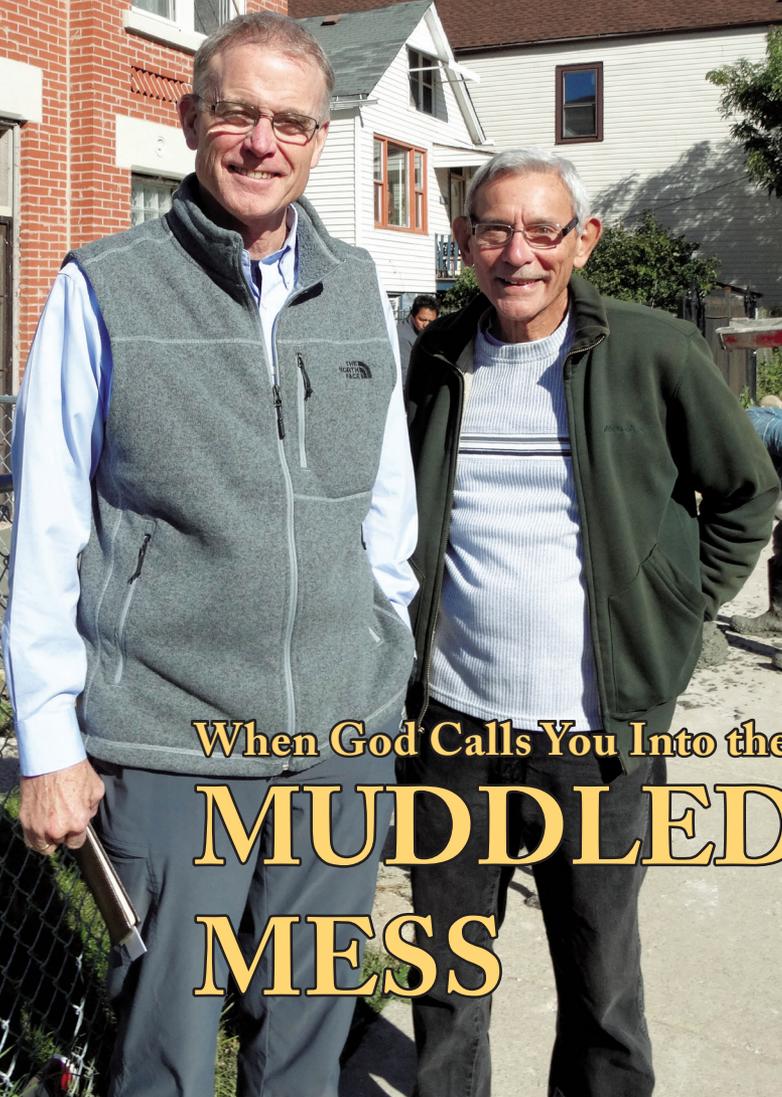


WINTER 2019

COPPS TODAY

MISSIONARIES OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD



When God Calls You Into the
**MUDDLED
MESS**

In this issue of *C.P.P.S. Today*



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**C.P.P.S. Frs.
Tom Hemm and
Tom Welk.**

C.P.P.S. is an abbreviation of the Latin name of the Congregation, Congregatio Pretiosissimi Sanguinis, *Congregation of the Most Precious Blood.*

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Spirituality is Part of All that We Do

One lesson I learned in my undergraduate philosophy classes is that some words are hard to define. On one level the word “person” is very easy to define. A person is a human being. Period. But in a metaphysics class at Saint Joseph’s College taught by Br. Rob Reuter, C.P.P.S., nothing was ever that easy and simple. What is it that makes us a “person” but a chimpanzee isn’t? Is it intelligence? Is it free will? Each time in class, just when you thought you had a clear understanding of a difficult concept, Br. Rob would ask a provocative question that would lead to even more questions. So the basic lesson I learned was that some words are difficult to define.

Spirituality is one of those words that on the surface seems easy to understand. The prayers I pray each day, that is what spirituality is. Well, yes and no. We know that spirituality is related to our prayer life, but it goes deeper than that. Spirituality is, on a fundamental level, how we live. Spirituality is that deep relationship that we have with God and in turn our spirituality informs the totality of our lives. Spirituality is not confined to a church building or a prayer book. Instead, spirituality encompasses all that we do.

The articles in this issue of *C.P.P.S. Today* help us explore the idea of spirituality from two different points of view. The Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation (PBMR) needs no introduction. If you want to understand Precious Blood spirituality, go visit the PBMR. Better yet, volunteer for a few days and you will see how our Precious Blood spirituality is made concrete. You can see our spirituality in the circles of mothers who have lost children to violence in Chicago. You can see our spirituality alive in the various programs offered by the PBMR to help bring justice and healing to a fractured neighborhood.

We often concentrate on how our spirituality supports our various ministries throughout the world. We can see our spirituality at work in our own lives as well. This can be especially true as we age. Precious Blood spirituality helps us face the challenges of aging and death. Fr. Tom Welk, C.P.P.S., a chaplain and medical ethicist, recently led a conversation on these very issues. As we face diminishment in our advanced years, we need to draw even deeper on our spirituality. Our relationship with God will sustain us on our journey of life.

Spirituality may be hard for Webster to define, but we can clearly see it in action everywhere the Missionaries of the Precious Blood minister.

**Between
the Lines
by Fr. Jeffrey
Kirch, C.P.P.S.**





Precious Blood spirituality led Fr. Dave Kelly, left, and Fr. Deny Kinderman into a neighborhood where God's healing touch is needed every day.

When God Calls You Into the MUDDLED MESS

The Back of the Yards neighborhood on the south side of the Chicago, where the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation (PBMR) is located, is not always an easy place to be. It's a neighborhood where people have been kicked around,

undermined by poverty and assaulted by violence. It's not featured on any postcards of the city, but for two Missionaries of the Precious Blood, it's home.

For Fr. Dave Kelly, C.P.P.S., who directs the center, it's the perfect place to live out his

vocation as a Missionary of the Precious Blood. Following Jesus isn't necessarily about occupying a land of peace—it's about allowing Christ's peace and healing to flow through you to those who need it the most.

"Part of understanding Precious Blood spirituality is understanding that by entering into the muddled mess, the woundedness that is carried in others and in ourselves, the chaos of life, is an act of faith, not an act of desperation," he said. "We move in to help other people not with the idea that we have all the answers, but that God will work through us. We touch the woundedness that we see, recognizing that if we stay with it, if we do the work faithfully, healing will happen. We embrace the spirituality of the cross as a sign of hope, because it's only through suffering that we really are one with God."

Living Holy Saturday

That means something different to everyone who embraces the cross. It calls for unflinching courage when looking at the pain dished out to humans by humans, or sometimes by happenstance. It requires a Christian to be a healing presence in the midst of discord. It means opening one's arms to strangers, to those who

are lonely or fearful, hungry or cold, and welcoming them into Christ's compassionate care.

Fr. Kelly carries out that calling at the PBMR, which annually serves nearly 300 youth and 100 adults, all of whom come to the center for their own reasons, and all of whom are welcomed into a safe space, a place where they are valued as sons and daughters of God.

Often, they present themselves with problems that may seem unsolvable, wounds that will never heal. Fr. Kelly said it's crucial that he and other staff members at the PBMR are patient and counsel others to be patient, too. He calls it living in Holy Saturday.

"We know from our own experience of the Triduum and in our own lives that Holy Saturday is not a very comfortable place to be. People want to move on quickly to Easter. But staying there in Holy Saturday when you know that's part of our spirituality, not glossing over the pain and yet not giving up hope—when you understand that there is the resurrection and that is ultimately what will come of this—that gives purpose and meaning to where you are sitting," he said. "You have the conviction that you will become a new creation—versus the desperation of being in an ugly place with no hope."

Relentless Engagement

He talks about waiting, he talks about sitting—but at the PBMR’s center, which is on the second floor of a former parochial school building, patience does not mean passivity. The 20 staff members and many volunteers who minister at the center move heaven and earth to help the youth and adults who walk through the doors. “You’ve got to be willing to be real, authentic and caring,” he said. “You’ve got to love these kids and not give up on them.”

Sr. Donna Liette, CPPS, one of two Precious Blood sisters also in ministry at the PBMR, says what’s required is “relentless engagement.” That means not only welcoming people to the center and accepting them for who they are, but also taking phone calls after hours, visiting them and their family members in jails and hospitals, helping them find their way through a world that often tries to exclude or entrap them.

The youth and adults who come to the center have often experienced trauma at home or in their neighborhood, Fr. Kelly said. “Because of the trauma in their lives, they don’t trust, period. To win over their trust and to be able to engage them in a deeper way, they have to sense authenticity about us—

versus us just coming in with a program that we think will help. Authenticity is the biggest thing,” he said.

That’s something that people on the outside struggle to understand, he added. “People get the general gist of what we’re doing here, but I don’t know if they understand the impact of trauma on these kids: how hard it is, how exhausting it is. That these kids come here scarred and wounded, and live out of that woundedness. (When they act out), other organizations sometimes tell them, ‘You’ve got to leave.’ But we try not to. It’s no different than a family: throwing your kid out is really not an option. You will leave no stone unturned for a son or daughter who is suffering. For us, it is not theoretical.”

Safety Within Themselves

That absolute commitment, that authenticity, has led to hiring staff members who understand the struggles of the neighborhood because they’ve grown up there or in a similar place. Orlando Mayorga, 38, whom everybody calls Chilly, was incarcerated when he was 17. In prison he participated in the CAVE program (Community Anti-Violence Education) with his peers and credits it for helping him find his way to a new life.



“Many of our youth don’t feel safe in their homes, they don’t feel safe on the streets.”

PBMR staff member Orlando Mayorga

Now a case manager at the PBMR, he facilitates CAVE circles every week for 16- to 24-year-olds. “It’s the same model that we used in prison: nobody is the holder of all knowledge: we can all learn from each other,” he said. “I facilitate the conversation, and we talk about what trauma is and how it impacts our decision-making. The most important thing is that we build relationships: we build up connections that may not have been there before. Even though some of these guys may have known each other forever, they may not ever have discussed their emotions before. So we have conversations centered around the emotions that we face on a day-to-day basis.”

In their neighborhood, one

of those emotions is fear. “Many of our youth don’t feel safe in their homes, they don’t feel safe on the streets,” he said. “So we talk about how we can find safety within ourselves. We talk about emotional safety, moral safety, physical safety. We also talk about loss. Many of us have lost our freedom, lost our childhood, lost family members or close friends to violence. When we talk about it, it allows us to learn from each other and move on to a healthy future.”

“The Call of the Blood”

Fr. Denny Kinderman, C.PP.S., was led to the Back of the Yards “to ministry to and with those who live on the margins of society. I believe God called me

there, and I willingly said ‘yes.’”

His first assignment as a priest was as associate pastor of St. Mark Church in an urban neighborhood in Cincinnati. That was in 1967.

“I soon fell in love with the ministry of parish life in an African-American neighborhood,” he said. “It was a time of racial tension and upheaval. This immersion into a ministry among African-Americans taught me meaningful lessons about the need for social reform and care for those caught in the web of poverty and prejudice.”

When the Missionaries opened the PBMR in 2002, he knew he wanted to be a part of it. “While I chose to be part of PBMR, it was born out of my life journey, which I had not chosen but grew into,” he said. “PBMR was born out of a call to be about something new as we were facing a decline in vocations and needing to say goodbye to some of our ministries.”

Ministry in a neighborhood where people face so many challenges every day fits into what Missionaries term “the call of the Blood,” a response to God’s urging that Christians to look around for those who need the healing power of the Precious Blood. The Missionaries, along with the Sisters of the Precious Blood and the Sister Adorers of

the Blood of Christ, thought this new ministry could bring new life and hope not only to the neighborhood, but to those who minister there.

That’s been true for him, Fr. Kinderman said. “I used to think, in my previous life, that I was busy as a pastor, but I’m far busier here. Even though I’m old enough to retire, I can’t imagine not being here constantly on call. I find it difficult to take any time off—you miss too much,” he said.

“I feel blessed to be able to continue to respond to the many needs faced daily (at the center). I know in my heart of hearts that God is the one arranging my life, and all I need to do is allow that. It ain’t always easy, but I continue to grow from my mistakes and will keep on ministering here as long as it pleases God to have me here.”

“I’ve Got Like 25 Sons”

It ain’t always easy—that’s something of an understatement. Yet the PBMR has experienced many successes. Young men who used to be fixtures at the center now come back with their wives and kids in tow and are making their way in the world as productive members of society. People who arrived at PBMR broken and suffering recover enough to join in its efforts, leading groups and showing



Marlon Gosa of the PBMR, with photos of young people who've lost their lives to violence.

up at fundraisers. The courts in Chicago have recognized PBMR's efforts and respect its methods. It has received funding, including a \$400,000 grant from the MacArthur Foundation (\$100,000 per year for four years).

But there is no way to say the work is ever finished, Fr. Kelly said. One goal is to get better at developing leaders among the young people who come to the center. "We want to help them become critical thinkers—we can do better with that," he said.

The center has established programs that encourage the youth to build on their talents, including the arts, through the gallery it rents across the street from the center, and skills such as carpentry, cooking and screen printing.

Other efforts also blossom, like the community garden

overseen by Sr. Carolyn Hoying, CPPS. It raised over 3,400 pounds of produce in 2018, much of it shared with the neighborhood. The Precious Blood Volunteer Program, administered by the Kansas City Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, is another boon, sending young people to the PBMR every year to lend a hand. There's a new staff member, Karlyn Boens, who works with young women, many of them single mothers. It's a new initiative at the center, which once worked exclusively with young men.

It's a place where love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13: 7). Marlon Gosa knows this; he's on the PBMR staff and serves as a mentor to young men ages 12–17. "I've got like 25 sons," he said.

“I try to instruct them and keep them on a positive note. I listen to them, and I understand where they’re coming from because I grew up in this neighborhood. The issues they’re dealing with, I’ve experienced all of that,” Gosa said.

He takes them to football games, barbecues for them, shoots hoops with them, and takes them fishing. “We go everywhere,” he said. “Mostly, I try to find something that they wouldn’t experience normally. Once we went to the lyric opera. I went to sleep, but they liked it!”

Mainly, he said, he’s trying to get them through a dangerous time, in a dangerous place. “I’m 38 now—and I realize that I wasted so much time in my life, doing things that didn’t benefit me. I could have been a doctor or a lawyer! But I wasted all that time—I see no positive in it,” he said.

“Most of the people I grew up with, they’ve been to prison. And I’ve been to so many funerals. I ask the kids, how many of us know somebody who has graduated from college? Maybe one or two hands go up. I ask, ‘How many know somebody who’s been in prison?’



The Precious Blood values and stances that have been taken at the center can help wounded people, and they can work anywhere.

All of them. When you go out to surrounding communities, that’s not the way it is. That’s what drives me to get to them all—which I can’t. But if we can get them through their adolescence, maybe they’ll be fine. If I can save one, two or three, maybe each of them will save one, two or three. That’s the goal.”

It Can Work Anywhere

That’s the goal for Marlon and perhaps for everyone at the PBM. And it can be a goal for everybody. The Precious Blood values and stances that have
(Continued on page 14)

The Physics of Discernment

Newton's first law of motion states that an object at rest will remain at rest, and an object in motion will remain in motion, unless acted upon by another object. The book sitting on my desk is not going to move unless someone or something causes it to move. Someone has to pick it up, or knock it off the desk. It's not going to move of its own accord.

Young adult Catholics will sometimes use the phrase "I'm staying open" as a shorthand to mean "I'm not actively discerning, but I haven't ruled out religious life." For many, this time of openness means neither actively seeking out a romantic relationship nor discerning religious life. In a sense they are like the book sitting on my desk. They are sitting in the middle ground, waiting for a sign from God. Like the book, nothing will happen unless an outside force takes action. Sometimes God will deliver his message directly to their heart in prayer. And other times God chooses to work through another person to give them the nudge they need to get them rolling.

You can be that person who nudges them along and gets them moving. So how do you do it? You simply invite them to consider the possibility, or ask them a question. Here are some hints:

- Make a clear and concise invitation. "I think you'd be an awesome priest or brother," or "I think you'd make a great sister." The clearer you are in your encouragement, the better.
- Share with them the gifts you see in them, and why you think they'd make a great priest, brother or sister. Be as specific as you can. Name one or two reasons you think they may have a religious vocation.
- Invite them to think/pray about it.
- Do it in relative privacy. An invitation to consider a priestly or religious vocation can be scary enough as it is, so make sure there isn't audience standing around when you make the invitation.
- Promise them your prayers. Pray for them, and that God will reveal His will to them

The goal here is a nudge, not a push; an invitation not a demand.

**The Missionaries
will host a discernment
retreat March
29–31 in Chicago.
For more information,
contact
Fr. Steve at
vocation@cpps-
preciousblood.org.**

**Call and Answer
by Fr. Steve Dos
Santos, C.P.P.S.**



saying it out loud

Death is
a part of life,
but few
know how
to talk
about it.



Fr. Tom Hemm, C.P.P.S.,
and Fr. Tom Welk, C.P.P.S.

At the presentations he's frequently called upon to give about end-of-life issues, Fr. Tom Welk, C.P.P.S., has a statistic that usually captures everyone's attention. He asks the following question, and it's not rhetorical: "What's the mortality rate among every generation?"

The answer, of course, is 100 percent.

Fr. Welk is a medical ethicist and chaplain who has been on the forefront of the hospice movement for more than 30 years. He is the director of professional education and

pastoral care with the Harry Hynes Memorial Hospice in Wichita.

He traveled to St. Charles Center in Carthagen, Ohio, in December to present talks to the Missionaries who live there in retirement; to the St. Charles staff; and to the public, on how to walk with people who are approaching their final days on earth.

Nearly 60 people came to the evening presentation, filling every seat. Fr. Welk said he can't count on that kind of a response. "Sometimes nobody wants to come to a talk about death. I'm

used to being alone in an empty room," he said.

Yet it's essential that people feel they can talk about the end of their life. Talking about it can decrease the fear and dread that many of us feel when we think about our own mortality. It can free us to value and enjoy the life we are leading. It can put us in touch with eternal truths: that God made us, set us on a path through life, and will ultimately call us home.

"The angel of death needs to always be on our shoulder, reminding us that we're not going to be here forever," Fr. Welk said. "We need to take care of things in the here-and-now."

Sacred, Holy Ground

The angel of death may not sound like a great companion, but Fr. Welk carries him lightly. He's an optimist, straightforward and upbeat, bouncing on the balls of his feet while he's speaking. It's not a burden for him to minister to the dying, as he has done for most of his life as a priest. "It's sacred, holy ground," he said. "Regularly, people say to me, 'I wouldn't want to do what you do.' But I consider it an honor and a privilege. It's a very satisfying ministry."

The beauty of the hospice movement is that it's not about death at all, he said. It's about

life. "We are people of hope, and that has to be constantly ongoing, even to the very last breath we take," he said. "I never deal with death. I am dealing with life. I didn't go to mortuary school—none of our hospice staff did. All of our patients are alive and living. We want to make sure our patients and their family members have a meaningful life right up to the last second."

What hospice aims to do, he said, is heal its patients. That's different from curing their disease, which has proven to be impossible. But it can heal their spirit by helping to remove the fear that surrounds death, particularly in the U.S., where death is seen as something that must be cast aside, disease is something that must be battled.

As a result, he said, patients often can't talk to their families about their impending death for fear of upsetting them. And families won't talk to the patients about death for fear of making their anxiety worse. Fr. Welk calls this "the conspiracy of silence," which is uncomfortable, unproductive and helps no one. As a chaplain, Fr. Welk hopes to heal that. It's his job to build the bridge that will allow them to talk to each other, to speak the truth and to face it together.

He recalls sitting with a patient years ago who was out of sorts, restless and agitated,



Fr. Tom Welk talks with a participant after his presentation at St. Charles.

“As difficult and painful as they may be, these conversations serve life so much more than denial does.”

unable to express his inner thoughts. “He was up all night and slept all day. He was miserable,” Fr. Welk said. “Finally he said to me in a quiet voice, ‘I think I have something that starts with a C.’ I waited a moment, then he exploded with, ‘I have cancer. I didn’t think I’d ever be able to say the word.’ All that pent-up emotion had to come out.”

It’s difficult for the whole family to face hard truths—but to do so can be healing, Fr. Welk

said. “Having this conversation can be difficult, but it’s also a gift in many ways. It’s a gift to ourselves, and it’s a gift to our loved ones,” he said. “Often, as a person comes to the end of his or her life, we hear their grown children say, ‘I wish I would have known what mom would want us to do.’ It’s also a gift to the medical community that is caring for the patient, to know their wishes.

“As difficult and painful as they may be, these conversations serve life so much more than denial does.”

Necessary and Blessed Work

To walk with people, to listen to their worries and try to ease their suffering, to help them see the light that is ahead: that is necessary and blessed work, added Fr. Tom Hemm, C.PP.S., the house director at St. Charles, who has made it his mission to be with his fellow Missionaries in their last days. “It’s an honor to be with the elders here, to accompany those who are suffering diminishment,” he

said. He invited Fr. Welk to St. Charles because of their shared commitment to the ministry, and because he wants to explore how the community at St. Charles can accompany members who are in their final days and how he might better enable that ministry.

The journey can be just as difficult for priests as it is for anyone else, Fr. Welk noted: “We’re still human. We’re not spared anything that belongs to humanity,” including a fear of death.

But for priests and for all of us, accepting that our life will end with a walk toward a loving father will help us keep our

The Muddled Mess

(Continued from page nine)

been taken at the center can help wounded people, and they can work anywhere. In fact, the PBMR will put them into practice in the archdiocese of Chicago, where staff members have been asked to hold listening circles in parishes that are merging. They’re also involved in a conversation in the archdiocese that may result in listen circles for the laity and clerics in the midst of the Church’s clergy sexual abuse crisis.

The same approach of respecting others, of showing them that they are valued and cherished and that their opinion

shoulders straight. It will help us consider that the angel of death is always among us.

“There’s a natural tendency to have a sense of dread and fear about the unknown,” Fr. Welk said. “It takes some courage to open those doors. And some people just don’t want to, especially if they have no faith dimension. Human beings worry that life will end in nothingness. But we know that God has an immense love for us. We come from a God of mercy; we hear over and over in the Scriptures that God is love. And love drives out all fear.”



counts, works for large groups and small, for strangers and for family, Fr. Kelly said.

“It’s not just for when you’re trying to heal the effects of violence or incarceration—it’s wherever you want to build or repair relationships, whether that’s in your parish or in your family,” he said.

Leading people into a safe place and allowing them to speak without fear is a step toward healing, he said. It’s a way to honor the journey that all of us make through Holy Saturday, toward Easter.





New Life on SJC Campus: On October 7, Mass was celebrated in the chapel at Saint Joseph’s College in Rensselaer, Ind., for the first time since the school suspended operations in May 2017.

After 18 months of hard-fought progress toward the goal of a re-envisioned Saint Joseph’s College, the college’s leadership, charged with finding a way back to life for the school, announced in September that it had reached a settlement with its lender. The settlement allows SJC access to its campus.

“Before we reached the settlement, we did not have the campus. Everything was in the hands of the bank, and we could not expose them to any kind of liability” by allowing visitors to campus, said Fr. Barry Fischer, SJC’s rector. Barricades blocking the campus drives were a daily reminder of all that had been lost, and all that needed to be done to set it to rights.



Mass was celebrated in October in the Saint Joseph’s College chapel.

The full chapel on October 7 was a sight to encourage all friends of SJC, according to Fr. Jeffrey Kirch, C.P.P.S., provincial director, who is also an SJC alumnus. “It was heartening to see the chapel full of such a diverse group of people: recent graduates, older alumni, supporters from the Rensselaer community, faculty and staff, members of the board of trustees. There was a feeling in the chapel that day of gratitude and hope for the future. It felt like old times.”

It was the first of many gatherings that the team hopes to host on campus, to draw people back, to help them remember why SJC is so special. It will still be a while before college classes will be held there—but on the academic front too, there is hope.

Three days after the Mass in the SJC chapel, Frs. Fischer and Kirch were present alongside Daniel Elsener, president of Marian University in Indianapolis, when Elsener announced a collaboration between the two schools, a new two-year college to be called Saint Joseph’s College of Marian University–Indianapolis. It is slated to open in July 2019 adjacent to Marian’s campus.

The Indianapolis campus will help Marian see if its two-year

model is viable. The university may then consider whether to expand that model to other areas of the state, including—possibly—on the Saint Joe campus in Rensselaer.

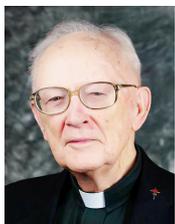
Meanwhile, the campus in Indianapolis will have more of Saint Joseph's to it than merely the name. There's a movement to adapt Saint Joseph's innovative core program to fit the two-year model. "That's our unique contribution," Fr. Fischer said.

Many people—alumni, townspeople, the Precious Blood family—are waiting to see what happens next. "The Mass on October 7 demonstrated the outgrowth of many people's hard work and dedication to the college," Fr. Kirch said. "If that's our beginning (of this new phase), we can go much further. It shows that as we come together as the Saint Joe's family, this new venture is possible."

In Memoriam: Fr. Robert Conway, C.PP.S., 93, died on December 8, 2018, in the infirmary at St. Charles Center in Carthage, Ohio, where he made his home.

Fr. Conway was born on September 19, 1925, in Detroit, to Harold and Marie (Oberle) Conway. He entered the Society in 1941 at Brunnerdale, the Congregation's minor seminary outside of Canton, Ohio. On December 19, 1953, he was ordained to the priesthood at Mount St. Mary's Seminary, Cincinnati.

Fr. Conway has served as a pastor, chaplain, educator and missionary to Latin America during his 65 years as a priest.



Fr. Conway

After his ordination he served at parishes in Fort Wayne and Dayton. In 1961, he traveled to Chile to minister in the C.PP.S. mission there. Fr. Conway returned to the U.S. in 1974 to attend graduate school. He received his Ph.D. from Loyola University in 1980. He was then appointed instructor and later associate professor at Calumet College of St. Joseph in Whiting, Ind. Fr. Conway's later ministries included Hispanic ministry at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in East Chicago, Ind.; visiting professor of Latin American studies at Saint Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Ind.; chaplain of Ave Maria College in Ypsilanti, Mich.; and chaplain and an adjunct faculty member of Ave Maria University's Latin American campus in San Marcos, Nicaragua.

In addition to his other duties, Fr. Conway raised funds for the Catholic organizations. Fr. Conway was "a faithful and holy priest. In his ministry, he continued to pour himself out, preaching on behalf of the missions later in life," said his nephew, Msgr. Robert McClary. "His desire to serve the missions, wherever he was called, inspired us all."

Memorial donations may be made to the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, Cincinnati Province.



Not Renouncing

On Thanksgiving, I arrived uncharacteristically early for Mass (don't ask me how that happened) and had settled in for a nice reflective conversation with God when I realized I'd forgotten the envelope. The Thanksgiving collection goes to the needy in our community. There's extra significance in dropping the envelope into the basket.

Because we live right across the street from the church, I decided to go home and get the envelope. "Save my seat," I whispered to the family, and slipped out of church into a rush of oncoming parishioners.

Because I was going the wrong way, I thought about shouting, "I renounce Catholicism!" It would have made a funny bit. Or perhaps it would have been funny, before the announcement last August when a grand jury in Pennsylvania put the Church's sexual abuse crisis back in the spotlight. Plenty of people are renouncing Catholicism, and there is nothing funny about it.

I understand people who are turning their back on a Church that they feel has abandoned and betrayed them, a Church that has at times acted contrary to the Gospel values it preaches to its people. I have no hard feelings against people who are calling the Church to task; in fact, I wish them well because "to task" is where the Church needs to go, if "to task" means a new awakening to and understanding of the pain it has caused, and a sincere commitment to heal itself from the inside out.

And I intend to go with it. As a Catholic I acknowledge and own whatever I have done to contribute to the culture that made the Church's sins possible, and pledge to be a part of the solution, whatever that means. What I can't do, is leave the Church.

The Church was given to me, decided for me, by a line of my people stretching back across an ocean, across all time. It was the home where my mother placed me when I was an infant. Its layers, its endless mystery and eternal truth fascinate and beguile me. And at the heart of it is the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who inform, lead and love me when I am lost, when I am joyful and when I am at rest.

The Church is also people like me, who are searching or celebrating or just carrying out their everyday lives. The church is Gary and Trish and Mike and Lindsey and Rosie and Bert and Paul and Joyce, and we're all struggling, we're all trying, we all take turns uncovering the answers and passing them along to the next person. How can I abandon them? I whisper to my family, "Save my seat." I go home and get our envelope. I come back.

At Our House
by Jean Giesige



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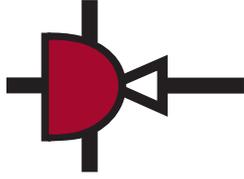
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