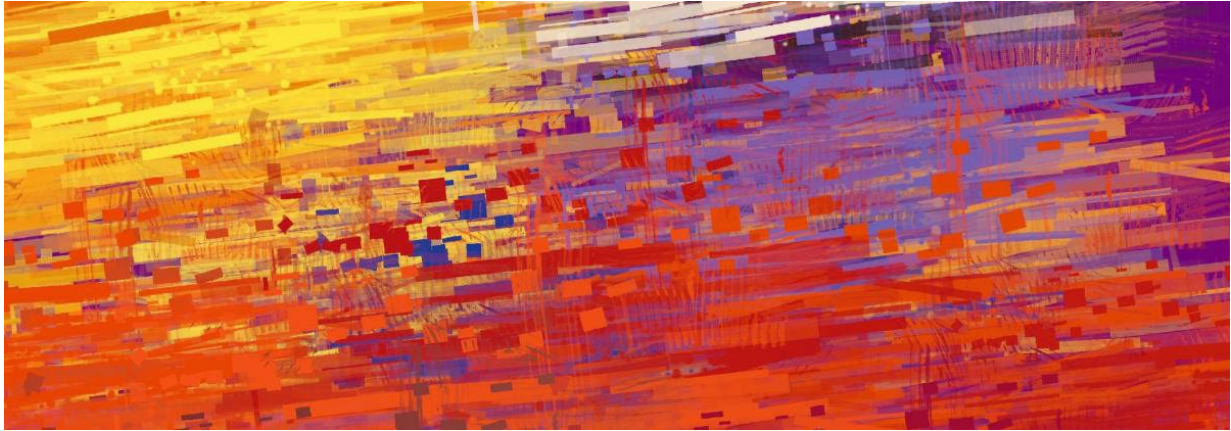




Precious Blood

SPIRITUALITY INSTITUTE



Sharing the gifts of Precious Blood Spirituality with the world.



What Society Forgets *Remembering, Accompanying, and the gift of Continual Conversion*

Every December 1, World AIDS Day invites us to remember those who died of AIDS, accompany those living with HIV, and renew our commitment to compassion and care.

But remembering asks more of us than recalling names and dates.

Precious Blood Companion Cath Sullivan offered these words as we talked about her more than forty years of accompanying people living with HIV and AIDS:

“What society forgets, the community gets to relive.”

I've been carrying them with me ever since.

Sometimes remembering brings us face-to-face with suffering we would rather forget.

Sometimes it awakens gratitude for courage we barely understood at the time.

And sometimes remembering asks us to change.

The Courage to Remain

In 1985, Cath's dear friends David and Jane were diagnosed with AIDS. Fear, shame, and stigma surrounded people already suffering from a frightening disease.

Cath drove them to Ward 86 at San Francisco General Hospital.

Jane died nine months later. David died one month afterward.

Two friends, gone within ten months.

Cath couldn't stop their dying. But she could remain their friend.

She remembers someone asking David which spouse had brought HIV into their marriage.

"What difference does it make?" he responded. "We probably both did."

Even in the face of death, people wanted to assign blame.

David's response reminds me of something essential: how desperately people need something simpler than judgment—a friend willing to stay.

Today, Cath is in her eighties. She walks slowly with a cane, her steps sometimes unsteady. Yet she continues accompanying people living with HIV.

More than forty years later, she still shows up.

Perhaps that's what compassion looks like when it becomes a way of life.

A Brother Remembered

On July 24, 1988, Fr. Gary Jarvis, C.P.P.S., died in California from an AIDS-related illness.

At the time, Gary was pursuing doctoral studies at Claremont. He had shared his HIV status with only a few brothers. When he was hospitalized, Fr. Tren Meyers traveled to California to be with him.

Gary belonged to a community that loved him. Yet fear, judgment, and uncertainty surrounded AIDS in those years, even within religious communities. There were difficult questions about sexuality, illness, and death that many people did not know how to discuss.

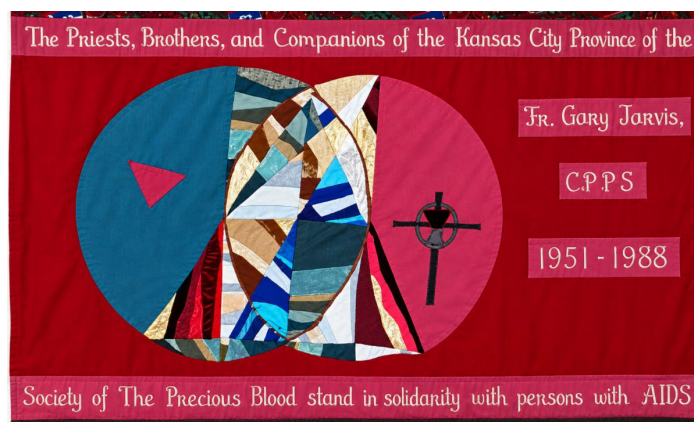
I joined the Precious Blood community in 1989, the year after Gary died. His death had already begun to change the community I was entering.

Gary's death prompted a province-wide conversation, led by Fr. Tom Welk, C.P.P.S., about AIDS, sexuality, death, and our responsibilities to one another. Those conversations challenged us to confront our fears, speak more openly, and develop a provincial AIDS policy rooted in compassion, inclusion, and respect for the dignity of each person.

Several years later, around 1992 or 1993, our brothers created a panel honoring Gary for the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Along its bottom edge were words that expressed a commitment extending beyond Gary's memory: "Society of the Precious Blood stands in solidarity with persons with AIDS."

The quilt remembered a brother we loved. The conversations and the policy helped reshape the community to which he belonged.

Sometimes continual conversion begins when grief opens our eyes-and we find the courage to change how we live together.



A Family Surrounded by Love

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Henriette and Rombaut were teachers, parents, and beloved neighbors.

Their son, Jean-Paul Mundungu, remembers their goodness, faith, and the joy they brought into their home.

When illness came, their neighbors did not turn away. They supported the family.

That detail matters.

Not every story of AIDS was a story of abandonment. Even amid fear and stigma, there were communities whose relationships sustained compassion.

Yet love and good neighbors could not provide the medical treatment Henriette and Rombaut needed.

Henriette died first. Fourteen months later, Rombaut died.

Six children were left without their parents.

Jean-Paul was still a young man. He went to work to help support his siblings.

Their deaths were a terrible loss, made even more painful by the absence of lifesaving treatment.

When Someone Finds the Courage to Speak

In 2001, Jean-Paul and fellow university students founded Stop SIDA, breaking the silence surrounding HIV through education and personal testimony.

They visited schools and parishes, sharing information and their own experiences of loss.

Jean-Paul remembers one parish gathering.

After the students spoke, a father approached them, nearly in tears. His daughter had HIV and was seriously ill.

Hearing these young people speak openly had given him the courage to tell her story.

Jean-Paul and a friend went to meet her.

In 2003, through their connection and the international assistance with the Bureau Diocesain des Oeuvres Medicales (BDOM) and USAID, the young woman gained access to antiretroviral medications.

Jean-Paul watched her recover.

Imagine what that meant to him.

Here was someone suffering from the same disease that had taken his parents. But this time, treatment was available. This time, someone was getting better.

He couldn't help wondering whether his parents might have survived had that treatment been available to them.

What a heartbreaking question for a son to carry.

Yet what a powerful reminder of what happens when someone breaks the silence.

A father found the courage to speak. Two young men listened. A young woman received treatment. And a life was given another chance.

Sometimes compassion begins when someone feels safe enough to tell the truth about their suffering.

A Song That Lives On

There was another moment in my conversation with Jean-Paul that I have not forgotten.

His mother, Henriette, loved singing a French hymn:

Tu es, Seigneur, le lot de mon cœur. (You, Lord, are the portion of my heart.)

Jean-Paul remembers hearing her sing it during his childhood.

Now he has a five-year-old son. He has taught him that same song, and they sing it together during their evening prayers.

“My parents’ voices are still in our home,” Jean-Paul told me.

A mother sang a hymn in the Congo. Her son carried that memory across years of grief and across an ocean. Now her grandson sings it in Missouri.

After listening to Jean-Paul, I found myself wanting to learn Henriette’s song, too.

Her voice is still traveling.

Her love is still finding a home.

Remembering That Changes Us

As Catholics, we have a beautiful word for remembering: *anamnesis*.

In the Eucharist, we do more than recall something Christ did long ago. We are drawn into the saving mystery of his love, made present among us.

Our remembrance of those who died of AIDS is not the same as Eucharistic anamnesis. But our Eucharistic faith teaches us something about memory.

When we tell these stories, we remember the grief, the stigma, and the silence. But we also remember the compassion that was there.

Cath, who remained with her friends.

Our brothers, who accompanied Gary and allowed his death to change the community.

The neighbors who supported Henriette and Rombaut.

Jean-Paul, who helped a young woman find care.

We remember the grief. But we also remember the grace.

When our international Precious Blood community gathered to elect new leadership in September 2025, the first value we named was *continual conversion*.

Perhaps that is precisely what these stories ask of us.

Not simply to remember who we were, but to allow those memories to change how we live and love today.

That’s at the heart of being a missionary.

We don't simply go into the world hoping to change others. We allow the people we encounter, especially those who suffer, to change us.

Remembering for the Future

Jean-Paul worries that our waning commitment to observing World AIDS Day may reflect a growing complacency.

Medical advances have transformed HIV treatment. Yet many people still lack the education, prevention, and care that could protect their lives.

We don't have to agree about every moral question to agree that every young person's life is precious and worthy of protection.

Protecting the next generation begins with knowledge, compassion and care

The danger of forgetting is not simply that we lose the stories of those who died. It is that we lose the compassion their stories ought to awaken in us.

As Missionaries of the Precious Blood, we proclaim that **all blood is precious—even blood carrying a disease.**

Remembrance doesn't condemn a community to its past. It invites us to become more faithful to the love we profess.

We cannot change how these people died. But we can change how we remember them—and how we accompany those still among us.

Cath is still walking. Jean-Paul is still singing.

And our community is still learning to love.

Remember the dead. Accompany the living. Protect the future.

Fr. Dave Matz, C.PP.S.