

The Path To God Is Crowded

Perhaps legacy is not only what we leave behind; it is what keeps traveling in the lives of others.

BY: NICK SCHAFER, CFRE



My introduction to Precious Blood spirituality did not begin in a theology class, a chapel, or a formal process of vocational discernment. It began with a family van full of stuff outside Bennett Hall.

My parents drove one car to Saint Joseph's College. My younger brother Greg and I followed in the family van with everything I thought I needed for college. When we pulled up, Brother Tim Hemm, C.P.P.S., and his band of upperclassmen, the Puma Movers, greeted us, asked for my room number, and carried everything into Bennett Hall in one trip.

Greg watched them disappear with all my possessions, looked at me, and said, "Dude, I think that priest just stole all your stuff."



Puma Movers, Brother Tim "BT" Hemm, C.P.P.S. leads Puma Movers during freshman orientation weekend 2005. Joined in this photo by Alumni Volunteer Nick Schafer, '03

Greg was wrong on two counts. Tim was a Brother, not a priest, and the Puma Movers had not stolen anything. But Greg recognized something before the rest of us did. The Precious Blood community was already taking me in.

Later, at the Mass for new students and their families, Brother Tim reassured my parents: "It's okay. We've got him now."

And I'll tell you what, he meant it.

He meant all of us freshmen. We arrived carrying boxes, expectations, uncertainty, and more fear than most of us wanted our parents to see. “We’ve got him” was a promise of accompaniment. I had entered a community where I would be seen, known, challenged, and loved.

Before I knew the language of radical hospitality, accompaniment, covenant, and community, I had experienced it. Strangers helped carry what I brought, made room for me, and told my family I would not walk alone.

I have come to believe that the path toward God is crowded. I recognize it by the people who have walked with me.

At Saint Joseph’s College, faculty, staff, Brothers, priests, and fellow students walked with me. Some became lifelong friends and mentors. Some, like Brother Tim, have since passed, yet their wisdom stays with me.



Brother Tim "BT" Hemm, C.PP.S. and Nick Schafer near "Hemm Harbor" at the CPPS Camp on Lake Banet, Rensselaer, Indiana.

During one particularly difficult period of discernment, Fr. Ken Schnipke, C.PP.S., accompanied me as vocation director. He told me something I remember this way: many qualities that would make someone a good priest would also make him a good husband and father, and vice versa. He was helping me understand that discernment was not like choosing a college major. The deeper question was where, how, and among whom God was calling me to pour out my life in love.

I thought I was discerning whether I belonged to a particular form of religious life. What I discovered was a spirituality that would shape every vocation and relationship of my life.

Precious Blood Spirituality gave me a wider language and community in which to live what I had begun learning at home: show up, make room, help carry what has become too heavy, and do not allow someone you love to suffer alone.

That spirituality followed me into marriage and fatherhood. It informs how I try to love my wife and children and how I live as a son, brother, uncle, and son-in-law.

Before it becomes something I express through public ministry, it must become patience at home, the humility to apologize, the willingness to remain present in suffering, and the daily work of making sure the people closest to me know they are loved. My family is where my vocation is most intimately lived and most honestly tested.

Years later, the first person I met when I walked through the door at Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation was Sr. Donna Liette, C.P.P.S. She welcomed me like a long-lost relative finally coming home. That welcome was her way of life.

Sr. Donna and Sr. Carolyn Hoying, C.P.P.S., deepened my understanding of hospitality and accompaniment. Whether welcoming families, tending the urban farm, or sitting in circle, they made room for people to breathe, heal, and belong. They showed me that welcoming someone also means staying when things are hard. To be loved by them was to know, deep in your bones, that you were not alone. That is a legacy I hope to carry forward.

At PBMR (Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation), restorative justice gave me practices through which to live those convictions more intentionally: tell the truth about harm, listen to those affected, accept responsibility, repair what can be repaired, and rebuild trust where possible.

Restorative justice refuses the false choice between mercy and accountability. As Fr. David Kelly, C.P.P.S., has said, “Mercy doesn’t overlook sin, it overwhelms it.” Mercy does not ask us to pretend harm never occurred. Accountability does not require shame, isolation, or permanent condemnation. These practices belong wherever people must find a way to keep living in relationship.

The Precious Blood family continued to widen for me. When I met Adorers of the Blood of Christ in the Philippines, they welcomed me as family before they really knew me. In their hospitality, I experienced the cup we share as a covenant deeper than geography, vocation, or formal affiliation.

Over time, I have learned that service is more than something we once did when we were young. It is something we do until it becomes part of who we are. Precious Blood spirituality has become part of who I am.

If my children carry anything of the Precious Blood tradition forward, it may not initially be its vocabulary. I hope they carry its instincts: recognize suffering, make room at the table, listen deeply, name harm without reducing anyone to the harm they caused, repair relationships where possible, welcome the stranger, and believe no person is beyond the reach of mercy.

Perhaps legacy is not only what we leave behind. It is what keeps traveling in the lives of others.

Twenty-seven years ago, I arrived at Saint Joseph's College with a van full of stuff and little understanding of what I was about to receive. Brother Tim and the Puma Movers carried everything into Bennett Hall in one trip. The community spent the years that followed helping me carry much more.

Brother Tim told my parents, "We've got him now." Whatever legacy I leave will begin with my effort to keep that promise for someone else.



Questions for Reflection:

- Nick describes how his introduction to Precious Blood spirituality began with a simple act of welcome and accompaniment. Who has helped you carry the burdens of life or made you feel that you belong? How has that person shaped your understanding of God's love?
- Nick reminds us that mercy and accountability belong together, calling us to acknowledge harm without defining people by their worst actions. How might this understanding of mercy influence the way you respond to broken relationships, conflict, or those who have caused harm?
- Nick hopes his children will inherit not simply the language of Precious Blood spirituality, but its instincts: welcoming the stranger, recognizing suffering, listening deeply, and making room for others. What qualities of Precious Blood spirituality do you hope to pass on through your own words, actions, and relationships?