

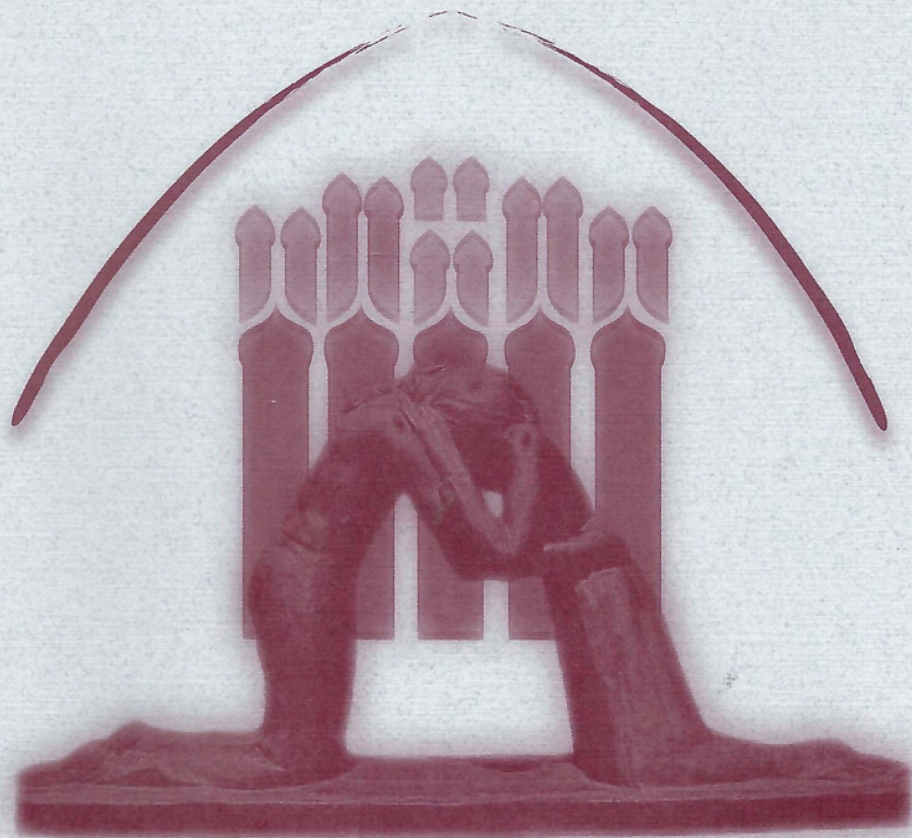
*An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality*



# THE WINE CELLAR

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Reconciliation

# THE WINE CELLAR

*An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality*

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“...And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made himself to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Reading from Evening Prayer II,  
Feast of St. Gaspar

# From The *Wine Cellar* by Keith Branson, C.P.P.S.

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Those wounded by historical divisions find it difficult to accept our invitation to forgiveness and reconciliation, since they think that we are ignoring their pain or are asking them to give up their memory and ideals. But if they see the witness of authentically fraternal and reconciled communities, they will find that witness luminous and attractive. It always pains me greatly to discover how some Christian communities, and even consecrated persons, can tolerate different forms of enmity, division, calumny, defamation, vendetta, jealousy and the desire to impose certain ideas at all costs, even to persecutions which appear as veritable witch hunts. Whom are we going to evangelize if this is the way we act? (Pope Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, #100)

**R**econciliation has been a major theme of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood since Gaspar del Bufalo and his companions founded the community on August 15, 1815. The powerful image of the Blood of Christ washing away the sins of all, reconciling the world to the Father through his sacrifice, was a springboard for reconciliation, evangelization and conversion that central Italy needed in the chaos following the fall of Napoleon. Beginning a new community wasn't easy, nor was navigating the waters of interpersonal relationships and Church politics, but Gaspar and his band were able to walk the walk as well as talk the talk. Francis de Sales Brunner had similar challenges in translating the spirituality of the Blood as he built the first Mission Houses of the American Province, when German missionaries sought out isolated German Catholics in the anti-Catholic 1840s and 50s to bring them close to the Sacraments, especially the sacraments of healing.

Today we face a new kind of chaos in a polarized world. We strive to proclaim the message of redemption and reconciliation through Christ's Blood in an industrialized world whose disillusionment regards religion itself as an adversary and also in a post-colonial world where human life itself is at risk from poverty and exploitation. Our message of justice and reconciliation is as urgent in today's world as it was in Gaspar's Italy and Brunner's Ohio.

The work of reconciliation is inextricably tied to community life. If we are to create safe places where the wounded can find healing, they must come from our own experience of charity and compassion with each other. Pope Francis challenges us to live what we preach, and reminds us of the hope that reconciled communities can show the world. It is a call to touch the wounds of Christ present in the world today. It is a call to live our life as a community of reconciliation.

Living as “authentically fraternal and reconciled communities” isn’t easy. From what I’ve read, I don’t know how successful Gaspar del Bufalo or Francis de Sales Brunner were in that task. Perhaps their authenticity made up for any shortcomings in fraternal spirit or internal ability to be reconciled. We know that our life and ministry as Precious Blood communities so far has had a great effect in the places we’ve been. Pope Francis holds out hope that as we seek to be communities of reconciliation, it will provide a space for others to find Christ’s Reconciliation.

With this inspiration for action, we listen. We listen to stories of our past, and celebrate the reconciliation our founders were able to empower in their day. We listen to stories of our own past, of wounds that are still healing, of those marginalized by society and even the Church. We listen to stories of healing that are taking place around us. The stories are our starting point and our resource of connections.

We begin our journey in this issue of *The Wine Cellar* with two historical essays. Jerry Stack shares the story of Gaspar’s ministry of peacemaking in central Italy, and how he and his companions worked to be communities of reconciliation in a time of chaos. Ellen Orf describes her community’s journey of reconciliation, unpacking what the C.P.P.S. Sisters of O’Fallon have discovered along their journey.

Two ministries of reconciliation claim our attention next. Alan Hartway shares the evolution of his ministry as an Advocate in Annulment cases, and the reconciliation this process can bring for those wounded by relationships. Dave Kelly tells us stories from the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation in Chicago, sharing their work of healing in the Back of the Yards neighborhood.

Dennis Keller and Martha Ann Lauber tell us their personal stories of reconciliation. Dennis was an incorporated, ordained member of our community who was laicized, and recounts the journey of reconciliation that brought him back as an Amicus. Martha Ann shares with us from her long experience, particularly how a pilgrimage to Assisi led her to a reconciliation with someone close to her.

Joe Nassal concludes our journey with a trip to the Upper Reconciliation Room. The movement of Doubting Thomas from a relationship broken by death brings focus to a powerful contemporary tale of reconciliation.

In lieu of study questions at the end of each article, let me propose these questions for the articles as a starting point for discussion and reflection:

- What surprised you about the article?
- Is there any part of the article that affirms you?
- Is there any part of the article that challenges you?
- How can the ideas in this article help you live better as a part of a community of reconciliation?

Reconciliation is a path of promise that leads to finding the New Jerusalem on earth as we come together as the Reconciled Community that Pope Francis describes. It is not the easy path, it is not the popular path, but it is the path of peace. As we make the journey together, we have the chance to find healing and wholeness for ourselves, and the restoration of Creation, at least in part. It is a destination, but perhaps more importantly a journey we undertake with humility, trepidation and hope. Perhaps the most difficult part of the journey of Reconciliation is starting it. With Faith, Hope and Charity, let us begin.



Word over all, beautiful as the sky!

Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of carnage,  
must in time be utterly lost;

That the hands of the sisters Death and Night,  
incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world:

... For my enemy is dead—a man divine as myself is dead;  
I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin—  
I draw near;

I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white face  
in the coffin.

Walt Whitman (1819–1892). *Leaves of Grass*.



# Saint Gaspar, Peacemaker

By Jerome Stack, C.P.P.S.

One of the more prominent and memorable chapters in the life of St. Gaspar is his ministry with the brigands in the Papal States south of Rome. Gaspar and his Missionaries took a bold and courageous step in order to bring peace to a very troubled area. It remains a powerful example of Gaspar's ministry of reconciliation motivated by the power of the Blood of Jesus.

Gaspar's concern for reconciliation and peacemaking was not confined to this dramatic period of his life, however. The missions he and other Missionaries conducted also emphasized reconciliation, as recorded by Biagio Valentini, Gaspar's spiritual director for more than fifteen years and Gaspar's successor as superior of the Congregation, and the Venerable John Merlini, his friend and the third moderator general of the C.P.P.S. Not long after Gaspar's death, both of them were invited to give testimony in the canonical process for the beatification and canonization of Gaspar. Their testimony is an invaluable source for much of what we know of our founder's life and work.

Merlini notes that a feature of the mission was reconciliation and establishing peace. He describes a ritual for peacemaking:

It consisted in having the priests come onto the platform two by two where they kissed the wounds of the Crucified Lord, while he and his companions kissed the feet of the priests. Sometimes, he would have two of his companions kiss the feet of the priests while he held the Crucifix. The priests then stepped off the platform, wearing their choir garb and the solemn stole or with surplice and stole. Where there were few priests, he would substitute with the men of the various confraternities that had assumed the task of assisting at the Mission. While all that was going on, he urged the people to exclaim:

“Peace with God, peace with everyone, long live peace.” Furthermore, he himself or others would announce the selection of peacemakers, both men and women, whose responsibility it was to bring about reconciliation wherever there was need.

What is noteworthy here is that Gaspar, always concerned that the fruits of the mission would endure, would choose peacemakers (in Italian, *pacieri*) from among those making the mission to continue the work of reconciliation begun during that spiritual exercise. I have not found a description of the process for selecting the peacemakers, but Gaspar may well have consulted the clergy and lay people of the place in making his choice. Gaspar was also known to be perceptive of the gifts of others and rather forceful in inviting them to use these gifts in ministry.

It is not clear how these peacemakers were to carry out the ministry of reconciliation. Gaspar and the other Missionaries did, of course, establish associations or sodalities of the laity and clergy in order that the good work begun in the missions might continue to be fruitful. In the regulations for one of these associations, the “Sisters of Charity,” Gaspar specifically mentions that promoting reconciliation among women was to be one of the ministries of the group. He also suggests that among the members who held the position of “zealot” (the *zelatori*), some might be suitable to be peacemakers.

The association for men, the Sodality of Saint Francis Xavier, also had designated zealots, who were to maintain harmony and peace, and promote the conversion of the wayward and sinners. It is possible that Gaspar penned some written instructions for the ministry of peacemaking, given his love for order and detail, but thus far I have not encountered such a document.

Another significant feature of the mission that took place on the final day was the “sermon of reminders.” Prior to the sermon, the people were asked to bring “all evil books that were to be burned, also playing cards and other dangerous articles, including forbidden weapons” and to surrender them to the missionaries. The books and cards would be burned and the weapons smashed to bits, with the metal then sold and “the money used to buy wax for candles or something else in honor of the most holy Mary.” It seems that Gaspar anticipated contemporary gun turn-in programs nearly two hundred years ago! (It appears that at some point in our history playing cards were judged to be less evil, given the prominence of pinochle and other card games in C.P.P.S. history in North America.)

Merlini and Valentini describe a number of occasions in which public and dramatic reconciliations took place during missions conducted by our founder. One striking example (told to Valentini by Innocenzo Betti, one

of the first companions of Gaspar) involved a very sick man whom Gaspar was trying to convince of the need for repentance and reconciliation. The man was not convinced of the urgency of his situation, so Gaspar resorted to more dramatic means:

Realizing that his words were being ignored and wanting nevertheless at any cost to save that soul, the Servant of God again took out his discipline and while holding the Crucifix aloft in his other hand, he proceeded with the thrashing on his back. The dying man was so moved that with great compunction he began making his confession. Since he had borne a long-seated interior hatred for one of his neighbors, he then shouted out his pardon and sought immediate reconciliation with him. Shortly after that, the man died tranquilly, fortified with the other sacraments.

From these few examples it is clear that reconciliation was a very important element in Gaspar's ministry, especially in the missions. Not only did he encourage and invite people to be reconciled during the mission, but he also provided a means of continuing the ministry of reconciliation by the peacemakers he appointed and by the ongoing ministry of the lay associations he established to continue the good work of the missions.

We Missionaries of the Precious Blood have been sharpening our focus on reconciliation as a core element of our congregational charism. Certainly Gaspar must be pleased that we are, in a sense, rediscovering a dimension of ministry that was of such great importance to him.

An earlier version of this article appeared in the Cincinnati *C.P.P.S. Newsletter*, July-August 2010.

Jerry Stack, C.P.P.S., a member of the Cincinnati Province, was formerly the archivist for the worldwide Congregation, and now serves as editor of the *C.P.P.S. Resource* series. He has completed the translation of three volumes on the life and times of St. Gaspar del Bufalo, the founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, and *Hidden Father*, which explores the profound effect Francesco Albertini, St. Gaspar's mentor and guide, had on the life of the saint and of the congregation.



"Many people today agree that we need to reduce violence in our society. If we are truly serious about this, we must deal with the roots of violence, particularly those that exist within each of us. We need to embrace 'inner disarmament,' reducing our own emotions of suspicion, hatred and hostility toward our brothers and sisters."

Dalai Lama XIV

# Reconciliation: Responding to a Suffering World

by Ellen Orf, C.P.P.S.

**D**ifficult times often spawn new responses to suffering. Certainly our Precious Blood Congregations came to birth at a time that Europe was in turmoil. Political upheaval and religious disorder were felt by all and disrupted the lives of almost everyone.

In a variety of ways our predecessors in the faith, men and women, found ways to use their gifts to respond to the moment they were living. They preached the word of God's unfailing love; they cared for the children and the sick; they offered their lives as a bridge between suffering people and their God, God who walked with them in each moment that would be transformed by the living of it.

How many years have we prayed: "Eternal Father I offer you the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ for my sins and the wants of the Holy Church"? This Holy Church to which we are committed is the People of God, all those within the purview of God – documented and refugee, all colors, all sexual orientations, from the desperately poor to those who enjoy the benefits of the economic systems. All of these are children of God and all of those contribute in one way or another to the wants of the Holy Church.

From our earliest years, we Sisters of Steinerberg, Gurtweil and now O'Fallon have sensed that what we can do is little in the way that is usually counted – we are not the preachers, or the system changers or the architects of major institutions. We do care for the poor and we love God. We stand in the breach.

While our early efforts were dedicated to the perpetual adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, responding to requests from local pastors led us

to teach in nearby parishes which soon met with government opposition. For a time the pull between the life of adoration and the external ministry threatened the young community. The dedication to prayer took on a more internalized, interior character as the care of children and the making of vestments helped the community to survive difficulties of an environment hostile to religious life.

Moving from Switzerland to French Alsace-Lorraine and then to Gurtweil in Germany allowed the young congregation to survive for a time. However, to build anything permanent, only a move to transplant the community to America seemed to offer any long-term future. The strenuous labor required was part of the sacrifice that was made by willing hearts. It came with separations from familiar places and beloved beginnings. Regardless of the personal cost, there was above all a confidence that every part of the journey was in the plan of God. For that reason they would go forward.

The hymn of the Precious Blood, prayed daily, expressed the openness to be always instruments of God's saving love:

"What shall I offer You for all that You have given me? I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord."

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*"Prayer is our best  
response as we offer  
ourselves to the God who  
loves each one of us."*

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Through the years when most of the Sisters were involved in an active, external ministry, the prayer life accompanied the apostolate. The monastic style so evident in most religious congregations of this time combined a prayer life that supported a varied ministry.

Circumstances led to active involvement in the liturgical renewal in the decades before the II Vatican Council. The Sisters embraced the daily celebration of the Eucharist as the core of their life. Bound by the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours the Holy Mass was truly the central expression of that prayer. The Sister in the classroom, the Sister providing for the needs of her sisters and the Sister making the beautiful paraments joined daily to give praise to God in whatever way possible. In prayer there was the continued sense of offering life with all its joys and sorrows for the other such as the Holy Father, suffering family members, those affected by war, children in the classroom or former students.

Some Sisters took on the role of "Moses" (cf., Ex. 17:11) who, like Moses, offer a silent witness of prayer and presence for each Sister active "on

mission” as well as for many other needs in our world. These include: mothers and children who are stopped at the border as they flee violence in Central America; trafficked women and children; persons executed in Missouri at an alarming rate; our elders and we ourselves affected by memory loss; for family members who leave the faith we love, etc. New needs are brought to our attention each time we read the newspaper or listen to the news. Prayer is our best response as we offer ourselves to the God who loves each one of us.

For each of us there continues the call: “How can I be the continuing presence of Christ in the part of the world where I am? What can I create, what space of peace and reconciliation can I help to fashion either close at hand with people I touch through my ministry or perhaps on the other side of the country or the world as I offer myself as an instrument of God’s grace?” Sr. Nancy Sylvester in her network of contemplation encourages a daily “sitting” that tries to leave behind thoughts of work, of planning for work/ministry. She proposes and has developed an international network that joins for a daily, regularly scheduled time when the focus is to be open to God, that our time is God’s and we are open to where God leads us. It is not necessary that we see or feel the effects of our prayer. We trust in the power of God. Like the widow in the gospel parable, we each are invited to offer the small bit that is ours.

The encouragement to contemplative waiting is also being encouraged by the LCWR so that all its members might be actively seeking the new that God is doing among us (cf. Isaiah 43:19). As our world continues to erupt in violence in our cities and across the globe, how can we be actively engaged, even in our diminishment? How can we stand in the breach and bring healing to our world?

We are united in the Precious Blood of Christ poured out for the world and offered each day.

Ellen Orf, C.P.P.S. currently serves on the Leadership Team of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood in O’Fallon, Missouri. Her reflections are the fruit of 49 years of professed religious life and the ministries of parish leadership, vocations, and Hispanic ministry in Bolivia (1976-83), southern Texas and outlying areas of northern Missouri (1988-2010).



"The Church is likewise conscious of the responsibility which all of us have for our world, for the whole of creation, which we must love and protect. There is much that we can do to benefit the poor, the needy and those who suffer, and to favor justice, promote reconciliation and build peace. But before all else we need to keep alive in our world the thirst for the absolute, and to counter the dominance of a one-dimensional vision of the human person, a vision which reduces human beings to what they produce and to what they consume: this is one of the most insidious temptations of our time."

Pope Francis, 5/20/2013



# Annulment Ministry as Reconciliation

by Alan Hartway, C.P.P.S.

**A**s I am writing this, the Synod on the Family is beginning in Rome. One of the major questions raised and to be considered is how to be more pastoral with people who seek full communion but are obstructed by a previous marriage(s). It is a very important topic for us to consider.

For much of my priesthood, I've swung from one end of the spectrum to the other on the annulment issue. On the one hand, I've felt and then reasoned to myself that it was drudge work and an unnecessary slog through a great deal of pain on top of which was an arcane and interminable ecclesial and juridical process. On the other hand, I have been an advocate in the process for many cases over the last almost forty years. There's about a dozen cases right now before the tribunal in which I am the advocate. While every case I've advocated has been annulled by the Church, there's no such thing as an easy, by-the-books case. We would be wrong to give that impression to any petitioner.

After a fifteen-year lapse of having no annulment cases in the pipeline, my shop is now open again, and my attitude and practices are shifting. In order to renew my understanding, along with a couple in the parish, I have been attending an advocacy training course offered by the archdiocese. My own seminary training was under the old Canon Law of 1917 taught by Fr. Dismas Bonner, who kept telling us a new code was coming; it finally arrived in 1983. So there were a number of new things to learn.

During that time, our community has been learning a great deal and talking about the practice of authentic reconciliation. We have learned that reconciliation involves five narratives, each of which needs to be fully heard in order for us to get to the one new story we have to offer as a gospel

people that is true. This telling of stories and listening to them is a very important part of reconciliation, not be lightly skipped over, glossed, or varnished. Omitting it cheats people out of the experience that we all need of being heard. So, while there are internal forum resolutions to a person's marital history—and this kind of resolution may make sound pastoral sense—we also have to consider that we are not necessarily doing people a favor when this route is taken. We may be ameliorating an immediate inquiry from them, but in the long run we avoid the full listening and narrative process that can be so helpful in healing and forgiveness. In other words, perhaps for my own comfort sometimes, I may have been tempted to rush right for the internal forum response, and just set all the messiness aside. This is not respectful.

In Schreiter's book, *Reconciliation*, there are five narratives to hear. First is the original story each person has of their childhood innocence and purity. It is "good old days" or "golden age" narrative. The language told as an idyll or a "romance."

In life, some violence, wound, or even word from some one else, sometimes even inadvertently spoken and then misheard, shatters the first narrative. A person feels or knows that they have become a victim. The other person becomes a perpetrator. With the break in the narrative, two new stories take its place. There is the story of the victim and the story of the perpetrator. Because a broken marriage so often can be colored by the narratives of blame and shame, they must both be equitably heard, in patience, so that in the telling the person can come to know and confront the truth. It is then that they can be ready for the fourth narrative.

This is the gospel story of our encounter beside the road where life dumps us with Jesus Christ. He reminds us of the mercy of God that we should accept in our lives. This good news effects a new person. The mercy of God that is shared by the advocate or minister creates a new story. We are ready to follow Him.

This fifth story moves beyond what had all happened previously. The movement to a new place for both petitioner and respondent, often because of a new spouse, liberates the person to return to the Lord and Communion because a truth has come to light. Fundamentally, this truth shines the light of the freedom of the children of God. They are ready to move over, across to a new place and begin a new story. This movement is at the heart of the Greek word for reconciliation.

The advocate, the legal representative of a party in an annulment case, is primarily a listener. This cannot be stressed enough. The advocate listens

to stories. Gently questioning, refining, sifting out the full narrative of the petitioner's life helps both the petitioner and advocate. The petitioner is helped by assembling their whole life narrative in one work. The truth of one's identity emerges, and a new understanding of the person is achieved. These are two of the narratives in the reconciliation process. The advocate needs this because she (he) is assisting the petitioner to write the inquiry to the tribunal called a *libellus*, asking the question: was my marriage true? The advocate helps to collect all the relevant documents, and then submit the *libellus*, the narrative, and the documents to the tribunal to initiate the case. This may take weeks or months.

The underlying principle is that it is assumed the first marriage was valid and indissoluble until proven otherwise. The annulment process is a search for the truth of an act that two people committed. In fact, both of these foundational points are directly related to the process of reconciliation and forgiveness of self and other. Let me try to explain it this way. When we do something, act in any way, there are consequences that ripple out from the act affecting our own lives and the lives of others. A good and beautiful act creates an effect of love and bears good fruit. Its effects remain in the bonds of our own interior self and in the lives of others. For example, who of us has not been stung by a word, and then we've remembered that one sound bite for the rest of our lives, without acting in any way to remove the power it may have been given over our self identity and in the way then we ourselves sting others.

An ugly, thoughtless act, or one that is meant to be just evil, has consequences for the self and for the intended victim. It can remain in force and scar lives for decades to come. In this sense our acts are indissoluble.

However, reconciliation and annulments is a process of reconciliation seeking to put an end to an act and its consequence. For most of us this can be very healing, liberating us from an act we made in error, inadvertently, or maliciously. People can begin to construct carefully the new narrative of their self in the world and their relationship to Christ.

Reconciliation seeks the truth and reveals the new space where the story of both victim and perpetrator can listen to their narratives of their lives in respect and dignity so that the truth of what happened can be exposed and seen for what it is.

Annulment as reconciliation uncovers the truth of what happened. That's why one of the former spouses is called only the petitioner (the one seeking the annulment) and the other the respondent; the Church doesn't call

one the party who was wronged and the other the person who caused the problem and the pain. It doesn't call them victim and perpetrator.

The presence of grace can be observed from the very beginning. Rarely does the bulletin notice or the end of Mass announcement that there will be an annulment meeting in the parish hall bring anyone out of the woodwork. In most cases, because pastors have been rotated so frequently for the past thirty years, we are the last to know the parishioners well enough to know more than a little about them. The grace comes because the person makes an appointment as if out of the blue, and then it all comes out. We're learning that authentic reconciliation never minimalizes, dismisses, or ends with hasty closure. Annulments take time. I have often taken one of these three routes out of my own uncomfortableness, having nothing to do with the petitioner. Their coming to the pastoral agent and telling their long and painful story means just the opposite for them; they deliberately want a hearing so that their lives are not minimalized, dismissed, or given instant closure. So we as good pastoral servants recognize this element and give the petition full and fine hearkening to their story. After all, it probably took them years to get to this point. So the advocate's response is never, "Oh, thank you for sharing. Now doesn't that make you feel better. You're free now. You just leave all that stuff here with me. Have a nice day." Just the opposite.

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*"...the Church doesn't call one the party who was wronged and the other the person who caused the problem and the pain."*

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The petitioner makes an appointment with anyone trained to be an advocate. Normally this is the parish priest or sometimes a deacon. There are far too few women in this ministry of reconciliation; ordination is not a requirement for it. Before they've called, fees and fears have surfaced, and these should be addressed immediately at the beginning. In one parish, a rumor started that an annulment cost anywhere up to \$5,000. The fear comes because people think it takes forever and that the past will have to be faced. This particularly may be true for women who have to divulge all this to a priest, hence the great need for trained women of the parish in the spirit of reconciliation can hear the story of a woman's pain and minister to her through this process.

The children of a divorced marriage at any age also have their own questions, and especially adult children may be aware of a petition for annulment filed by one of their parents. It may be pastorally helpful to them to have their questions answered. Because there are so many

misunderstandings about marriage and annulments today, this is an opportunity for a good catechesis.

A person not to be overlooked is the respondent, the other party in the marriage under investigation for its truth. There have been times when pastoral outreach has been possible; these are opportunities for healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation also.

Giving witness to the parish and world regarding our Catholic understanding of marriage, I have experienced couples in the annulment process follow all the procedures and not receive Holy Communion. This part of the remarriage and annulment theology can be very painful, which means that this in particular requires accurate and thoughtful pastoral answers. Because parishes can be communities where everyone knows everyone else, it can invite people to pray for the petitioner and respondent, and it can also deepen the appreciation they themselves have for the Eucharist. After all it is the “source and summit of our Christian lives” according to the Catechism. When the annulment is adjudicated by the tribunal, when the petitioner (and often the spouse of the second marriage) return to the Eucharist with deeper appreciation, it can touch the whole parish.

I have completely changed my view in advocacy work with all the parties involved. I understand just how this ministry is truly a ministry of reconciliation. When carefully and pastorally framed, an annulment can restore the person to full communion with Jesus Christ. Our community’s charism invites and challenges us in a unique way to pursue this good work of reconciliation.

Alan Hartway, C.P.P.S., a member of the Kansas City Province, is the Administrator of Guardian Angels Parish in Mead, Colorado and co-authors a weekly *Lectionary Catechesis* at the Kansas City Province’s website ([www.kcprovince.org](http://www.kcprovince.org)). Prior to this, he was a member of the faculty and administration of Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado.



"The Lord never tires of forgiving. It is we who tire of asking for forgiveness."

Pope Francis, 3/28/2013

# Reconciliation: A Ministry of Hospitality and Accompaniment

by Dave Kelly, C.P.P.S.

**O**lu, a small fourteen year-old boy, stands before the judge's bench, shifting from one leg to the other. As much as he tries to stay focused on the barrage of words filling the room, his mind is focused on something that will indicate whether he will go home or be held in custody. He understands only a small portion of what is being said, even though it is all about him and will determine his future.

Olu is homeless. He and his mother, along with his brothers and sisters, are living with a friend of the family. It is a one-bedroom apartment, and so Olu and his family sleep in the front room. There is no bed, just a few blankets he folds up in the corner of the room.

He showed up early in the morning at our Precious Blood Center and asked if I could take him to court. No one from his family came to be with him.

We are finally called into the courtroom and after all the oral arguments, he is released on house arrest. The judge agrees to release him to me with the order that I am to take him home and that—other than school and the Precious Blood Center—Olu is not to leave his “house.” No one says much about the fact that he and his family are homeless and their living situation is only temporary. Next case is called. We leave.

Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation (PBMR) embraces a restorative justice philosophy. Restorative Justice sees crime and conflict as a violation of relationships and seeks to repair the broken or strained relationship by addressing the harm done. In contrast to a punitive model, restorative justice asks the questions, Who was harmed? What was the harm done?

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***“Twenty years later the urgency is still here and the obligation more real than ever. No matter where we come from, we hear the cries of those who have been impacted by violence.”***

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How do we work to repair the harm? Restorative processes (peacemaking circles and other practices) bring those harmed by crime or conflict, and those responsible for the harm, into communication, enabling everyone affected by a particular incident to play a part in repairing the harm and finding a positive way forward. Where a punitive model isolates the parties and establishes an adversarial relationship, restorative justice brings together those impacted and seeks a new relationship.

Twenty years ago, the U.S. Catholic Bishops put out a pastoral letter titled, *Confronting a Culture of Violence, a Catholic Framework for Action*. In that pastoral letter they wrote:

Our families are torn by violence. Our communities are destroyed by violence. Our faith is tested by violence. We have an obligation to respond.

...reflections are not enough. Words cannot stop weapons; statements will not contain hatred. Yet commitment and conversion can change us and together we can change our culture and communities. Person by person, family by family, neighborhood by neighborhood, we must take back our communities from the evil and fear that come with so much violence. We believe our faith in Jesus Christ gives us the values, vision and hope that can bring an important measure of peace to our hearts, our homes, and our streets.

Twenty years later the urgency is still here and the obligation more real than ever. No matter where we come from, we hear the cries of those who have been impacted by violence.

The spirituality of the Precious Blood empowers and sustains us in this ministry, a ministry that witnesses to the power of God to change lives and renew and restore communities. But, as the pastoral says, words do not stop weapons, statements do not change hearts. So the question becomes: “How do we build communities in which children and families can grow up in safety? How do we ensure that the needs of those children who have experienced trauma and violence have what they need to heal? How do we move from a punitive society to a restorative society?”

For the past several years, in collaboration with others, we have sought to develop a model in which communities can be empowered to restore the



harm done, where communities create a kinship in which the core values that are strained due to poverty and violence can be rekindled. We named the model Restorative Justice Hub, to reflect the need to build a network (a hub) of relationships that would allow a youth to experience a sense of belonging and self-worth, a place where a child could find the support of his/her community and where resources would not only be rendered, but received.

This model, Restorative Justice Hub (RJ Hub), would have to be in the community; it would seek to engage and empower the members in creating a community in which both young and old can thrive. The RJ Hub is an organization, but an organization that takes the lead in building a web of relationships that work toward ensuring that each young person—in particular those that are court involved—has a caring adult in his/her life, who will act as a role model/mentor, and that the resources that are needed are not only available, but adequately meet the needs of the child/family. An RJ Hub is an organization that creates a space of safety through hospitality and accompaniment, where young people can feel a sense of belonging and empowerment.

## A Brief Overview of Restorative Justice Hub Model

### **Mission**

Through a restorative justice philosophy, Restorative Justice Hubs create safe and healthy community spaces where disconnected and court involved youth experience belonging, opportunity and positive transformation.

### **Vision**

Restorative Justice Hubs create healthy and nurturing communities where youth are welcomed and supported. Youth and families are engaged in pro-social, hospitable, and supportive ways that enable youth to express themselves and be supported in becoming responsible members of their community.

This vision is realized through:

- Using restorative justice philosophy and practices as the foundation for the RJ Hubs.
- Recognizing that violence causes trauma and trauma causes violence; hurt people hurt people.
- Community members taking the lead in creating safe and welcoming spaces within the community.
- Engaging and collaborating with community and systems resources to support the needs of youth and family.

- Building, restoring and strengthening relationships.
- Rooting hospitality and accompaniment in the mission.
- Promoting the youth's increased connection to and sense of belonging to the community.
- Engaging in peacemaking efforts within the community.
- Advocating for the reinvestment of justice dollars to build community capacity.
- Evaluating and measuring the impact of these efforts on the safety and well being of the community.
- Using practices that promote healing.

### **Pillars (Values)**

Welcoming and Hospitality, providing a welcoming and safe space. Hospitality means that the young person is welcomed and that the RJ Hub (organization) works to nourish their spirits by being affirming and being open to all those who come. The respect is the only prerequisite to belonging. Here youth can expect to be provided models for positive boundaries and positive relationships with others.

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*“Accompaniment means..a caring, responsible adult will walk through obstacles, situations and life’s moments offering support...”*

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Accompaniment. Young people are engaged for the long haul through mentoring and positive adult role models who engage the young person and are committed to “be there” for the youth for the long journey. Accompaniment means that a caring, responsible adult will walk through obstacles, situations, or life’s moments offering support, advice, advocacy, education and celebrations.

Building relationships with youth and families. Engaging in peacemaking circles and mentoring to promote healing, honest communication, conflict resolution, healthy relationships, connection and a sense of belonging.

Relentless engagement of organizations and resources. The ability to effectively link youth to resources needed to be successful while maintaining a strong presence in their life.

Collaboration and relationship with other RJ Hubs. The strength and power of a community comes from stronger relationships within and between the members of the community and their supporters. True

collaboration is a process where the collaborators continue to learn and be part of a learning community.

These core values or pillars must be lived out, so that the neighbors can work together and create a healthy community in which young and old alike have what they need to thrive and feel as though they belong. When members of a community feel as though they belong, they become co-creators. In stark contrast with a systems-led effort, the RJ Hub is community-led. A community-led effort can be sustained even when administrations or political trends change.

The RJ Hub sees the greatest asset of a community as the members themselves. When working together, new possibilities arise. Real and lasting change can only happen in the community.

While this model was created to respond to the violence in Chicago, it would also create safe spaces for parish communities, schools, and other organizations.

“The Catholic community is in a position to respond to violence and the threat of violence in our society with new commitment and creativity. More of the same is not sufficient. Business as usual is not enough. Our faith and facilities can be beacons of hope and safety for those seeking refuge from the violent streets and abusive homes.” Those words from *Confronting a Culture of Violence* were written with a prophetic voice. The inspiration I feel is only tempered by the knowledge that they have yet to fully be lived out. We have yet to fully embrace them as a Church.

The spirituality of the Precious Blood calls us into the lives of God’s people. To be ministers of reconciliation, we must be willing to enter into the lives of those who are on the margins. While it can be difficult, there is so much grace to be found in the stories. It is a privilege and an honor to be a part of the lives of families and youth who open their lives and share their struggles. But there is also a responsibility in hearing these stories.

Too many children are growing up in the midst of violence and abuse. To merely speak without putting the full weight of the Church behind the words, is unfaithful.

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*“To be ministers of reconciliation, we must be willing to enter into the lives of those who are on the margins. While it can be difficult, there is so much grace to be found in the stories.”*

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My prayer, my hope, my work is to create communities in which children can grow up without knowing violence, where mothers can allow their children to go outside and play, where fathers are their role models and neighbors are just that—neighbors. The time is long past. Let us take up the challenge and be about building communities of hope and healing, where no child needs stand before a judge frightened and disconnected.

(Note: Olu was taken into custody two weeks later for breaking his house arrest. We continue to see him at the detention center.)

Dave Kelly, C.P.P.S. has worked with Kolbe house, the Jail Ministry of the Archdiocese of Chicago for almost 30 years. A member of the Cincinnati Province, he is also executive director of the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation in Chicago, which promotes restorative practices and supports efforts toward reconciliation and healing.



"I see the church as field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars. You have to heal the wounds. Then we can talk about everything else."

Pope Francis 9/19/2013

# An Amicus and the Spirituality of Reconciliation

by Dennis Keller

**I**n a year of struggle leading to leaving the priesthood, the difficulty of discernment was heightened by anticipation of stories of infidelity and radicalism. These stories did bubble up from the parish community, from extended family members not privy to the decision process and from the religious community in which I was formed. For thirteen years I was immersed in a community of peers creating an overlay to my birth family. The impact on my birth family was made more horrendous because my assignment was four miles from where I was born and raised. “I want to be married and have a family.” That was my easy answer to the question, “why?” The more complete answer to the question contained other factors. But a discussion of the impact within the church struggling to come to terms with the age of reason and its own rich and immense heritage lacked understandability for the laity. There was no reason to assign responsibility to a lack of Community support in a parish where I was the only Precious Blood person. Marriage was an easy answer to both clergy and laity. For the cynical, marriage elicited stories of misconduct, radicalism, perversion and promiscuity. These allegations had a searing effect on my birth family. The Community expressed no concern about my decision. It left me with a sense of foreboding guilt that even jumping through the laicization hoops of ecclesial bureaucracy didn’t allay. Certainly this personal angst was not in the league of the wronged and wrongdoers Fr. Robert Schreiter writes about in *The Ministry of Reconciliation*. It was nevertheless a very real stumbling block for me. I went into hiding in plain sight.

Reconciliation began for me 20 years after leaving the Community in 1991 at St. Joseph College during the first Amici meeting. Over the years, freed by the gatherings and associations of the Amici, I’ve come to terms with that difficult decision. In retrospect there is clarity to many of the issues

that ravaged my mind and emotions in those decisive months. Writing this is my way of forgiving myself and others complicit in my struggle. The polarization within the church in the conflict between old and new did little to help. The Amici experience provided credibility and a greater understanding and appreciation of the human need for intimacy. Thirteen years of formation did little to prepare for adult life outside the formation community where the creative power of intimacy was discouraged.

Our primer for reconciliation is Fr. Robert Schreiter's *The Ministry of Reconciliation*. As his work reveals, reconciliation is neither a purely spiritual endeavor nor a purely secular-humanist project. His writings apply the work of the Blood to healing the violent persecution and murder of persons that is a reality in the secular world. Secular humanism lacks the energy to accomplish that.

The thoughts expressed in this article are Carol's and mine. As such they may not reflect the experiences of other Amici. However, in Amici meetings we realized our experiences are not radically different from professed Amici. Ordained Amici share an even more intense experience of alienation from both the secular and the sacred. Using Fr. Schreiter's work as a starting point I've identified eight challenges to unity with the church, with the secular world and with the Community of the Missionaries. These challenges were both causative and resultant from the decision to leave a life to which Amici had dedicated so many years of study and formation.

The first challenge deals with the culture of the church in the forties and fifties, remnants of which remain to this day. The rising sun shadow of St. Charles didn't quite reach our farmhouse, but there it was two miles across the fields. Angelus bells of St. Henry marked our meals. The pastoral work of Frs. Henry Hess, John Martin and Val Fleckenstein impressed me. It was the triumphal church. In the face of contrary science and reformation theology, it stood strong and certain in dogma. This translated to the laity as morality. Spiritual life was reserved for religious, clerics and hierarchy. The Bible was a place where family histories were stored. The Scriptures contained nice stories that taught the absolute supremacy of God as opposed to the hypotheses of science and intellectual quests. We heard about heaven and hell a lot. Liturgy was ritual. Getting the words and movements exactly right often resulted in debilitating scrupulosity. Laity came to Mass as spectators to a great mystery enacted by the priest who was a stand in for Jesus. The statue of St. Henry, over the high altar, wore military armor causing the child in me to worry that somehow the devil had wrangled a place in our church. His armored legs made me think he was kin to Satan.

Brunnerdale, the minor seminary, continued and intensified this culture. Priesthood couldn't be all that hard. God was with the priest and wouldn't allow mistakes. Decisions, even the most arbitrary or unjust, were received with absolute obedience. Failing to do so carried the threat of being "shipped." At St. Joseph's College there appeared cracks in these walls of dogmatic certainty. Frs. Rudy Bierberg and Bob Lechner threw rocks into the placid pools of our thinking. Rudy taught an introductory scripture course. He questioned our understanding of the Bible, specifically what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God. Even the most timid among us made a stab at defining this kingdom. We failed miserably. Bob Lechner once asked, "What would you think of the Mass in English?" My impetuous answer sprang from my firm and abiding faith: "That would take away the mystery." Bob responded in a quiet tone, "Yes, it would." This was the beginning of a change of culture that took another decade to find root. Reconciliation of a medieval understanding of faith and loyalty has never been a matter of a once and done challenge. In the past two decades, it is most apparent that reconciliation has yet to be a focus of the church.

The second challenge for reconciliation was the conflict between the lack of understanding of liturgy, scripture and doctrine and the actual practice of following in the way of Jesus. The Novitiate exposed me to the practical spirituality of Fr. Herman Goldschmidt. Our Latin reading was an ancient treatise on bees – unfortunately not the "birds and the bees;" that aspect of humanity wasn't meaningfully discussed in seminary. Fr. Andy Pollack exposed and encouraged us to read the ancient Christian salvation history in the Fathers in Greek and Latin. The thoughts there were a revelation. We needed help reconciling the church of our experience with the church of the ancient writers. The French and German schools of philosophy and theology in the early part of the 20th century paved the way for Vatican II.

The Second Vatican Council began its deliberations October 1962 following our first profession. Pope John's often quoted statement about "opening the windows of the church to let in fresh air" stirred an undefined hope in me. The workings of the Council provided sinew and muscle to the bones of our instruction and turned the Gospel into good news. The church was about people in need; the change was that the church served people and not the people serving the church. We had been captives of controlled thinking and a tyrannical dependence on authority. At first we looked to whom could blame for our captivity but found blame irrelevant to the movement of the Spirit. The effect of our captivity, however, eliminated questioning and search for understanding replacing true intellectual pursuit with rote memory. The open windows of John XXIII created an uncertainty in prayer life and study. Black was no longer black and white any longer white; each contributed to a vibrant spectrum. Uniformity did



not mean unity; mandated uniformity often meant irrelevant conformity. In our liturgical prayer life, Pius XII's reform of the paschal liturgies came as a shock turning scholars toward ancient resources of faith, tradition and liturgy. John Henry Newman's 19th century essay on the development of doctrine found validity when its process put in modern terms the early understandings and traditions of the Christian community. Those understandings were the foundation of the documents of Vatican II. We had been told repeatedly "revelation ceased at the death of the last apostle." The embrace of Newman's work allowed us to experience God in new and previously misunderstood ways. This was not some radical new thing, but a continuation of the experience of the People of God under the influence of the Spirit. God's work continues in our age; the Spirit continues its presence of resurrecting us as we embrace the cross. What a change for hope, relevance and meaning and purpose! A backlash was sure to follow and indeed it did in the form of a reconstruction of the church, treating the work of Vatican II and its philosophers and theologians as false prophets. The "reform of the reform" continues even to this day for many. The Council gave laity dignity, worth and a standing threatening the exclusive nature of the hierarchy and clergy. The easy way continues to be adherence to the old, the tried and true; that is the way of individual devotion and a static conforming spiritual life depending on morality alone. It would be an understatement to say we were excited about the work of the council. Xavier Rhyne's reporting in the *New York Times* gave hope for a future in which we had a place. We were foolish to think it would be clear sailing. There continues to be a pressing need for reconciliation.

The third challenge occurred after ordination. I felt empowered to preach the gospel with compassion and care for the whole person. I was driven to preach hope and mercy and a sense of freedom for the congregation to live full lives. By the fact of ordination there was a new community that included the clergy in the deanery, or so I thought. My first social engagement with the priests of the area found me penned in a corner undergoing an inquisition. "What's this about original sin? Why don't you think the Bible is inspired? How could you possibly think that Mary wasn't forever a virgin?" There was no room to answer; it was oppressive.

In the summer of 1969, a year after my ordination, we conducted a parish survey. The intention was to find out what the parish members knew about scripture, liturgy and the teachings of Vatican II. Many were surprised by our candid questions and our even more candid note taking. A sizeable number rejected Vatican II and wondered why it had ever happened. The depth of the divide between 'old time Catholics' and 'Vatican II Catholics' became evident to me when I attempted to visit an uncle and aunt living in the parish. When I called, my uncle was less than welcoming and I was told

not to come for a visit. Unfortunately I didn't know about reconciliation or how the Blood of Christ was the unifying source of energy and peace. Our Precious Blood training and devotion focused on the horrific sufferings of Jesus. By the time Frs. Tom Hemm and Robert Schreiter worked out the understanding of reconciliation of the Blood, I was a layman. A focus on spiritual life as a system of debits and credits conflicts with a spiritual life that allows God's Spirit to lead us. This is more demanding than will power and depending on a moral code. It remains an opportunity for reconciliation both in community and individually.

The fourth challenge for reconciliation is a personal one. Many seminarians expected the Council to discuss two issues for needed change. The one that affected me was priestly celibacy. Most of my sexuality derived from curiosity and an unhealthy fear of the attractive power of the opposite sex. Admittedly this is not a healthy attitude. Cloistered in seminary, there was mutual support in an undemanding celibacy which left issues and curiosities unresolved. With the first assignment, the comradeship of seminary disappeared and there was no easy entry into a new community of equals. I found myself caught between the mistrust of older clergy and the impetuosity of younger clergy. I felt an increasing isolation. Isolation is a vacuum and even questionable relationships flow toward emptiness.

The second issue was artificial birth control. Many women of childbearing age, either in the confessional or in the parish office, came begging for help. The difficulty of a life of intimacy with loved and loving husbands often resulted in another child to care for and educate. The stress fractured many loving relationships.

Paul VI removed these two issues from Council debate. The backstory of why he removed these two significant issues is veiled in obscurity. The *National Catholic Reporter* published both the minority and majority position of the commission of hierarchy, clergy and laity responsible for a study of the issue. Those who read the position papers were certain the majority position would be promulgated by Paul VI.

To even the most casual observer it was evident these two issues were decided in a traditionalist and retrenchment fashion. The operational mode of the council of collegiality and subsidiarity were thrown over. The work of the Council was based on an understanding that the Spirit of God continued to work in the church at all levels, not only in the Papacy and its Curial support system. For many, this was the death knell of hopes for deep reform in the lives of laity and priests. For many this rejection of the principle of collegiality and subsidiarity was the tipping point in decisions about their ministry.

The fifth challenge for reconciliation was the issue of survival. Years of seminary training did little to prepare us to enter the job market. For some, teaching was already their profession. For those in parish ministry the choices were few. We were in the “people business” and unless financing could be found for a marketable degree, many went into sales, social work or retail. Some continued their priesthood in another denomination. A very few found a bishop willing to put training and experience to work for their diocese. Ignoring their spiritual training was a solution to the need for economic survival. Many lost contact with the church. For others attempting to maintain connection with the church, the church remains generally less than willing to accept their service. While the bishops have been empowered by Francis to discuss celibacy and priesthood, it will be left up to religious communities to begin that discussion and find solutions to the economic questions of a married clergy.

The sixth challenge has to do with personal mindsets. No one expects competition in the world of religious instruction and ritual, but it is there even if only for the purposes of ego boost or an attempt to climb the ecclesial ladder. In the secular environment successful competition is the price of survival. Reconciling self-interest with altruism continues to be an opportunity for competitive strength in the secular world.

The seventh challenge came as a surprise. When Frs. Jim McCabe, Bob Kunish and Mark Dorenkemper met with Joe Hanish in 1989, a new possibility was born. For some, past friendships among the Missionaries continued. For some, like myself, the sense of guilt and loss kept me away from centers of the Missionaries. The awful sense of rejection and of having done harm to the community that formed me kept me in shadows. That changed with the first Amici reunion at St. Joseph College. Over the next fifteen years connections were renewed with other Amici. Both provinces extended hospitality. I've been told that some in the Community felt abandoned and that prodigal sons were attempting to return to the table of the calf fattened by the sale of the minor seminary. It remains that neither the Amici nor the Community have sought a formal reconciliation. It is too late now as more and more are dying, taking to the grave hurts and anxieties. The Amici did provide opportunities for those with guilt and shame to stand together based on a shared experience of formation, separation and survival in a secular world. But for the most part we stand alone without our brothers in the Community.

In Carol's and my experience, we felt reconciled with the Community when we were invited to attend Fr. Joe Uecker's 50th jubilee of permanent incorporation at the Kansas City Province assembly. The priests and brothers and companions welcomed us and we were one with them. We

were invited to return and have done so for two more assemblies. We did not complete any formal reconciliation process but the genuine and warm hospitality and invitation to full participation made the assembly part of our planned life. We were participants, not mere observers. We were not strangers but friends walking the same way. We belong there. So long as we are invited, so long as we can drive the 1200 one-way miles, we will attend.

The final challenge is one that affects Amici in a unique manner. Those of us blessed with children and grandchildren find that our faith and tradition have no place in their lives. We found energy and hope in the practice of our faith and prayed our children would as well. How do we reconcile their decisions with our belief in their freedom and intellectual depth? Our children are kind, compassionate and generous with their resources and practice a moral lifestyle. We regret their rejection of the ecclesial church, which provides Carol and me with a liturgy of nourishment and strength. Perhaps we see too clearly the warts and blemishes of the Body of Christ in our love of the church. Perhaps we shared too much with our children and have muddied the water. We continue to struggle for reconciliation.

It is with a visceral sense of gratitude that Carol and I embrace the change from devotion to the Blood to response to the cry and the call of the Blood. It becomes a lived reality for us as we work on reconciliation of the eight challenges identified. The way of Christ marks our journey. We try to heal and teach. We accept the suffering life doles out to us as our way of bringing about the transformation of creation and its caretakers. We hope for and rejoice in the resurrections that come our way signaling release of the Spirit, which lifts our lives from the profane to the sacred.

A native of St. Henry, Ohio, Dennis Keller entered formation at Brunnerdale in 1954. He was ordained to the priesthood in June 1968. He was released from priestly obligations in 1971. He worked as a Human Resources Professional and Executive for thirty years. With his wife Carol, Dennis founded Accent Mail a printing and mailing service in Duluth, Georgia. After ten years they retired to North Carolina to be near their children and grandchildren. He currently writes Sunday reflections for Volume 2 of the *Dominican Preachers Exchange* and for several dozen subscribers. In 1991, Dennis was involved with the Amici movement, serving on the planning committee and as editor of Amici C.P.P.S. from 2009 till its demise in 2013. He continues to act as a communication link for prayer requests and death notices of the Amici and their families.



"The confessional is not a torture chamber, but the place in which the Lord's mercy motivates us to do better."

Pope Francis, 10/25/2013

# An Effort to Understand Reconciliation

by Martha Ann Lauber, ASC

**P**ope Francis said if there is conflict, it can be resolved with discussion and prayer. My reflections upon these words and words from the Holy Scriptures brought me to new insights about reconciliation.

Now I know that in 1997 I had an outstanding experience of reconciliation. That summer our St. Louis Cathedral Choir toured Italy. While we singing during our Mass inside the Shrine of St. Francis in Assisi, to the left was a famous painting of St. Francis. The picture seemed to say to me, “just as I gave up all those riches, you, give up all those hurts inside of you.” I thought of one of my older sisters, who had just lost four loved ones in two years. From the strength of compassion for her, I started to visit her to help her and later as I helped her pack for moving, she related differently toward me as our peaceful love and friendship grew until her death.

At Notre Dame University I had a chance to take a class on reconciliation. Two concepts stayed with me. The first fit the words of Pope Francis: Reconciliation is humanly impossible; it happens only by the grace of God. There must be prayer or a religious experience. We humans may work for years to bring about peace; but it may never happen without the help of God and when He chooses to do so. This reminded me of my religious experience at the holy place of Assisi, Italy. The second was a surprise to me. It is usually the person who was hurt or victimized who will send the invitation or make the first move to start the process of discussion, which allows each person to freely and peacefully speak as they learn the truth about each other. I realized I had had the courage, and it felt peaceful as I visited my older sister after that trip to Italy.

It is like a conversation or transformation of the soul. St. Paul also had a religious experience. In Damascus it completely changed his relationship with the man Jesus.

This past May, I heard angry words of a friend and felt offended. It is difficult after feeling offended, because of the feelings of fear, anger, and/or hurt; there could also be an unhappy mild depression or sadness after the incident. Forgiveness is a process of overcoming these feelings and any process needs time. We had two days. I learned a discussion is important, since we need to hear the truth about and from the other person is a help to us in knowing the person and his true thoughts and feelings. The truth matters greatly at any moment of dialogue. Sincere words can call my anger and soothe the hurt and distress after some time for reflection.

The process moves to my accepting the whole truth about the other person. This moves me to the act of letting go of bothersome feelings. Embracing the truth may even cause me have compassion for the other. Words from the wrongdoer may help me to recover and feel strong again. The process of freeing from

anger, fear, resentment, hurt, and/or distress is like the grace of conversion, which can only come about because of prayer or the grace of God. I found meaning for the words of Scripture, "The truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). The experience of reconciliation and forgiving the other person fit with those words.

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*"Just as I gave up all those riches, you, give up all these hurts inside you."*

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After welcoming dialogue and discussing the matter, the two of us may realize sometimes comes about after a simple agreement. It may come from these following statements: we each have a different set of priorities; we each see the situation differently. In case of a mental illness, the one person will never change his behavior, thinking, or position. With such a mental agreement, I can grow to accept the impossible in a peaceful way.

I like the idea of forgiveness as that attitude of giving the person a second chance. This also applies to forgiving oneself, which assault by these words about God who is "Slow to anger and rich in mercy" (Psalm 103:8).

Lately I have wondered if there are levels of forgiveness. There is the attitude of a companion who patiently forgives us for our human faults and shortcomings without any word of complaint. There is forgiving the hungry youth who robbed us of money. There is a father's forgiveness of the young man who killed his son.

We can encourage people to reconcile with nature; we see what we are doing to our home, the Earth. Any kind of abuse or violence takes away that piece that the human heart longs for.

This winter and spring I got the chance to read and study the six volumes of the letters written by St. Maria De Mattias, founder of our religious community. As my exploration was ending, a special charism was appearing.

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*“Reconciliation is humanly impossible; it only happens by the grace of God.”*

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I never found the word, “Reconciliation;” in fact, I seldom found the words, “redemption” or “forgiveness,” although St. Maria was known for her humble spirit of forgiveness toward each person and she wanted her Sisters to love and accept one another without complaints. She often spoke of obedience, knowing that obedience of Jesus to the Will of His Father. That obedience later meant Jesus would freely give up His life-giving Blood.

St. Maria knew her Sisters would experience sacrifice and sufferings. One time a priest broke her with the request to know the requirements of a woman interested in joining her new apostolic order. Her last written words to him were these: “you will also recognize how much of those will have to suffer who join this new Institute” (# 1318).

During my first mission of two years there were fearful incidents that seemed to warn me to expect suffering in my own life as an Adorer of His Blood. His tears and blood came from the different sufferings of Jesus. As we know from the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, His Blood appeared as a result of emotional and mental sufferings. I learned that, for us, tears are the blood shed from emotional or mental suffering.

Many times she signed her letters with, “Maria De Mattias of the Holy Cross” (#522) she even wrote, “They tell me that I am always talking about the Cross,” (#210) and “O sweet suffering, O beloved Cross, you are the real happiness of the soul in love, you are what brings us to perfect love of Jesus!” (#85).

We can look at her advice to her Sisters. “Be very calm about everything” (#64) or “be at peace” (#295) there is a hint of the trials and difficulties of her Sisters in her words, “I will always be asking God to give you strength, courage, and great confidence” (#383). She often wrote these three words. “Through prayer you can obtain everything from God” (#480). At one time she wrote, “We have to carry the Cross with Jesus, if we love Jesus” (#478).



I would summarize our charism as one with these three points:

1. Sisters who compassionately journey with one another to accepting the sufferings of their life as a gift from God.
2. Sisters dedicated to the poor and suffering. "Our Institute was founded precisely for the poor" (*Letters*, Volume set III, p. 155).
3. Sisters who help people understand a spiritual meaning of suffering as a special love shown by Jesus as He reaches out with open arms to put us on the Cross with Him next to His Sacred Heart while He slowly loses His Blood (His Life) out of love for us all.

Each Adorer experiences in her own life the meaning of suffering and death so that she can be near and assist the wounded dear neighbor.

Martha Ann Lauber, A.S.C. lives in the Central Westend area of St. Louis. During the 54 years as a A.S.C. Sister, she taught, did parish ministry and worked as a CNA in care of the elderly. She says, "it seems like a full circle to go from the first years of teaching high school religion and math to my present volunteer work in an adult basic education building, helping adults to learn how to read or get a high school diploma." She enjoys nature hikes, reading, traveling, and writing.



"Some may have blamed you that you took away  
The verses that could move them on the day  
When, the ears being deafened, the sight of the eyes blind  
With lightning, you went from me, and I could find  
Nothing to make a song about but kings,  
Helmets, and swords, and half-forgotten things  
That were like memories of you -- but now  
We'll out, for the world lives as long ago;  
And while we're in our laughing, weeping fit,  
Hurl helmets, crowns, and swords into the pit.  
But, dear, cling close to me; since you were gone,  
My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone."

*Reconciliation* by W. B. Yeats (1910)

# The Upper Reconciliation Room: Restoring Relationship

By Joseph Nassal, C.P.P.S.

One of the important Scripture texts for understanding and living a spirituality of reconciliation is the post-resurrection appearance in the gospel of John when Jesus enters the upper room where the disciples were hiding behind locked doors (John 20:19-29). “Jesus stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’” He breathes on them and gives his fearful friends a new lease on life and the commission to be ministers of reconciliation in the world: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

In the second part of this story, we learn that one of the disciples, Thomas, was not in the upper room when the breath of Jesus signaled the first hints of springtime hope. Thomas, deemed the doubting one for his refusal to believe his friends’ story about the Risen One dropping by on that Sabbath evening to celebrate their confirmation as ministers of reconciliation, says he will not believe “unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side.” Thomas did not just want visual evidence of the story; he wanted to touch the body of Christ before he would believe.

What was that week like between Jesus’ first appearance and his second in that upper room the following week? Did Thomas’ friends keep trying to convince him of what they saw? Did Thomas notice his friends acting differently since they had inhaled the fresh breath of the Risen Lord and exhaled fear? Were they more courageous? Were they more willing to go out in the neighborhood to practice the pardon and peace they received from the Risen One? Did Thomas notice a spring in their steps? Were their hearts lighter and free? Did he see them laughing and joking where before—when he left the upper room to get some fresh air himself earlier

that morning—they were very quiet, weeping, trembling, constantly checking the window to see if they were under surveillance?

One would think the appearance of Jesus in that upper room would have changed them so dramatically that Thomas could not help but notice that something profound had happened while he was out and about. But remember the story: the following week the doors of the disciples' hideout were still locked when Jesus showed up a second time. Perhaps the disciples' reaction was not as explosive as one would think. It was certainly not enough to convince Thomas.

Was he just stubborn? Or was he just so thorough in his personal belief that he needed to verify everything? He often gets the rap of "Doubting Thomas" but people forget that Thomas was not afraid to be out and about after the death of Jesus. He was not afraid to get caught or to be seen or to have people speculate that he was one of Jesus' closest followers. So instead of "Doubting Thomas" perhaps we should call him "Daring Thomas."

### Daring to Reconcile

According to The Rev. Steven Pankey of The Episcopal Church, Thomas did not doubt. The Greek word should be translated as "without belief." He was "a-believing" because in John's gospel, belief isn't about an intellectual assent to some list of facts, but instead, belief is about a relationship. When Jesus died on the cross, so too did his relationship with Thomas. Thomas believed Jesus, he gave him his heart and his hope, and that belief couldn't live beyond the grave.

"Unless," Pankey continues, "Jesus lived beyond the grave, and that is so hard to fathom, that Thomas wanted proof before he handed his heart over to be burned again." This makes sense because the resurrection is always about restoring relationship. And how do we restore relationship except through reconciliation and forgiveness?

When Jesus does appear a second time, he goes directly to Thomas and dares him, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it in my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." In response, Thomas gives one of the great professions of faith: "My Lord and my God!" These were the words many of us used to say after receiving the body of Christ in the Eucharist. His body and his blood enter our lives and we become ministers of reconciliation who are called to share generously the mercy of God with all.

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***“If we are looking for confirmation that we are called to be ministers and missionaries of reconciliation, all we have to do is check our scars. ”***

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The gospel doesn't say if Thomas actually put his finger in the hole in his hand or his hand in the side of Jesus. But Thomas had seen enough, more than enough. It also doesn't say if Jesus breathed on Thomas as he did the others, though he did give them the sign of peace as he had done the week before. But at the moment Jesus reached out his hand to him, Thomas received the grace to believe that the new creation comes through the cross.

We find our mission of reconciliation through the wounds on the body of Christ, and in our own scars as well. Carol Howard Merritt tells the story of a friend who was asked by her doctor what kind of plastic surgery she wanted to remove a major scar. “Are you serious?” her friend told the doctor. “Do you really think I'm going to give up these bragging rights? I earned this scar!” Merritt imagines Jesus stepping into that upper room and showing his friends his hands, feet and side, and saying, “Hey, check out my scars!” He certainly earned them. “There is so much to that disfigured flesh that teaches us how to be survivors together,” Merritt writes.

If we are looking for confirmation that we are called to be ministers and missionaries of reconciliation, all we have to do is check our scars. Whether they are inscribed on our skin or on our souls, they tell stories of a life lived in the thick of the world.

## Touching Our Scars

When we trace the lines of our scars and the stories they tell, they often involve relationships that have been severed or broken. Much like Jesus' relationship with his followers he had lovingly called his friends on the night before he died that was broken by their betrayal. Instead of standing by him in his moment of greatest need, they fled in fear. Since only those incidents in our lives that are most painful are likely to leave a scar, they are often difficult and dangerous to recall.

Some time ago there was a story on National Public Radio about a veteran from the war in Iraq who returned to the U.S. after his tour of duty and was assigned to be an army recruiter. But as he tried to recruit young men and women to serve in the Armed Forces, his experiences and memories of what he witnessed in Iraq haunted him. He suffered a nervous breakdown and was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

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He began a long journey of confronting his fears. One of his deepest fears was toward people who identify as Muslim. So when he went back to school at a state university, he noticed there was a large group of Muslim students on campus. He decided to tackle his anger and bias directly by joining a Muslim student organization. At first, the Muslim students in the group thought he

was a spy from the CIA. Even his therapist thought it was a bad idea. But over the course of the next year, he got involved in a service project and became a good friend with one of the Muslim students.

In the *New York Times* (August 24, 2014), Juliana Schroeder and Jane Risen from the Booth School of Business at the University of Chicago wrote an op-ed piece about restoring relationships among those who have been in conflict. Like the soldier from Iraq, their answer was simple and straightforward: “Encourage positive personal contact among individuals from each group.” They use as an example Catholics and Protestants from Northern Ireland sitting down and sharing personal stories about their lives, “learning about one another’s families, hearing about one another’s fears.” This rather basic, common sense approach to conflict resolution has an academic term: “interpersonal contact theory.”

To explore how this theory can be turned into a reality, for four years Schroeder and Risen studied Seeds of Peace, “a program that every year brings together several hundred teenagers from conflict regions such as Israel and the Palestinian territories for a three week summer camp in Maine.” The students spend this time in play but also “daily sessions to talk about the conflict between their groups and their own experiences with it.”

The authors note that previous studies indicated “personal contact may be effective in making people feel more positive about groups with which they have little or no experience,” but this study was done with youth “facing pervasive violence” from those deemed “the enemy.”

The students were chosen by their government or nominated by teachers to participate in the Seeds of Peace program and were selected “solely on their leadership potential and their ability to speak English.” Often the teenagers attending the program “had experienced only negative contact with members of the other group.”

The results of this four-year study showed that the majority of students indicated “feeling more positive toward and trusting” of those students

they met from “the other side.” The change in attitudes was statistically significant. In their post-camp interview, participants reported “feeling more optimistic about the likelihood of peace and more committed to working for peace.” According to the authors of the study, the most striking and important discovery in the research was “regardless of their initial attitudes, the campers who were able to form just one close relationship with someone from the other group were the ones who developed the most positive attitudes toward the other group.”

When we truly seek to know a person with whom we disagree, we may not find it any easier to love them or even like them, but it may afford us the courage not to write them off or exclude them or punish them. And it may help us to see a little clearer that image of God imprinted upon the other’s heart.

### Wondrous Wounds

What makes the upper reconciliation room from John’s gospel so central to our understanding of reconciliation is how the wounds of the cross are still visible on the body of Christ. As Professor Roberto Goizueta of Boston College points out, “Christ’s bodily resurrection involves the realization that past injustices are never erased by future victories. Past suffering remains forever a part of the history of the resurrection; the wounds remain forever inscribed on the body.... All pain, all suffering appears in our lives as unwanted reminders that we are not in control of our lives, that we are indeed vulnerable. The act of solidarity with the wounded other is an acknowledgment of our common woundedness, our common powerlessness.”

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Certainly this was the lesson Jesus was trying to teach his disciples in that upper room. When he breathed on them and said, “Peace be with you,” he wanted to remind them that they carry within them the breath of God. This is the place where reconciliation begins to take shape. We can only discover reconciliation and the healing of life’s hurts when we recognize and acknowledge our true identity as God’s beloved daughters and sons.

The ministry of reconciliation invites the one who is wounded to step back and see a larger picture that includes the one who has perpetrated the harm as a human being made in God’s image and likeness. When each of us came out of the wombs of our mothers, we most resembled the Divine One. Each and every one of us is imprinted with the divine image. But as

we grow older, learning the ways of this world, seeing so much violence and suffering, our eyes can grow dim. Our vision grows narrow. Sometimes we lose our peripheral vision—the ability to see those who are on the fringes of life. The wounds and scars of life can create scabs over the eyes of our heart causing a blind spot toward the one who inflicted the harm.

Ultimately, forgiveness is a step in the direction of restoring relationship that is at the heart of reconciliation. This is what Jesus does when he enters that upper room after his resurrection: he offers his fearful disciples forgiveness for their sins. They had abandoned him, but now he shows them his wounds and then offers them a gentle breath of peace and reconciliation as he grants them his forgiveness.

“If it is truly the victory of life over death,” Goizueta writes, “the resurrection must vindicate and restore not just the life of the individual called Jesus Christ. The resurrection must also vindicate and restore the relationships that themselves have helped define Christ—his compassionate relationships with the poor, sinners, prostitutes, and other ‘unsavory characters.’” Ultimately, he adds, “the resurrection is the victory of companionship over abandonment, the victory of community over estrangement.”

When Jesus entered that upper room and invited his friends to inhale the fresh air of his forgiving love, he brought them back into communion, and made all those spaces in our lives where we seek to restore relationship with those with whom we are broken, reconciliation rooms.

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