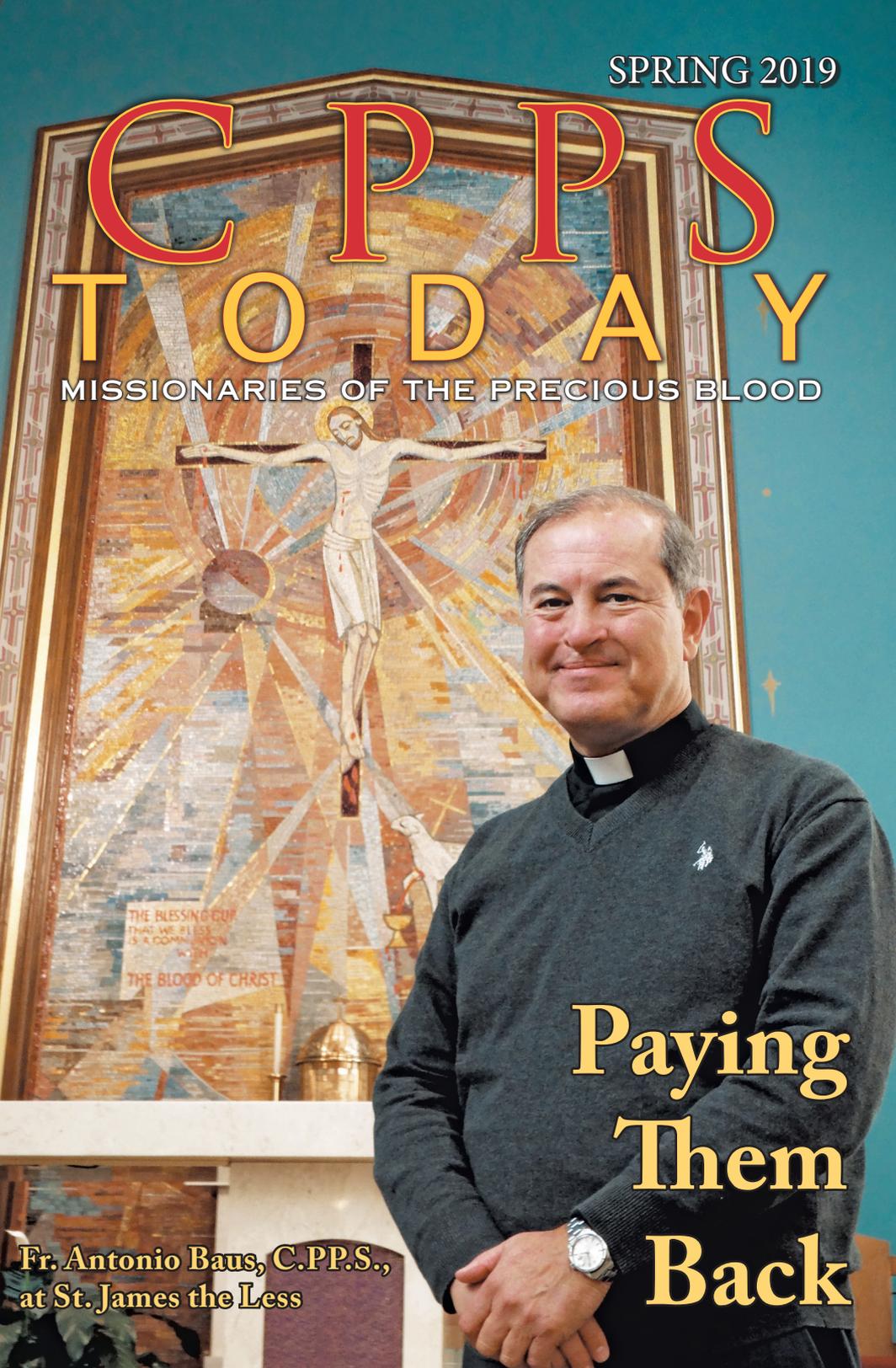


SPRING 2019

C P P S T O D A Y

MISSIONARIES OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD



Paying
Them
Back

Fr. Antonio Baus, C.P.P.S.,
at St. James the Less

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



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Baus at St.
James the Less.**

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

SPRING 2019

C.P.P.S. Today is published by the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, (Society of the Precious Blood), Cincinnati Province, 431 E. Second St., Dayton, OH 45402 937-228-9263 mission@cpps-preciousblood.org cpps-preciousblood.org
On Facebook, Missionaries of the Precious Blood Cincinnati Province
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Missionaries Carry the Message

Throughout the history of the Congregation in the United States we have been known by a variety of names: Society of the Precious Blood. Fathers and Brothers of the Precious Blood. Sanguinists. Even, jokingly, the “Bleeders.” Our official name is the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. That’s quite a lengthy name! We now use Missionaries of the Precious Blood as our preferred name.

This name highlights two very important components of our identity. From our foundation in 1815 we have been missionaries. Our founder, St. Gaspar, gathered a group of priests to go out to give missions in the towns of the Papal States to bring a message to them. The message was that of the redeeming power of the Precious Blood of Christ. St. Gaspar, and all who follow after him, are dedicated Missionaries of the Precious Blood. In this issue of *C.P.P.S. Today*, we highlight two Missionaries who, in different times and different ways, have followed in the footsteps of St. Gaspar.

The Venerable Giovanni Merlini was the third moderator general of the Congregation. Fr. Emanuele Lupi, C.P.P.S., explains how Merlini’s cause for canonization is proceeding. Merlini was a quiet, humble and hardworking person. Merlini never traveled to the far reaches of the Earth preaching the Gospel, but through his leadership the Congregation ventured out of Italy and experienced great growth in North America. Merlini knew that the message of the Precious Blood had to flow over the entire world and into the hearts of the people of God.

Fast forward 200 years and we have an example of another type of Missionary. We often think of missionaries as going from Europe or North America to those areas of the world most in need of priests and religious. Fr. Antonio Baus, C.P.P.S., is a member of the Chilean Vicariate who has turned this upside down. He has come from Chile to minister to the people of S. James the Less Church in Columbus, Ohio. The parish has had an increase in Hispanic members and so needs ministers who can speak Spanish. The direction of travel might be different, but the work is the same. Preach the Gospel. Minister to those in need. Proclaim the redeeming power of the Precious Blood.

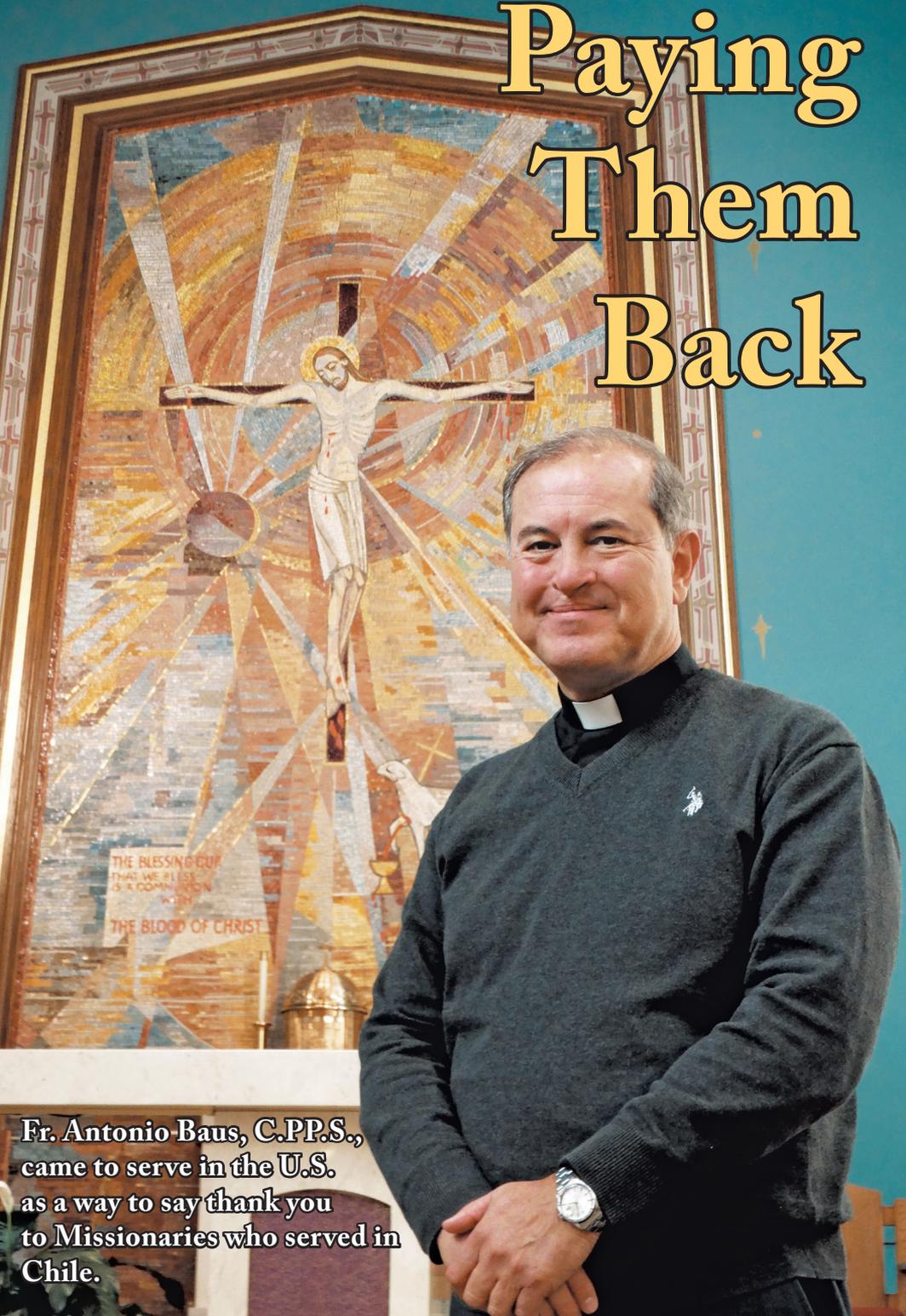
Missionaries can take on a variety of forms. This issue highlights very different examples of how we are missionary by our very nature. How will you serve as a missionary today?



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



Paying Them Back



Fr. Antonio Baus, C.P.P.S.,
came to serve in the U.S.
as a way to say thank you
to Missionaries who served in
Chile.

Fr. Antonio Baus, C.P.P.S., has been the pastor of St. James the Less Parish in Columbus for a little less than a year. He doesn't know yet if there is any sure-fire way to knit together the two segments of the parish—the Anglo Americans who have lived in Columbus' North Linden neighborhood and have been a part of the parish for years and years, and the many Hispanics who now call the parish and neighborhood their home. He suspects the secret formula might involve food.

"We had a food festival here, and everybody brought in food from their own country. Food from 10 different countries was sold in our cafeteria," he said. "Everybody shared their own heritage through the food they brought, and it was better than words."

Often, it's at the table when people come together. At a family's kitchen table. At the table of the Lord.

Fr. Tony has known that from early on. The oldest of four brothers, his family memories often center around his parent's table in Santiago, where the family still resides. Long grown, he still made a point of visiting his parents for Sunday lunch whenever possible. This was fairly easy when he was the director of San Gaspar School in Santiago, a short drive from his

parents' home. It was a ministry that he did conscientiously and well, keeping the successful school on track, its eye on the prize of educating young people for a life of service and, possibly, success.

Then he gave all that up: his important ministry at the school, the leisurely Sunday lunches with his parents along with the chance to see his brothers and their children if they stopped in at his parents' house. He gave up Chilean food and music. He gave up the view of the Andes, glimpsed from Santiago streets, the comfort of the familiar, and friends he's known forever. He set it all aside to follow a missionary call to the United States because he believed he could do some good in a parish here. And because he felt he was paying a debt.

Growing Up with the C.P.P.S.

Fr. Tony grew up among Precious Blood Missionaries serving in Chile. He went to school at San Gaspar, which Missionaries from North America founded in Santiago. He admires the sacrifices they made to leave their familiar world and travel to a country without knowing the language or the culture.

Missionaries of the Precious Blood first came from the U.S. to minister in Chile in 1947, when

it must have seemed to them like they were going to the ends of the earth.

“Nowadays we have Skype, we have Facetime, we have a lot of ways to communicate with the people back home,” Fr. Tony said. “I can’t imagine what it was like for those American priests when they first went to Chile. They committed to spending five years there. The only communication was by mail—snail mail—and they’d have to wait almost a month for a letter to go up to North America and come back down.”

Although he has much better means of communicating with the people back home, Fr. Tony took on a similar journey, traveling as a missionary to a different hemisphere. “For me, this was a way to pay back the many Missionaries (from North America) who gave the best of their young years to work and serve and minister in Chile,” he said.

Fr. Tony was serving on the provincial council for the Missionaries when he learned about St. James the Less and its need for a bi-lingual pastor. He was intrigued. The parish was founded in 1947, the same year that C.P.P.S. Missionaries first went to Chile. He appreciated their courage and generosity. Would coming to St. James the Less be a way to pay them back?

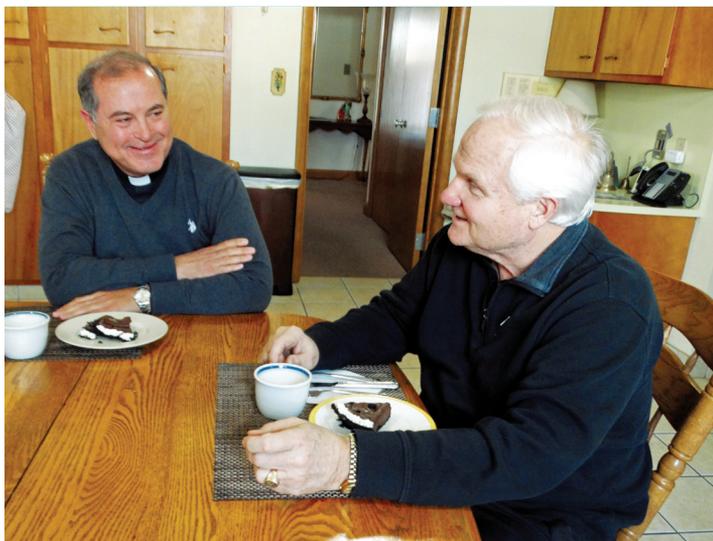
Like many parishes in transition, St. James the Less has been grappling with its identity and the best way to make people from diverse cultural groups feel at home in the parish. People who have lived in the neighborhood forever love the parish. People who have moved in more recently want to love it. Everyone should feel welcome and valued. What’s the best way to get that message across in a way that everyone will understand?

“Many people here have a welcoming attitude—but some are resistant and may feel somehow invaded,” Fr. Tony said. “That’s understandable, but when they look around, they don’t see a lot of young Anglo-American families with young children. The young families are mostly Hispanic. So people realize we’re in a time of transition. It’s a challenge to bring people together.”

Serving With a Brother

It’s not Fr. Tony’s first time to spend a significant amount of time in the U.S. In 1987, when he had been ordained for a year as a priest from the Missionaries’ Chilean vicariate, he was sent to the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago for advanced study.

The coursework, though it was in English, was not a problem. The Chicago weather



Fr. Tony works closely with Br. Tom Bohman, also in ministry at the parish.

was. "The winters were terrible there," he said.

He studied with fellow Missionaries Br. Tom Bohman and Frs. Angelo Anthony, Scott Kramer, Ken Schnipke, Lac Pham and Denny Kinderman, and became friends.

Thirty-two years later, Br. Tom Bohman serves with Fr. Tony at St. James the Less. Br. Tom is an important cultural link to the parish as well as a friend and guide to its new pastor. They compare notes over their evening meal in the St. James rectory. Br. Tom, who has been at the parish for seven years, continues to serve as the liaison between the parish and its large and thriving school. It's a blessing, Fr. Tony said, that Br. Tom is willing to take care of the many details that the school requires.

"I have my hands full with the parish, and though I have experience in school administration, this is a different country and it's great that Br. Tom is here," he said. "It's great to have him around. I would never have come here to serve in a parish without any other C.P.P.S. priest or brother from the U.S. helping me. It would have been so difficult."

Seeing Every Side

Br. Tom's ministry at the school allows Fr. Tony to focus on his parish ministry. That involves diligence as the parish tackles some maintenance issues (as with most parishes), and compassion as he ministers to the people of God, whatever their background. St. James

the Less was once made up mostly of German- and Italian-Americans. Now, Hispanics make up about 70 percent of the parish, coming from Mexico, Honduras, Venezuela, Peru, Panama, Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, Nicaragua, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic. ("But the only Chilean is myself." Fr. Tony said.)

Fr. Tony understands that some of the parishioners are here in the U.S. legally, but some may not be.

"When I meet with people, I try not to ask if they are documented," he said. "I try to work and see the human side of every situation."

People who are not documented have very little freedom of movement, he said. They can't go back to their home countries to see their families, for fear of never being able to return. Some have not seen their parents or siblings for more than 10 years. Their legal status may prevent them from getting a driver's license, owning property or going to college. "It's not easy," he said. "There's a lot of division and fear on both sides of the political spectrum. But the vast majority of our people are good, decent people. Some have been here in the U.S. for many years. They work, they pay their taxes, they contribute."

His calling as a priest and a Missionary of the Precious Blood

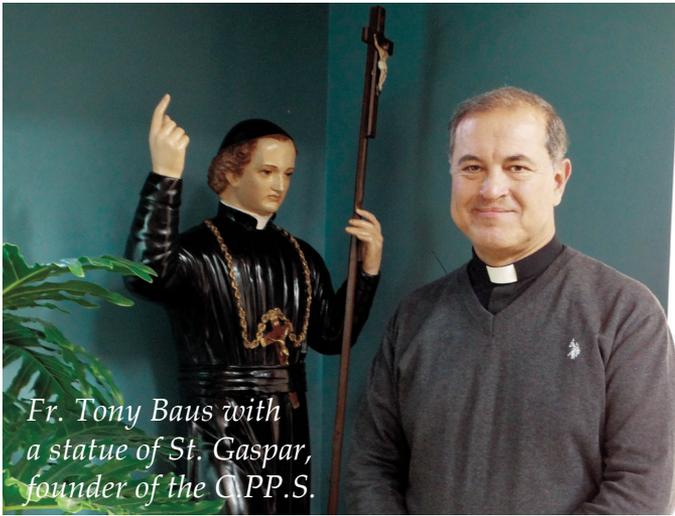
impels him to reach out to people who need him, regardless of their legal status.

"I see people suffering, people displaced from their own country — and as a Missionary of the Precious Blood, it's important for me to try to help in healing those hurts from the past and try to build our parish into a welcoming place where they can feel at home," he said. "They have left their culture — they've been forced to leave their countries, sometimes — and this is their new country. They are trying to fit into a different culture. We have to be as welcoming as possible to them. Since I am a foreigner myself, they understand me. The Hispanic community knows that I am experiencing, to some extent, what they experience. I'm in a foreign land too."

He knows it's different for him. "I am in a privileged position. I'm a documented person, and have the support of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood," he said. "But I belong to a family of immigrants myself. My parents were born in Spain — with their parents, they came to Chile many years ago. I know, to some extent, what it means to be the child of immigrants."

Creating a Link

So their new pastor is helping Hispanic parishioners feel at



*Fr. Tony Baus with
a statue of St. Gaspar,
founder of the CPP.S.*

“I know,
to some
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grants.”

home at St. James the Less, and at the same time helping the Anglo-American parishioners understand that they are not losing the parish they love. He’s a historian and a story-teller. He can appreciate what it took for their parents and grandparents to build up the neighborhood and the parish in what were then farm fields.

“This parish has a history. It wasn’t just built yesterday,” he said. “Seventy years ago, Americans came here and worked hard over time, with the help of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, to build a community. Hispanics started arriving some 20 years ago, when everything was already built. That was a blessing for them. But it also could be said that without the Hispanic population, there may not be a parish because

there are not enough people to keep it open.” So each group needs the other.

Recently, with the help of a program sponsored by the Dominican Sisters, St. James the Less announced that it would offer English classes for adults for a minimal fee. The parish asked thought it would need six English-speaking volunteers, for the 30 people it thought might enroll in the classes. Instead, 17 people volunteered.

Then when enrollment opened, over 100 people signed up, with a waiting list of 60 more. “So we had a place for all 17 volunteers,” Fr. Tony said. “This program serves two purposes. First, to teach English. Second, to create a link between the Anglo-Americans and the Hispanics. Through these classes, they get to know each other, exchange ideas,

and become friends.”

Everybody at the parish, including the pastor, might need to make adjustments to adapt to a new way of life, a new way of being a parish family. “For the people who’ve always been here, I want them to know it’s still their parish. It’s not only a Hispanic

parish, although that’s important too – it has to be a new creation as a parish,” he said. “We have new people coming in, and we need everybody to be part of this new reality. It’s not easy. But we have come a long way.”



Snow is Okay, but Ice: No Thanks

Because he spent two years as a grad student at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Fr. Antonio Baus knew a little something about Midwest winters before he came to St. James the Less. Still, adjusting to life in what feels to him like the frozen north took some time.

It gets chilly in Chile, even in his hometown of Santiago, where temperatures go as low as 30. But it was hard to get used to the heating system at St. James the Less. Homes in Santiago have furnaces but less insulation, so cold seeps in.

“Here, if you don’t heat the house, you die,” he said. “But the bad part was, everywhere I went in the rectory, I was getting shocked by static electricity all day long.”

He could cope with driving on snowy roads. But another tricky part of an Ohio winter is the black ice that occurs when precipitation freezes at night.

“There was a time when it rained all day, but I didn’t realize it would freeze at night. I went out to the garage and slipped—it was like something out of the Three Stooges. But I never fell on the ground. I kept my dignity.”



What We Know about the Call

Every year, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) out of Georgetown University surveys the young men and women who entered formation the previous year. While it does not survey everyone who entered, the survey gives us insight into the young men and women who are entering religious life today. Each generation of religious is different from the one before it, and this report helps us get to know the men and women who are saying “yes” to the Lord’s call to religious life

The class was split almost evenly between men and women. The class was relatively young, with 50 percent of the respondents being age 25 or younger. The youngest was 17 and the oldest was 66, and both were women. For men, the age range was 18–61. Roughly nine in ten were born Catholic, with eight in ten coming from families where both parents were Catholic.

When asked about their relationships with religious growing up, one-third report having a religious in their family. On a separate question, two-thirds of respondents report that they got to know religious, outside of their family, growing up. This data point highlights the importance of helping our children get to know priests, brothers and sisters outside of Mass or the classroom as a way to influence vocations.

While most (52 percent) report that starting the conversation with their family about vocations was easy, somewhere between a quarter and a third report that family members never spoke to them about a vocation to the priesthood or religious life. One simple step we could take is to resolve to explicitly talk about the idea of a religious vocation with our children and/or extended family.

On average, they were 19 years old when they first considered a vocation. For men, the median age of first consideration is significantly lower. Half of the men were 10 or younger when they first considered a priestly or religious vocation. This data suggests that the first stirrings of a religious vocation are happening earlier than we may think.

In the limited space I have here, I’ve been able to highlight only a few bits of data. I hope this has encouraged you to look at how you promote vocations at home. To see more of report’s findings, go to <https://cara.georgetown.edu/EntranceClass2018.pdf>.

While the report is 109 pages long, the executive summary and major findings are a very readable four pages.

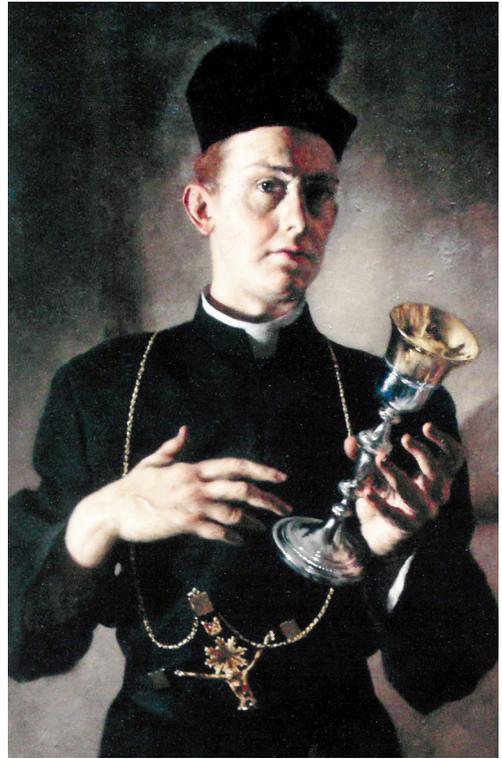


**Call and Answer
by Fr. Steve Dos
Santos, C.P.P.S.**





**Venerable John
Merlini wasn't flashy.
He was a quiet,
humble hard worker
who knew how to
get things done.
And perhaps he
will become**



A Regular Saint For Regular People

Venerable John Merlini (1795–1873), the third moderator general of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, has taken one step closer to canonization as the Archdiocese of Naples, Italy, investigates a possible miracle that was performed through his intercession. The testimony of 11 people, including medical experts, was submitted on February 6 to the

archdiocese's ecclesial court for further examination. The possible miracle involves the healing of Ciriaco Cefalo in February 2015 in a Naples hospital.

"We talk about the 'possible miracle'" until the investigation is completed and the miracle is confirmed, both by the archdiocese then the Vatican, said Fr. Emanuele Lupi, C.P.P.S., who is the vice postulator of

Merlini's cause.

Fr. Lupi, an Italian priest who currently serves in Rome as the vice moderator general of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood worldwide and as the Congregation's archivist, is also a historian who has researched Merlini's life and ministry.

"Merlini was a very versatile person," Fr. Lupi said. "He was an artist and an architect. He was a man of God. He was a person who knew when to stop and reflect. He had a very calm personality. Nowadays, Pope Francis talks a lot about discernment. Merlini was a man of discernment. He was a spiritual director for many people, including St. Maria de Mattias," who founded the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, a congregation of sisters who now serve around the world.

Merlini was ordained a diocesan priest on December 19, 1818. He was 25 years old in 1820 when he met St. Gaspar del Bufalo, the founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood during a retreat that Gaspar was leading in the Abbey of San Felice, the Missionaries' first mission house in Giano, Italy. Though he had been ordained a diocesan priest, Merlini was inspired by Gaspar and knew right away that he wanted to take part in St. Gaspar's mission to renew the Church through the Precious

Blood of Jesus.

A Man of Wisdom

Merlini brought a lot of gifts to the new Congregation of priests and brothers, said Fr. Lupi. St. Gaspar was a passionate, visionary preacher and Merlini was a planner and a designer, someone who could carry out the dreams that St. Gaspar had for the Missionaries. Those who have studied the life of St. Gaspar have marveled at all that he was able to accomplish—but "if Gaspar was able to do it all, it was because of the presence of Merlini," Fr. Lupi said. "Gaspar was a man of action. Merlini was a man of wisdom."

Gaspar spent much of his life preaching missions in the Italian countryside, traveling from town to town. "He was not living in a C.P.P.S. house. He was living mainly where he was preaching," Fr. Lupi said. "Merlini lived in a C.P.P.S. house his entire life. He was the one who was primarily running the Congregation while St. Gaspar was going out and preaching."

An able administrator, while admirable, might not inspire the faithful—but Merlini was so much more than that, Fr. Lupi added. He was compassionate and loyal—after Gaspar's death in 1837, everyone expected Merlini to be elected as his successor, but he was not. It had



Fr. Emanuele Lupi, second from right, with Sr. Nicla Spezzati (far right); Cardinal Crescenzo Sepi of Naples, center; and Ciriaco Cefalo (third from right) and his family.

“Sometimes when we read the lives of the saints, we see that they performed many miracles during their lifetime. That’s not true with Merlini. What he can teach us that it is possible to be saints, it is possible to be holy, in regular daily life.”

— Fr. Emanuele Lupi

to be humiliating for Merlini, but he continued to serve the Congregation humbly and well, working hard and never complaining. “In humble silence he continued on, trying to be faithful to the message of St. Gaspar,” said Fr. Lupi. “That is another sign of his holiness. Not everyone would have been able to accept that.”

Leading the Missionaries

Ten years later, Merlini was

chosen as the third moderator general and held that position for nearly 30 years, longer than anyone else in the history of the Congregation.

Merlini was the spiritual director of Fr. Francis de Sales Brunner, C.P.P.S., who brought the first Missionaries to the United States in 1843. As they established themselves in mission houses and parishes across central and western Ohio, Merlini encouraged and guided Fr. Brunner. Under his leadership,

the Missionaries' ministries stretched far beyond their home country of Italy.

Merlini's accomplishments were many—and all in the past. But re-examining his life, promoting him for possible sainthood, is not about the dusty records in the archives of the Congregation, Fr. Lupi said. People today can learn a lot from the life of Merlini.

"The secret of the holiness of Merlini is exactly that he was a regular person. The holiness of Merlini does not consist of miracles. Sometimes when we read the lives of the saints, we see that they performed many miracles during their lifetime. That's not true with Merlini. What he can teach us that it is possible to be saints, it is possible to be holy, in regular daily life. We can make extraordinary all the ordinary things that we do every day.

"The holiness of Merlini consists mainly in the commitments that he made. This tells me that I can be holy if I am faithful to what I have to do. His holiness comes from trying to do his level best in order to serve God. He didn't heal any paralytic. He didn't make any blind person see. But day after day, he was constant and faithful to God. He's a regular saint for regular people, and he can teach us that if we are faithful and do

what we are supposed to do, we can be saints."

Beatification Next?

Merlini, who was recognized as venerable in 1973, can be a saint if his cause goes forward. Working with Sr. Nicola Spezzati, ASC, who is the postulator (a person who presents a case for the canonization or beatification), Fr. Lupi is promoting his cause. If the tribunal of the Archdiocese of Naples rules that a miracle did occur through his intercession, the cause then goes to the Congregation for Saints in Rome, who will also investigate the testimony about the possible miracle. That could happen by the end of Lent, Fr. Lupi said.

"The big question will be in Rome. Until the pope signs the decree that he can be beatified, we really need to pray because the process can lead to beatification but it can also lead to nothing," he said.

It's hard to say what Merlini himself would think of all this. He might be a little embarrassed by all the attention, said Fr. Lupi. "From what I understand of him, he was such a humble man. He worked hard and he kept a low profile. He didn't like to be in the limelight," he said. "But of course, a person would have to be happy about being canonized."





In Memoriam: Fr. Leonard Kostka, C.P.P.S., who at 104 was the oldest living Missionary of the Precious Blood in the world, died on December 21 at St. Charles Center in Carthage, Ohio.

He was born in Chicago to Anthony and Rose (Schmidt) Kostka. Raised in Detroit, he was a lifelong Detroit Tigers fan. Fr. Kostka entered the Society of the Precious Blood and was ordained on September 8, 1940.

A priest for nearly 78 years, Fr. Kostka first ministered in parishes in Brooklyn, N.Y., and Detroit; was associate editor of the Precious Blood Messenger; served as a chaplain at Seton Hill College in Greenburg, Pa.; and was a navy chaplain from 1945-47.



Fr. Kostka

In 1948, he was assigned to Saint Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Ind., which is sponsored by the Missionaries. There he served as part of the college family for 65 years, as a chaplain and instructor of religion courses. He also helped at St. Augustine Parish in Rensselaer for many years. Fr. Kostka was a professor emeritus at the college, and was a great support to its students, faculty, staff and sports teams for many years, until a heart attack forced his move to St. Charles in 2013.

Officially retired and older than anyone else in the Congregation, Fr. Kostka continued to dream and envision and pray for the C.P.P.S. during his years at St. Charles. He offered an impassioned plea for the Community to "get fired up" for its bicentennial in 2015: "We talk about evangelization, we talk about reconciliation, and those are wonderful things—but they are the spokes of the wheel. At the hub is our devotion to the Blood of Christ. Unless all our missions and ministries are imbued with the Precious Blood, they will all come to nothing."

He often mused about his long life, amazed that God had allowed him to live so long. "I wonder how many Masses I have offered? Here's a thought I like to contemplate: as the angels look down from heaven, what do they see? They see a million chalices raised aloft, adoring and imploring the Trinity. I like to picture myself up there with the angels, seeing those million chalices."

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on December 28 at St. Charles Center. Fr. Jeffrey Kirch, C.P.P.S., provincial director, presided.

A memorial Mass was also celebrated at Saint Joseph’s College, where Fr. Kostka had ministered for so many years.

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

May he rest in peace.

In Memoriam: Fr. Thomas J. Beischel, C.P.P.S., 92, died on March 4 at St. Charles Center, Carthage, Ohio.

He was born May 31, 1926 in Cincinnati, to Victor and Edith (Frey) Beischel.

He served in the U.S. Army as a technical sergeant in World War II. After his military service, he entered the Society in 1949 at Saint Joseph’s College in Rensselaer, Ind., and was ordained on June 1, 1958.

For many years Fr. Beischel was a hospital chaplain and was also active in parish ministry.

After his ordination, Fr. Beischel ministered at St. Anthony Parish in Detroit then was named assistant pastor of Precious Blood Church in Fort Wayne, Ind. From 1961–66 he was the treasurer of Brunnerdale, the Community’s former high school seminary in Canton, Ohio.



Fr. Beischel

Fr. Beischel became a hospital chaplain in 1966, serving for many years at St. Elizabeth Hospital in Dayton; St. Rita’s Medical Center in Lima, Ohio; and Providence Hospital in Cincinnati. In 2000, he became a chaplain at the Dayton Heart Hospital and also served at St. Albert the Great Church in Dayton. In 2008, he retired to St. Charles Center in Carthage, Ohio. At St. Charles, he volunteered enthusiastically to help at local parishes for many years.

Fr. Beischel ministered to thousands of people in his years as a chaplain, many of whom he saw only once. His sincere smile and staunch faith gave them something to lean on when they were sick and scared. “Hundreds of times the beeper woke me up in the middle of the night, sometimes twice in a night,” he said. “The priesthood always had something to offer to the people who were calling for me: they wanted to be anointed, or to receive communion, or have me hear their confession, or just to be there with them.”

A Mass of Christian burial was celebrated on March 7 at St. Charles Center. Fr. Jeffrey Kirch, C.P.P.S., provincial director, presided. He was buried in the Community cemetery with full military honors.

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

May he rest in peace.



One to Send, One to Receive

A few years ago when our goddaughter was in the Coast Guard, she was stationed on the Great Lakes, in Duluth, Minn., where she was responsible for inspecting the big freighters as they came and went from the harbor. It was as close to us as she was ever going to get to us while in the service, so we went north to visit her. As we sat with her on the patio of our hotel, looking out over the harbor, she could tell us something about nearly every vessel.

Each time a freighter entered or left the harbor, an intricate dance took place between the freighter and the Duluth aerial lift bridge, which spans the mouth of the harbor. The vessel would steam toward the bridge; traffic on S. Lake Street would stop; and the bridge would rise so that the vessel could pass beneath it. It was fascinating to watch. Landlubber that I am, I thought it might work like a giant garage-door opener. But no, my niece told me, there was a human operator on the bridge who communicated with the captain of the freighter. It took both of them, the one who sent the message and the one who received it, for the bridge to be raised.

I thought about that bridge earlier this year when in the Gospel we heard the story of Jesus coming back to his hometown to teach in the synagogue. “Many who heard him were astonished. They said, ‘Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him?’” They knew too much about where he came from, and in the end, they rejected him not because he was a stranger, but because he was too familiar. As a result, “he was not able to perform any mighty deeds there, apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith” (Mk 6: 2a–6).

I was amazed, hearing that story, of the power of the people within it. With their lack of faith, they had disarmed Jesus. Had they believed, mighty deeds may have followed. It made me realize once again that this covenant we enter into with the Lord is a two-way relationship, and while we may not be in charge, we certainly can’t just lay back and watch it all unfold. We have to receive the signal. We have to raise the bridge.

In Duluth, once the freighter passed beneath the bridge, the bridge was lowered, traffic resumed and everybody moved on except for the bridge operator, who stayed in one place. In our life in Christ, we operate the bridge but if we choose, we can also be on the vessel as it sets out for other shores. There’s no telling how far we can go.

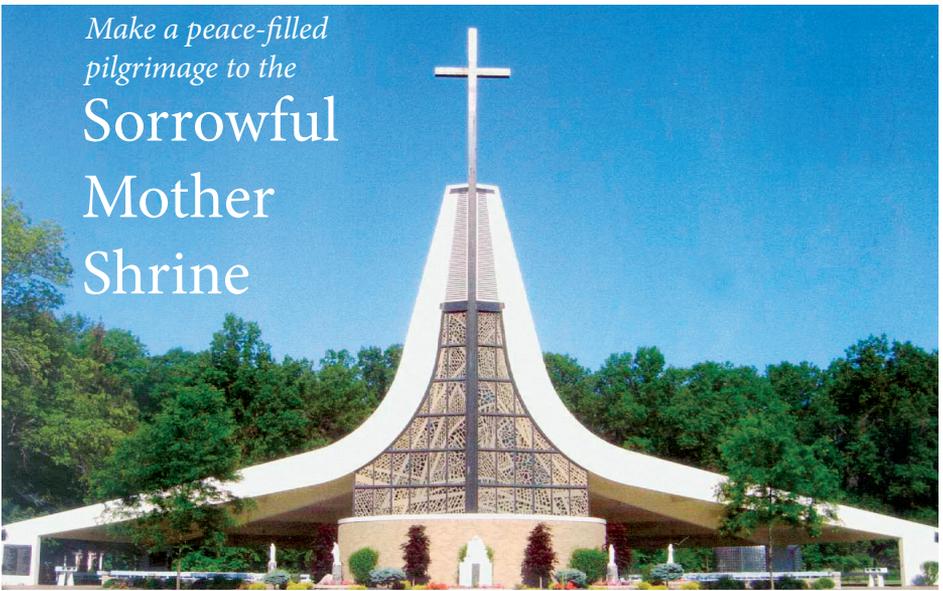


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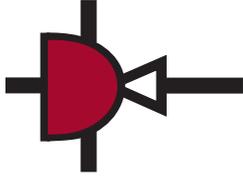
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