His omnipresence.”

-Charlotte Brontë, “Jane Eyre” †

Reconciling with God’s Creation, continued from page 9 all of us as individuals, as a Precious Blood community committed to renewal and reconciliation, to care for our common home and a reframing of how we view and treat it.

Pope Francis writes in “Laudato Si” that “[Mother Earth] cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.” He continues: “We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.”

He challenges all of us even more firmly with quotes from Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew “for human beings ... to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life—these are sins” since “to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and sin against God.”

Embracing this challenge requires us to have a change of heart. Pope Francis cites his predecessor Pope Benedict in a call to find the way of love, which is moving from our own individual wants and desires to what God’s world needs. This means liberating ourselves from fear, greed, and compulsion.

Changing our hearts should lead us to deeper reconciliation with our common home and each other. Action should follow our turning away from the sin against nature. Our actions need to include reducing emissions of greenhouse gasses and other pollutants by using less and becoming more energy efficient. Better efficiency can be achieved through technological tools that include renewable sources of energy and technologies such as higher efficiency light bulbs and means of transportation.



Deer at Precious Blood Renewal Center, photo by Margaret Haik

However, we are not going to be able to use technology to get us out of this crisis. A major part of this is reordering our lives to use less. It means shaping our communities in ways that reduce dependence on automobiles and prioritize walking, bicycling, and public transportation. It will require us to think about how much waste we produce through non-reusable items and other consumer goods that have short useful lives that end up in landfills or as litter. We will need to think about our food systems that produce a great deal of waste and greenhouse-emitting byproducts. The waste from spoilage of food is especially troubling since a good deal of that could go to feeding people.

Our overuse of land for agriculture and other commercial purposes also takes away from wild areas. These wild environments, on a larger scale than what is happening at the Renewal Center, need to be protected and expanded. Wild areas are wonderful carbon sinks. They are our best way to reduce the amount of greenhouse gasses currently in our atmosphere. They have the added benefit of protecting and promoting biodiversity, while ensuring the longevity of our sources of freshwater. †



Fr. Denny Kinderman, C.P.P.S., the Men's March in Chicago, August 2020, photo by Holly OHara, PBMR Communications Coordinator

Something I Can't Not Do

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

Editor's Note: The names in this article are fictitious; the stories are true.

"When I was seven, my auntie adopted me. As my stepmom, she changed my name to Henry. At age 11, she put me out, later admitting she never did like me. I came into her life as a package deal with my little brother, whom she really loved."

I listened to Johnathan (his birth name) for about 15 minutes as his story unfolded. He eventually landed where he is now at age 17: in Cook County's Temporary Juvenile Detention Center (JTDC). He doesn't think his story is out of the ordinary, sleeping in abandoned cars or on the floor of a friend's home.

"I look at my life, and I love it," he said. "I feel better telling you about it."

I've spent 20-some years listening to stories of young lives in disarray. Yet God, like a shepherd, is there leading JTDC kids—struggling, resisting, and longing to be led.

Author and activist Parker Palmer reflects: "Violence is what happens when we don't know what to do with our suffering." While the courts focus on the violence, I sit and listen to the suffering.

"I love my birth mother," Alfred confides in me, "but she's an addict."

"Do you have any sisters or brothers?" I ask.

I always ask that, and then I wait as they calculate how many on their father's or their mother's side. He counts on his fingers, including as his siblings the children of a caring woman he calls "mother." On his sixth finger he looks at me and says, "These six died in a fire two months ago—all children of my stepmom."

"Come close, I don't want anyone to hear. My mother is homeless and is in a wheelchair. Can you help her?" Isaac asked me.

“Do you think I did the right thing? Think I can plead self-defense?” Thomas tells me what happened on the train—the one I take whenever going downtown. It is too often in the news, with reports of stabbings, shootings, and robberies. Thomas’ story was detailed—and one that now has him going to the adult court for attempted murder.

“I go to court every Wednesday hoping DCFS will find a placement for me,” Raymond says. The lives of some incarcerated kids are overseen by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Often these kids spend months incarcerated, just waiting for placement in a group home or with a family. Raymond seems resigned to this fate while telling me about his dream to someday be a chef and own his own restaurant. I’m touched by his untiring hope.

“I fell on my knees and cried out really loud: ‘God forgive me!’” Hernandez exclaimed.

Hernandez had experienced months of nightmares and torturous feelings of guilt. To escape his depression, he told me about his attempt to shoot himself, while making a video of it. The gun had jammed.

“You have to be serious,” Hernandez instructed me, “You have to really get into it!” And I remembered Thomas Merton’s reflection that the deepest level of communication is not communication but communion. “After screaming to God, I feel good again.”

“I’m writing a book about my life to help kids not make the same mistakes I’ve made,” said Jakwon.

Jakwon lives in a neighborhood he claims is the worst in Chicago. “I became street-wise and did a lot of bad things,” he says.

He wants to help others by telling his story, like I hear from many other JTDC youth in their creative reflections on life as it really is in the hood—rapping realities of shattered lives.

From a table where four kids are playing cards, one implores: “Say a prayer for all of us.” They all bow their heads while we lift our voices to the God who knit

them together in their mother’s womb, to the God who calls them beloved sons, to the God who has plans for their lives. They ask the One who alone is their Judge for freedom, for protection for their families (especially for their moms and grandmoms), and for help bettering their lives. Occasionally, they wipe away tears.

Through it all, I am balancing ministry with a tinge of guilt. It’s as if by volunteering as a chaplain in JTDC, I am agreeing with a faulty criminal justice system—like guilt by association. Advocating for change is another battleground. Here in JTDC I enter a healing ground where I find the Good Shepherd going after the strays to put them on His shoulder and tell them: “Your faith has saved you.”

Every Tuesday and Thursday evening finds me in JTDC doing something I can’t not do. ✠

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is everything."
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