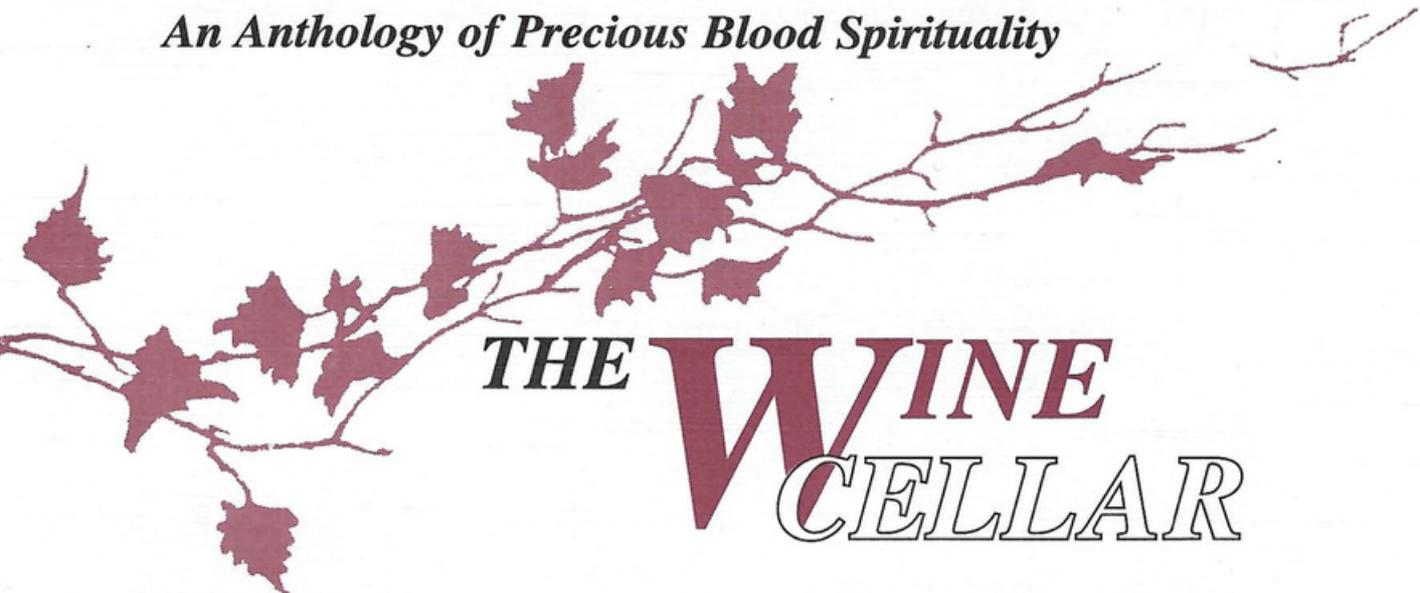


An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality



THE WINE
CELLAR

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Jubilee

*The heart of Jesus
is the wine cellar
of the Blood of Christ*

Gaspar del Bufalo

The
Wine Cellar

An anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality

Editor: Joseph Nassal, CPPS

Assistant Editor: Cathy Fortney

Layout Editor: Barbara Schepers

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From The
Wine Cellar

By Joseph Nassal, CPPS

Seeking a Few Clues

Adorer of the Blood of Christ Regina Siegfried taught a course to undergraduates at St. Louis University on United States millennial groups. One of the students' first assignments was to write a paper on what their particular religious denomination or faith tradition teaches about the millennium. She told me that one of the students entitled her paper "A Clueless Catholic." This student "certainly wasn't the only Catholic without a clue in the class," Sister Regina said. "Some had not heard of the Jubilee year; others had vague notions, while a few expressed regrets that their home parishes seemed to be missing an opportunity."

The Precious Blood Leadership Conference (PBLC) missed few opportunities to inform its members, associates, partners and companions about the Jubilee year. Various workshops with outstanding speakers were held to help congregations make connections between precious blood spirituality and the call to justice in the new millennium. In one of these presentations, Father Barry Fischer, Moderator General of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, called on us to be "guardians of the new covenant." He encouraged Precious Blood people to "call the Church and society to celebrate this special time in solidarity with the poor and disenfranchised of our world. We must avoid the temptation to transform this year into a merely personal, spiritual experience, detached from our covenant commitment with the poor and needy."

This issue of *The Wine Cellar* seeks to address two of the major themes of the Jubilee Year—debt relief and release of

prisoners—from the perspective of those who experience first hand the plight of the “poor and disenfranchised.” Dayton Precious Blood Sister Terry Walter writes how the Jubilee year is being observed in Guatemala where there are seeds of new hope being planted following the peace accords but the signs of new life after years of oppression and injustice “are sometimes hard to see.”

Veteran Precious Blood Missionary Father Gerald Dreiling reflects on how the call to “forgive the debts” of Third World nations has been a focus of prayers and meetings in Peru but “when all is said and done, more is said and less is done.” Also, as a result of the conferences held by the PBLC on Jubilee Justice, the Precious Blood Sisters of O’Fallon, Missouri took a corporate stance calling for debt relief. Sister Rosemary Russell reflects on the process that brought the community to a consensus on the issue.

Another major theme of this Jubilee year—setting the captives free—is captured in the passage from Isaiah that Jesus used as his Mission Statement when he preached his first sermon at his hometown Synagogue (Luke 4, 18-19). Michael Hustad writes from a prison in Oklahoma where he is serving a life sentence about how he has been anointed by Christ “to bring glad tidings to the poor.” Adorer of the Blood of Christ Sister Pauline Grady echoes Michael’s challenge with stories drawn from her many years of service as chaplain at the U.S. Medical Center for Federal Prisoners in Springfield, Missouri.

Freedom is the bridge between these two themes of the Jubilee year. We offer a metaphor of how listening to the pulse of precious blood spirituality frees us from the chains that bind us and invites us to join the dance of life, and a poem by Rochester Franciscan Sister Eileen Haugh reflecting freedom’s inclusive call.

We hope this return of *The Wine Cellar* after more than two years contributes to making us all a little less clueless about the Jubilee year.



You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years.

Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the Day of Atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land.

And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family.

That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines.

For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you.

PROCLAIM JUBILEE...

IN GUATEMALA

Seeds of Hope, Small Signs of Life

By Terry Walter, C.P.P.S.

Jubilee has to do with conversion, justice, stewardship of the land, forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation—all wonderful themes for a country like Guatemala, and all sorely needed. I asked different persons how they think the Jubilee themes are being lived out here and they almost universally replied negatively. They say that there's nothing concrete happening here for the Jubilee Year. That reflects the reality, with just a little Guatemalan cynicism thrown in for good measure.

This article will attempt to reflect this reality of life in Guatemala as seen through the eyes of faith. Seeds of new life are sprouting here. But sometimes they are hard to see.

The cathedral in San Marcos is decorated nicely for the Holy Year. Behind the main altar and on the draperies in the nave are the Jubilee symbols. There have been special prayers and celebrations. There was a lot of preparation for the Jubilee during the last three years of reflection on the persons of the Trinity. Those I work with say that they liked the preparation, but they have been disappointed with the Holy Year. They say that it lost momentum somehow, that nothing is happening. These same persons talk about their busy lives and their inability to find time to

***It is still the custom here to use
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pray. But at least they wish they had more time for God, more Sabbath time. At least they feel that they are missing something as their values are challenged, day by day, by media hype and economic pressures. It is still the custom here to use Sunday for Sabbath time—time for family, Church, and outings. There is still some concept of “rest” here.

At the major seminary in the capital they are building a chapel for perpetual exposition in order to commemorate the Holy Year. I have heard criticism, though, of this project from persons who recognize that not very far from this exposition chapel there are hundreds of families living in tenements who have not felt any effects of the justice-related jubilee themes.

Proclaim Liberty

Guatemala has been in a period of radical change since the signing of the peace accords a few years ago. It is not clear, though, that the changes are in the direction of justice and freedom for all. It is true that there is more peace now, but there are still grave injustices. The rich and powerful are richer and more powerful. The poor are poorer and more powerless. The rising cost of living has made life impossible for the poorest. Highland farmers still have to sell their labor for almost nothing to the big farmers and plantation owners.

Even though it is true there is more freedom of speech—to protest, to have opinions, to get involved in the politics—people

still resist getting involved because of the fear so prevalent during the war years. We have heard from many people that they are afraid that the violence will begin again. We have heard rumors that a new guerrilla force is being formed. People don't have a sense of security yet and so they don't find the inner resources or hope to be able to demand and defend their rights.

In small ways we have seen some changes. In our mental health project we work with communities and persons who have survived the violence. We have seen people release their traumatic memories, let go of their fear, and find ways to support each other. We have met some people say that things seem different now, people who recover their future.

Justice has been a problem in the courts here. Innocent people are robbed and sometimes killed while the guilty parties pay their way out of trouble, escape, or threaten judges. The national police have had a reputation for being corrupt. Court cases go on and on forever, with changes in judges and counsel who can no longer stand the intimidation. Nobody has been prosecuted for war crimes here until just recently when Candido Noriega from Quiche was convicted of massacres and assassinations. It took years with much help from Church organizations to process this case. Achieving justice, though, will bring closure to so much suffering that he caused in Quiche and provide a ray of hope in the justice system.

Return Property

Many people have returned to Guatemala from Mexico over the last several years, assisted by various international groups as well as the Catholic Church in Guatemala. In many cases their land was taken over, legally, by other people. There have been many conflicts over land and over boundaries, aggravated by two different types of land titles, both recognized by the government; two people can have legal title to the same piece of property. Many groups have had to buy back

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their own property or look for other property. The Catholic Church, with the aid of different organizations, has helped groups buy abandoned plantations.

Recently we visited a group who returned to our diocese two years ago. They are in the process of building houses on a piece of property that was obtained for them. There's not enough land there for them to cultivate, so they work in the surrounding plantations. The years of violence are still very present to them. But they seem to be settling in a place they have named, "New Dawn." This group reflects some of the seeds of new life. Another group of returnees has recently decided to return to Mexico because of the lack of compliance with the Peace Accords in Guatemala. They longed to come home but found the political situation still unbearable. I have not heard of any occasion in which land was returned to its original owners because of the Jubilee year.

A related reality here is the existence of many abandoned plantations throughout the country. During the years of violence, landowners abandoned their properties to seek the relative security of the capital. Even though it is the Holy Year, these landowners have neither returned to their properties nor have made them available to the many land-poor communities of the highlands and the coast.

Let the Land Lie Fallow

The Jubilee Year calls for the land to have a Sabbath rest. In Guatemala there is not yet much official ecological concern. Organizations meant to protect natural resources have little power over the logging industry which has wiped out most of the forest. What the loggers haven't destroyed the yearly fires have, started by carelessness or by the yearly custom of burning off fields or on purpose to make more space for grazing livestock. For the last few years there have been so many forest fires at the end of the dry season in April and May, that we didn't see the sun, the volcanoes, or mountains for weeks.

In the most fertile areas, the land is given no rest, with at least two harvests a year, every year, with abuse of farm chemicals, with pollution of rivers and air and food. In Leviticus 25, the people are invited not to worry what they would eat the seventh year when the land would lie fallow because God promised such blessing on the crop of the sixth year that there would be enough for three years. People here have a lot of trust in God, but I doubt if any would be willing to omit planting for a year to wait to see what would come up naturally.

Most of the small farmers don't have enough land to live off of for a year, let alone two or three. There are projects here that encourage farmers to recover their use of natural farming methods in order to eliminate the expensive and harmful use of chemicals. It is difficult to wean the land off the chemicals. It is quite a hardship on a family during the several years it takes for the land to recover its productivity after years of chemical use.

***Don't mistreat the poor who have come to sell
their labor. Don't call them delinquents.***

Forgive the Debts

In the Jubilee year people are supposed to be released from servitude and mortgages on properties are supposed to be destroyed. Those who lend money find all kinds of ways to get around this mandate. In Guatemala many, many people live in near-slavery, working on plantations. They never get ahead. So they, or their sons, make the long, dangerous journey to the USA, the land of the beloved dollar, to sell their labor.

The Guatemalans I spoke with sent this request, an echo of the commandment of God in Leviticus 25: Don't mistreat the poor who have come to sell their labor. Don't call them delinquents. Don't treat them like criminals. View them as brothers and sisters. Treat them as international laborers. Teach them something useful that they can use when they return here. Their labor has served both US society and Guatemala. Their dollars help many families build adequate homes and start thriving businesses.

In Guatemala their dollars are used to pay the national debt. This is one of the few countries that stays off the list of most heavily indebted nations simply because of its sale of labor in the United States.

The biggest problem with respect to the Jubilee year and debt has to do with the promotion of indebtedness here and in other developing nations, the external control of national policy because of debt, and the immoral and unjust prolongation of debt forever by the international banking systems. In terms of the Jubilee year, Guatemala is waiting for a response from the first world and its bankers. Many even poorer countries are waiting for a Jubilee response of debt forgiveness.

There have been a few seeds of new life in this respect. There is international interest and concern over the question of debt. There have also been a few countries that have actually cancelled debts, although it has not caught on yet. In Guatemala the external debt has meant the sale of government-owned services, like the telephone company and the post office. It means the reduction of

budgets for education and health, with the goal to privatize even these. It means that bankers from other countries get to control spending here, which is a form of economic colonization.

Repentance and Reconciliation

Extending the concept of debt forgiveness, Jesus calls us to forgiveness and reconciliation. The word reconciliation was given negative connotations around the time of the signing of the peace accords, because to some it meant forgiveness of atrocities without justice, or without administering justice to the perpetrators. It meant the acceptance of immunity for most of those involved in the war. It meant forgetting about the past without resolving it. Nothing is happening on a national level to locate the dead, to provide restitution to families, or to right the injustices that gave rise to the war in the first place.

But there is healing and reconciliation taking place in small ways, with individual people and communities. On the mental health pastoral team we have seen new life shooting up from the grassroots despite the lack of national response. In one township in the highlands of San Marcos, probably the area most devastated during the violence, there are about thirty people now training to be mental health promoters.

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They will go to the people still hiding and trembling in their homes to offer healing and fellowship. These communities are united and strong once again and will become formidable in their courage, wisdom, and leadership. Those who survived the atrocities will become the resurrection energy that will sprout the seeds of justice, reconciliation, and new life in Guatemala.



For Reflection

How do you understand the United States participation in the problems that plague Guatemala? Consider a careful study of United States foreign policy with regard to Guatemala and other Central and South American countries.

What practical steps or projects could you and your group envision and initiate to concretize the themes of the Jubilee year in relation to Guatemala?

How does my prayer during this Jubilee Year call me to respond to the realities in Guatemala?



Precious Blood Sister Terry Walter is from the Dayton community. She is presently working in the diocese of San Marcos in Guatemala as part of a diocesan mental health team to train mental health promoters, give workshops, and provide psychotherapy. She also is working with the School Sisters of St. Francis (Milwaukee) on a new project—a wholistic healing center that will serve the diocese and surrounding areas. Terry has lived and ministered in Guatemala for six and a half years and says, “I hope to stay for a good long while yet.”

PROCLAIM JUBILEE...

IN PERU

Precious Blood Needs to Flow to All Parts of the Body

By Gerald Dreiling, C.P.P.S.

The people of Peru are aware of the impact that foreign debt has on our political and economic life. Young and old, people of faith or no faith, of all political affiliations or no political persuasions, recognize the initials FMI (Fondo Monetario Internacional) and BM (Banco Mundial) and can identify the men who are in charge of these institutions.

Peru's annual budget is a finely tuned instrument that must be presented, checked and approved by the FMI and the BM. Our Ministers of the Economy fly to Paris, then to Washington for meetings to inform and strategize. Among other things, they discuss what social programs can be eliminated and how much can be cut from the budget of those social institutions that for the moment must remain in order to avoid riots in the streets.

In the meantime, the local media keep the populace informed of the noble efforts our politicians are making to negotiate and/or renegotiate the foreign debt. Economists are often interviewed and proclaim to one and all the wisdom of paying the debt in order to

maintain our credit rating so that the sources of the loans we need to pay our loans don't dry up. The media also provide the members of the business community the platform from which they can solemnly swear and soberly declare that we must all defend and protect the honor of Peru by faithfully meeting our monetary obligations—the eternal foreign debt.

Forgive Us Our Debts

In the face of all this the Holy Father has declared this first year of the New Millennium a Jubilee Year during which the foreign debt of the Third World countries should be forgiven. So the Jubilee Year and the “forgiveness of the foreign debt” become the subject of meetings at all levels. Prayer vigils are held and sermons are preached and discussion groups are organized to deal with these matters.

But when all is said and done, more is said and less is done. The wheels keep turning to faithfully pay the debt and not much comes of all the activity designed to achieve forgiveness. Millions of dollars have been forgiven, but when we are talking about

How many lives are lost, how many talents go undeveloped, how many legitimate dreams and aspirations are frustrated, how many social problems go unattended, how many ecological disasters are the result of the foreign debt problem?

foreign debt forgiveness we are talking about billions of dollars, not millions. And in those cases where there has been some forgiveness it has only been granted to countries that are farther down the poverty line than governments like Peru care to admit, so we lose out on the opportunity.

Of course, the consequences of this are mind boggling. How many lives are lost, how many talents go undeveloped, how many legitimate dreams and aspirations are frustrated, how many social problems go unattended, how many ecological disasters are the result of the foreign debt problem?

How many rich can get richer, how many new and ever more sophisticated scientific and technological breakthroughs can be made, how many more luxury and consumer goods can be produced and sold, how many horrible weapons can be developed and manufactured with the sweat, blood and misery required to meet our foreign debt payments?

How many myths need to be spread, how many slogans must be dreamed up, how much propaganda churned out in order to make everyone feel that the collection by the rich and the payment by the poor of the foreign debt are the correct things to be done?

We must be kept on track, racing down a road that leads to nowhere.

Precious Blood Spirituality and Debt Relief

When we view the spirituality of the precious blood through the lens of the promotion and the protection of life, we can see how this problem of debt relief comes into focus. Blood is life. Christ shed his blood to give life, life to all creatures and all of creation. The blood of Christ must flow to all parts of the body.

I often think of an experience that I had when I was a child. I had a badly infected toe, and my parents called the doctor. When he came he had to cut away the infection to cure the toe. Then he bandaged the toe, but he made it too tight. Within a half an hour

the pain was unbearable. My parents called the doctor again. He returned immediately and understood the problem: the bandage was too tight and as a result cut off the circulation of my blood to that poor, suffering toe. When he changed the bandage and the blood started to flow again, I felt incredible relief. The blood was flowing back into my toe!

I frequently reflect on that toe of mine and the troubles of this world of ours. But when I make the comparison it seems to me that what we have today is a toe that gets all the blood, and the rest of the body is in dreadful pain. There is no blood. And it is Christ's blood, the spirituality of the precious blood that should make us aware of the problem and inspire us to work like that doctor to adjust the social structures that bind our world together so that all the parts get the life giving blood.

Some call this working for the construction of the reign of God. That is what the blood of Christ is calling us to and it is no small order. That is why precious blood spirituality is so very powerful. It is often too potent and we are often too weak. We often thin it out.



For Reflection

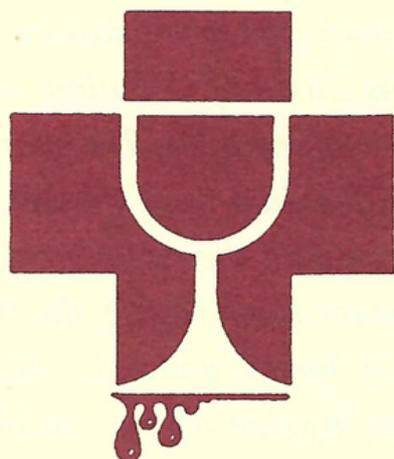
How is the blood of Christ calling you to promote and protect life?

What debt relief have you offered during this Jubilee Year to those who have hurt or offended you? What debts do you still need to forgive in your personal life?

In what specific ways can you promote debt relief for the people of Peru and other Third World countries in your parish and local community?



Ordained in 1958, Precious Blood Father Gerald Dreiling began his missionary work in Chile in December 1960. He returned to the United States in November of 1967 because of the illness of his father. Two years later he went back to Latin America, this time Peru where he has lived ever since. "My first eleven years were spent in La Oroya," Fr. Gerald writes. "They were exciting times, times of much theological reflection, social change and political unrest." His next eleven years were spent in Santa Luzmila located in the northern part of Lima, the capital of Peru. Following a sabbatical, he founded the Association of San Jerónimo that provides materials for more than five thousand teachers in Lima.



PROCLAIM JUBILEE

Precious Blood Sisters Call for Debt Cancellation

By Sister Rosemary Russell, C.P.P.S.

On March 1, 2000, the Precious Blood Sisters of O'Fallon voted to take our first ever public corporate stance calling for debt cancellation for the world's impoverished countries. The following statement was adopted by an overwhelming affirmative vote of the total community:

Impelled by our mission of reconciliation and our desire to serve the poor and marginalized, we, the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon, Missouri, seek justice and mercy for all peoples. Therefore, at the beginning of this millennium year, we call upon the leaders of the wealthiest countries, the commercial banks, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, regional development banks, and other international financial institutions to write off the crushing international debt of impoverished countries by the end of the year 2000, the Jubilee Year.

We ask these leaders to cancel the debt in a way that benefits ordinary people and without conditions that perpetuate or deepen poverty and environmental

degradation. We ask them to work with governments and civil society to prevent recurring cycles of destructive indebtedness.

We call upon ourselves to live out the call of our Constitutions and Directory as we endeavor to bring about the cancellation of the international debt of the impoverished countries.

This decision had its roots in the Precious Blood Leadership Conference Human Rights Initiative Committee workshop, "Proclaim Jubilee," which was held in O'Fallon in November 1999. One of the ways that the ten O'Fallon sister participants decided to bring the workshop inspiration and input back to the rest of our sisters was by means of proposing a total community public corporate stance on debt cancellation.

The proposal encouraged prayer, study and local community discussion for a month prior to voting on the stance. The proposal included the stance statement with background rationale which emphasized the biblical tradition of a Jubilee Year; the call of our Constitutions and mission of reconciliation; the plight of the peoples in debt laden countries; and the sense of solidarity with the peoples of Bolivia, Peru, and the refugees in the United States from Africa, Asia, and Latin America that we have gained through our ministries. In addition the proposal provided a listing of resources for study, as well as a listing of suggested actions for carrying out the stance.

Since taking the stance much prayer and fasting have accompanied the actions of the sisters to promote debt cancellation. Many letters and calls have gone out to the U.S. President, Senators and Representatives advising them to support debt cancellation and to set aside sufficient monies to allow for it. Letters have also gone out to members of the IMF and to members of the G8 Summit (leaders of the seven wealthiest countries and Russia) calling them to do all in their power to promote and carry out debt cancellation for poor countries. Four sisters, decorated in

paper chains made by our retired sisters, participated in the Jubilee 2000/USA rally on April 9 in Washington, DC to call for “breaking the chains” of unjust debt.

We invite you to join us in this effort to call for debt cancellation by joining your voice with the voices of the poor in indebted countries seeking justice and an access to adequate nutrition, healthcare and education for their children in lieu of paying off insurmountable debts.



For Reflection

Following the process outlined by the O’Fallon Precious Blood Sisters, how might your local community or parish take a corporate stand for debt relief?



Precious Blood Sister Rosemary Russell is a member of the General Council for the O’Fallon Community.

TO A DANCING DEITY:

Listen to the Pulse of the Blood

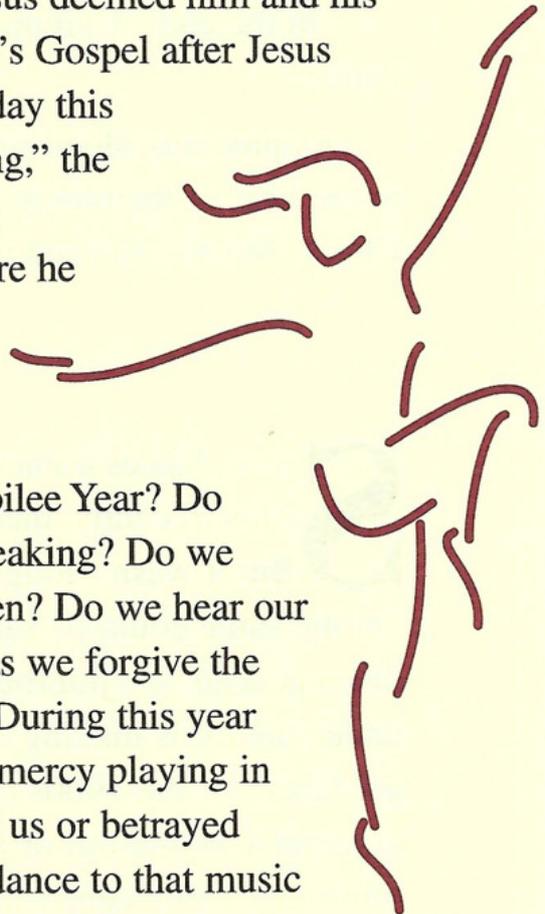
By Joe Nassal, CPPS

A friend of mind sent me a card with this quote on the front:
“Those who hear not the music, think the dancers mad.”

What music do we hear? Do we hear the beat of the precious blood pulsing in our bodies and souls to “bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, and freedom for those who are imprisoned”?

Those who didn't hear the music of Jesus deemed him and his dancing disciples mad. Remember in Luke's Gospel after Jesus offers his mission statement and says, “Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing,” the hometown crowd began to ask, “Is not this Joseph's son?” They began to wonder where he learned how to dance. They thought him “mad” because they didn't hear the music.

What music do we hear during this Jubilee Year? Do we hear the sound of the chains of debt breaking? Do we hear the doors of prison cells swinging open? Do we hear our hearts beating out a tune of tender mercy as we forgive the debts of those who “owe” us an apology? During this year of Jubilee, do we hear the music of God's mercy playing in our relationships with those who have hurt us or betrayed us? Or are we afraid to name that tune or dance to that music because others might think us mad?



I am reminded of a story attributed to the late Joseph Campbell who told of a distinguished social philosopher from New York attending an international meeting on religion in Japan. Although he was an expert in his field, this social philosopher knew very little about Asia or its religious traditions. So, after visiting many shrines and temples and seeing many ceremonies and rituals, he was confused and sought out a Shinto priest for some clarity. "I don't get the ideology," the philosopher said. "I don't understand your theology."

The Shinto priest thought for a moment and said, "I think we don't have an ideology. We don't have a theology. We dance."

In his book, *Myths to Live By*, Campbell uses this story to explain the difference between Eastern and Western religion. "In the West," Campbell said, "we have ideology and theology. We used to debate such things as how many angels dance on the head of a pin. But in the East where the rites are extremely stately, musical, and imposing, no effort has been made to reduce their meaning or spiritual impact to words. Dancing is sufficient."

"In the end," Campbell concluded, "We need no permission to dance."

As precious blood people we do not need permission to dance to the beat of the blood of Christ pulsing through the body of Christ. But we do need to hear the music.

Dance Fever

Some dances come and go, passing fads that fade from view. Most recently, there was something called the Macarena. But it wasn't long before the Macarena lost its magic. And yet the same could be said of other dance steps from different eras: disco is dead, the jitterbug was exterminated (although I understand it is making a comeback in some circles), and the go-go dances of the 1960s came and went. Ballroom dancing moves gracefully in and out of popularity, and according to one campus minister I met recently has become the rage again on some college

campuses. A new dance craze sweeps people off their feet for awhile but then something new comes along, taps the dancers on the shoulders and says, “May I have this dance.”

The phrase, “dance fever” actually has rather literal roots in the Middle Ages in Europe when people infected with the bubonic plague danced as if they were mad, out of their minds, and so became associated with the dance with death. But a fever breaks, a fad passes, a craze is not for the long haul. Those dances that survive seem to offer a steady, graceful pace that takes the human spirit to new places. Ballet, for example, still beckons human beings to new heights of beauty as it reflects how the soul is expressed in the body moving in the motion of the music.

In the dance of life one of the important questions is, “Who leads?” But for those who hear the music of the blood of Christ the better question is, “Who serves?”

Giving the Dance a Chance

Some dances reflect what we might call the geometry of the soul: line dancing and square dancing come to mind. In square dancing, for example, there is something called “Alamo style” because the circle of dancers join hands with every other dancer and face outward. As we visualize the church of the new millennium, we may want to “remember the Alamo.” The challenge of renewal may be to create an “Alamo style” dance of joining hands in a circle and always facing outward to the future.

Bishop Frank Griswold, the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States, wrote about a gathering of the clergy, their spouses and companions. The gathering took place at a farm in Clare, Illinois to celebrate his tenth anniversary as bishop of the Episcopal diocese of Chicago. After supper one night, the 160 people participating in this weekend retreat, gathered in a barn, formed a circle, and began to dance. Led by three women, the group was invited to move to the right and the left, in toward the center and out to the edges. At times the circle moved with a

contemplative slowness and very easy steps, at other times it moved quickly with abrupt turning and twisting which left all but the most agile trying to keep up.

In reflecting on that dance, the bishop noted that there were more than a few missteps by each one in the group. Some insisted on leaning to the left while others stubbornly leaned to the right. Their arms were strained and their shoulders crashed at times. They bumped into one another, stumbling over their own and others' feet. And yet they hung on and hung in with each other, forgiving and moving forward.

The bishop's experience of dancing in that barn offers an image and model for what it means to be a community of faith in the twenty-first century. Isn't this the story of our own experience of church—people leaning to the left or right, pulling us in one direction or another? We bump into and trip over each other's feet, or our own words, but we hang on and hang in and continue the dance with more than a measure of forgiveness and a hope of moving forward that will not die.

Perhaps we can take a cue from that proverb Jesus used when he was confronted by the religious leaders of his day who thought he was mad because he was "Lord of the Dance." He said, "We piped you a tune but you did not dance! We sang you a dirge but you did not wail!" He was referring, of course, to how the crowd rejected John the Baptist because of his austerity and were rejecting Jesus because of his flexibility, seen especially in his willingness to eat, drink, and celebrate with the outcasts of his day. Those who had been pushed out of the circle of community and not invited to join in the dance. These are the ones with whom Jesus danced up a sacred storm of forgiveness and faith.

We are well aware that in the Church there are some of us who lean to the left and others who lean to the right. We may often find ourselves stepping on each other's toes or tripping over another's words. But the important thing is whether we lean to the right or lean to the left in the circle of community let's give the dance a chance.

In thinking about that dance in a barn on the tenth anniversary of his ordination as bishop, Frank Griswold wrote: “And how does the Spirit bear witness to Christ? By showing up in the midst of the struggles, the concerns and questions, the frustrations and illuminations, the moments of idiocy and aspiration which make up the fabric of our lives. Nothing is safe from the Holy Spirit: no place or circumstance is off bounds to the Spirit’s driving yet subtle motion.”

As we dance to the themes of this Jubilee Year, we sense the Spirit’s movement in our lives. We trust this Spirit of God who plays the music we hear in our souls. It is a tune of tender mercy that calls us to enlarge our heart, our hope, and our circle of community.

Dancing Madly Forward

As we dance madly forward in the new millennium, Jesus gives us the notes of the music and the steps necessary to “preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to announce a year of favor from our God.”

Throughout the Gospel, in parables and stories, Jesus taught the crowds how to dance by first listening to the music. Listen to the music of God that sings of blessing for the poor, the pure of heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. As Jesus teaches these new steps in the dance of life, hearts and souls and feet begin to move. Join your partner, Jesus calls, and move in the motion of God’s music where those who mourn and those who are meek, those who are merciful and those who hunger and thirst for justice pick up their feet and tap their toes to the beat of God’s blessing.

As the people in the Gospel hear the music, some do a slow dance, others a soft shoe; some promenade while others pirouette; some do a river dance after being baptized in the Jordan while others do a swing dance, going back and forth in their belief about

Jesus. But what they all have in common, this remnant troupe of dancers, is that they hear the music of God.

Whether we view these steps as a ballet or a break dance, a line dance or a square dance, the music of the blood of Christ invites us to form a circle where no one is left out. Whether we hear the music as a tap dance or the twist, these steps are not a passing fad that will fade over time. The only danger is that we will stop listening to the music of God and think the dancers mad.

As we look at life, at ministry, at faith, at church in the new millennium, we can see it as a dead end or an endless opportunity. We can polka into the future or just poke around our past. We can say this millennium minuet isn't going to work, this circle dance of the remnant where the circle grows ever wider, or we can begin tapping our toes and listen to the pulse of the blood of Christ tapping out a new tune of tender mercy.

I know the excuses. I use them myself: "But I can't dance, I won't dance, I have two left feet!" But if we hear the music, the dance continues. Toes begin tapping, hands start clapping, bodies start swaying, arms raising, souls soaring, feet moving to the music of God. We can sit this one out or we can be on our toes, looking with hope to the future because we still hear the music of God found in the beat of the blood of Christ.



For Reflection

During this Jubilee year, what hope nips at your heels and gives you the courage to continue the dance of faith?

What music do you hear at this time in your life? Name and claim that tune.

Check the pulse of precious blood spirituality in your life. How does the beat of the blood of Christ motivate you to be engaged in ministry with those on the margins of society and church?

No One

What will wear away
This stone that is my heart—
What will tear it enough to
 Let you in?
Terror, darkness, worry,
 Frantic pain,
 All of them knock.
But you have led me, driven me
 Into this desolation of desert
 For the lesson: stone hearts are split
 By common things—
 Water and wind,
 Fire; or another stone, grating,
 Can open me up, crack my shell,
So I will be ravished by you my enemy—
Now, readying the room, you are repeating:
 There is no one—
 You have examined my heart
And tell me simply, again,
 There can be No One
 You can refuse to let in
No one
Whom you will not shelter;
Or the stone will close again,
The heart will shrivel
In the murderous son.

—*Eileen Haugh, OSF*

Sister Eileen Haugh is a Rochester (MN) Franciscan.

Answering the Call

By Michael Hustad

*The Spirit of God is upon me,
God has anointed me...
Sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,
Proclaim liberty to captives,
Recovery of sight to the blind
And release to prisoners,
To announce a year of favor from God.*

Luke 4, 18-19

Throughout this Jubilee Year we have been called to embrace the idea and spirit of Isaiah quoted by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. The question is how this passage applies to my life? How does this vision invite me to participate fully in the celebration of the Jubilee? How does Jesus' mission statement call me to be involved?

Isaiah is the first contact in this scenario. The Israelites were being released from their exile and were returning to a land scarred by conquering nations. Their bodies battered and worn from years of oppression, their souls tarnished by sin and rebellion against God, the call came to Isaiah to prophesy to the people and offer them hope.

In this passage which later would form Jesus' mission statement, Isaiah realizes he is being called to a mission that raises up the lower classes of society. He must minister to those who are on the margins; those who are most often seen as not being worthy of another's time or trouble.

Isaiah replied to God's invitation, "Here I am, God, I come to do your will." Bathed in his anointing, the prophet stood before the people and proclaimed the task God had set before him: "The Spirit of God is upon me, God has anointed me...." He set out to reclaim their identity as God's people, rebuild her once again into a great nation, recreate Zion and lift up the people who felt lost and forsaken. He spoke of freedom from the oppression of foreign rulers. He opened their eyes blinded by wickedness to see God's glory. He freed them from their roles as prisoners of Babylon. Isaiah answered the call and became a servant and reconciler for God.

The Mission of Jesus

When Jesus quoted his favorite prophet before his family and friends in his hometown synagogue, his mission is clear. He is sent to save us from the oppression, pain, and suffering of eternal death. He is sent to free those held captive by disease and those held prisoner by sin. In his ministry he would call others to follow and learn from him to recreate God's reign. Like Isaiah, Jesus is called to be a servant of God. His ministry would work most with those who are on the fringes. Jesus sought to reconcile us to God.

Like Isaiah, Jesus would claim the "victory of justice." But Jesus' victory would extend beyond this world to the fullness of glory in God's reign. Throughout his ministry Jesus brings the message of God to the people on the fringe. He has ultimate power and authority to give sight to the blind, heal those held captive by physical and mental illness, feed the hungry and lift up the poor. Those held prisoners by sin—prostitutes and the criminal who would die beside him on Calvary—were set free.

***His precious blood would spill out upon the
ground and stain the wood of the cross.***

As a prisoner himself, Jesus carried the instrument of his execution, of oppression, of death through the streets of Jerusalem. Three times he would stumble and fall from the weight of humanity's failings on his shoulders. Three times he would rise and trudge on toward fulfillment of his mission. He completed the task by climbing the hill, being raised upon the cross, being crucified, and dying. His precious blood would spill out upon the ground and stain the wood of the cross. But this was not a defeat because three days later he would rise from the tomb. He gained the reign for each of us through his resurrection.

Throughout his life, Jesus fed the poor, gave liberty to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to those held captive. Jesus answered the call.

Wipe the Slate Clean

During this Jubilee Year, we are called to do our part as servants of God. Once again the world seems to be in disrepair. It is our turn to answer the call.

Jesus is calling us and directing us to do as he taught and demonstrated in his life and ministry. If we are to make full use of our anointing, we must find ways to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. This may take us to places we would rather not go. Most likely, those who are most oppressed, poor, held captive, and are prisoners are in places we would prefer to avoid. But by answering the call, we claim victory over those forces that seek to institutionalize injustice and oppression. But victory cannot be achieved by staying out of the fray.

The idea of the Jubilee year in the time of Isaiah was to forgive debts, free those held in servitude, and to reconcile transgressions between parties. It was simply to wipe the slates clean and to begin

anew. It was much the same when Jesus was called to service. We had strayed so far from God and there was a need for healing and reconciliation. Jesus' entire life and ministry can be viewed as a Jubilee as he taught us how to be closer to each other and to God. He taught us how to live as God wanted us to live and how to treat each one around us with love and compassion, no matter the circumstances or consequences. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus freed us from sin and reconciled us once again with God.

Though all of us are called to this mission of service, some of us might echo the familiar refrain, "What can I do? How can I be of service?" Another of our ancestors in faith who answered the call, St. Paul, responds to this concern when he tells the community at Corinth that there is much work to be done where we are. In whatever circumstances or situations we find ourselves, we can be of service. "Were you a slave when your call came?" Paul asks. "Give it no thought. Even supposing you could go free, you would be better off making the most of your slavery (1 Corinthians 7, 21)."

This particular passage resonates vibrantly within me because it describes my current circumstances. I am presently incarcerated and held prisoner by the state for a murder I committed in 1987. In responding to Jesus' call and invitation in this year of Jubilee, I must make the most of my circumstances with the gifts and blessings that have been bestowed upon me. It is imperative that I move beyond personal concerns and problems, beyond self, and look for others in my community who need help finding their way. I must be aware of and respond to those who are held captive, are poor, and are blind to the ways of God. Those who still remain prisoners of sin. I must make full use of my anointing.

In whatever circumstances or situations we find ourselves, we can be of service.

Men and women whose entire lives have been spent struggling against oppression and sin are growing old and resigning themselves to this life and the prospect of dying in chains.

When you wander around the concrete, steel, and razor wire confines of a modern prison for any length of time you can see many examples of those who are oppressed, blind, captive, and of course, prisoners. You see hundreds, and even thousands of people, who have lived their lives shackled in chains of case hardened steel, never realizing they have always held the keys. There are those by the multitude who have been held captive by addictions to drugs and alcohol for so long their lives seem meaningless.

There are a growing number of young people doing excessively long sentences. They will live and die by choices they made as teenagers. Their spirits broken, lives shattered, hopes and dreams driven into oblivion by the iron fist of the criminal justice system. They know little hope and continue spiraling downward into darkness for lack of seeing a better way.

Our prison population is also aging at an alarming rate. Men and women whose entire lives have been spent struggling against oppression and sin are growing old and resigning themselves to this life and the prospect of dying in chains. But deep inside, as they near the end of their journeys, a quiet desperation simmers. They want to know a better way of life. They want to know peace.

Like the aging, the numbers of terminally and chronically ill are increasing. They have no one to hold their hands in their final years, months, weeks, and days. They feel abandoned, punished by God for their sins, and afraid of the unknown. They too are seeking comfort from the Comforter.

A Ministry of Reconciliation

Prison ministries are for the most part about reconciliation. In a prison environment one deals with people who need to be reconciled with their victims, society, their family, themselves, and God. They need the healing touch of God to move forward with their lives and beyond past behaviors.

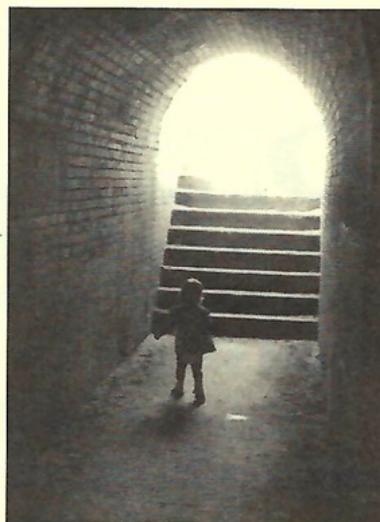
This Jubilee year offers an excellent opportunity to renew our commitment as servants of God and to refocus on the primary purposes and motivations for ministry—to be a compassionate presence and to help others work through a process of reconciliation. But this is a place where one cannot plan a ministry in neat and tidy outlines. This is a place where each day is different, and yet, is identical to the one before. Around every corner there exist new challenges and new opportunities to follow in the footsteps of the Teacher and to respond to the call, “Here I am, Lord.”

Jesus taught his disciples not only with words but with witness. He taught them by example. As he engaged in ministry with those on the fringes of life, his followers often asked, “What did he mean by that?” Those who watched him suspiciously raised questions like “Why does he do such things?” But in every word and act of Jesus there was a lesson for those who heard or observed him. By the manner in which he conducted himself; in the way he reached out to others, he taught his greatest lessons.

Ministry in prison—like anywhere else for that matter—is carried out in much the same way. It is by internalizing the message of the Good News in one’s life, and then living that message daily that the doors of ministry are opened. When one lives in the manner of Jesus, the gates to freedom are swung wide upon their hinges. One needs only to regain one’s sight to see the opportunities to profess, defend, and practice one’s faith.

My ministry in prison has covered a wide range of areas and many tasks. I have been involved with programs in literacy, health care, peer counseling, and programs for those with addictions, and

***My greatest challenge
is to allow the light
of the Risen Christ to shine
through me in the dark
corridors of daily life in prison.***



education. I am very active in my faith community. And I have engaged with those around me who want to make a better life for themselves while they are in prison, and one day carry those things with them back into the free world.

While these activities have been rewarding for me, my most rewarding experiences have been those of simply being a compassionate presence to others when they are most in need. My greatest challenge is to allow the light of the Risen Christ to shine through me in the dark corridors of daily life in prison. For the most part, the population I live with does not want to be evangelized. They are bitter, angry, resentful, and suspicious of anyone citing chapter and verse. A softer and more carefully disguised approach to ministry is often required. By incorporating and living the message and lessons of Christ in my life on a daily basis, His light shines and draws others toward it. They are able to see peace exist in another in an environment almost devoid of peace. It is a peace they may never have known in their own lives and they want this peace.

Amazing Grace: Open Wide the Doors

The doors of ministry are opened here more by reputation than by one's ability to preach. In quiet conversations questions are asked, stories are told, wounds are exposed,

and sorrows are given a name. And in time, freedom can be achieved. By following Jesus' example of servant leadership, the Good News is proclaimed.

I often find myself using parables and telling Bible stories in ways that can be understood and accepted by those who seek to change their lives but who may not yet be ready to embark fully on the journey of faith. But with most of these men, you cannot sound as if you are preaching the Word to them or else they will leave and never come back. One must find a way to be the comforter, consoler, healer, peacemaker, reconciler, and freedom facilitator in a non-threatening way.

I trust the Spirit of Jesus to guide me in my ministry. By living as Jesus taught, others gain trust in me. By enjoying this trust with those around me I am involved in a ministry rich in God's amazing grace. I have had the opportunity to hold the hand of a dying man, to share his journey from life to death and back to life with God. To see the spiritual transformation of this man, to see God's compassionate and loving touch come upon him, was more than words can describe. To know that the precious blood of Jesus washed away his iniquity, cleansed him of his sin, and reconciled him to God, was comforting.

I have discovered many ways in this prison environment to answer the call of God. The most common, however, is simply being present with others, taking time to sit with another, work with another, cry with another, share with another, and respond with the compassion and promises of Christ. By following in the footsteps of the Teacher, the spirit of the Jubilee Year can be proclaimed in prison.

There is a need, of course, not only in the prisons of this country but in every neighborhood to proclaim Jubilee. The people I live with come from places where you live. Remember St. Paul's reminder—we are to make the most of whatever situation or condition we are in when we hear God's call. We are to look within ourselves to see our gifts and look around to see the needs that exist around us. We can only free prisoners, give sight to the

blind, and proclaim liberty to captives in metaphorical ways. But it is our duty and responsibility to pass along the message of the Good News.

There is more work than all of us together can do in our lifetime. But the Spirit of God is upon us. God has anointed us. The call urges us to get up and go out among the poor, the captive, the blind, and the prisoner. The call is for each of us to do our part in the service of God's kingdom. Answer the call!



For Reflection

In what ways do you hear the voice of God calling you to mission and ministry in the spirit of this Jubilee year?

When you hear the call to service, how do you respond?

As you look at the needs in your neighborhood, parish, or community, in what ways can you bring glad tidings to the poor, freedom to prisoners, liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind?



Michael Hustad is currently incarcerated in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. He has served more than twelve years of a life sentence. For most of his incarceration, Michael has been active in ministry behind the walls. He has earned a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and a Master's degree in Criminal Justice Management and Administration while in prison. Michael's future plans for ministry include developing a hospice care program at the prison.

SET PRISONERS FREE?

Directives For Reconcilers

By Pauline Grady, ASC

When we seek to understand and practice the directive of the Jubilee year to release captives and set prisoners free, it may seem that we are facing a wall with no door. Is there any reasonable way to obey this prescription for the millennium in the spirit of celebration? How do I take part in the mission of Isaiah, taken on himself by Jesus in Luke 4, “to set captives free”? Specifically, what can I do?

There is a good deal of comment being bandied about concerning the situation in which the United States Department of Corrections finds its prisons, which are said to be overcrowded, a “big business” expanding exponentially, with a recidivism that runs to as high as eighty percent. Alerted by the Spirit, a person dedicated to the apostolate looks for a finger hold of some kind, but perhaps does not see one at first. The would-be reconciler does not know where to start or what to do. He or she may well be aware that our prisons are excessively crowded, full of people to whom justice has been meted out in a human way, out of a desire to be just, but with only limited ability to avoid mistakes of judgment and uneven levels of punishment.

There are many problems. Prison chaplains report a disproportionate number of Blacks and Hispanics among prisoners. A high level of security surrounds the inmates, and seems to keep visitors from meaningful contact with prisoners. Any desire on the part of a reconciler to come into a prison to proclaim God's mercy involves irksome paperwork that is necessary but seems to the outsider to be based on complete mistrust. Yet, if we were to undertake working with prisoners, would we actually be able to help them handle the anger and emotional uproar they feel? Can we reach them safely? Will they speak openly with us in the presence of unremitting supervision, crammed together against their will and with little encouragement to admit their wrongdoing and work with the actual situation? What can we do as reconcilers, impelled to this mission by Christ's blood? Clearly victim and offender have to be reconciled in some way, but how does one get near enough to help?

Obstacles That Arise

Who are these prisoners with whom I aspire to share reconciliation? Is any aspect of their spiritual development my responsibility? Just before I sat down to begin this article, I chanced to meet a prison guard I know. I've had to cut down the time I spend as chaplain at the federal prison hospital lately, and the officer asked me why he didn't see me around much anymore. I told him that it was a security measure. As we chatted, the officer, a good man and devoted to his work, warned me of the danger inherent in spending time with inmates, even if I was teaching them to pray.

The good officer did not comprehend my lack of fear or my need to give the prisoners the opportunity for confidential talk. Earnestly he reminded me, "There is a fellow, back in that section where the mental patients are, who cut out his mother's heart." He frowned. "You spend a good deal of time with guys like him, and it makes you very easy to manipulate. I think you really are in danger." I reminded him that men of that type are carefully locked

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up, and that I saw them only through a narrow slot, but he did not seem to understand my need to stand near. Somehow I could not find common ground to convey to this believing officer my admiration of the Godhead dwelling within the inmate, whatever he had done.

And so it went. We simply did not see the situation in the same light.

The friendly guard and I talked a while about the difficulty of being objective, and I admitted that I could not see the danger he saw for a non-officer (and therefore a powerless person) in a crowded prison. He has a good deal of truth on his side. As a federal officer he has as his first duty to keep everyone as safe as possible. Our conversation only underlined the problem that an enthusiast for reconciliation, for "releasing prisoners" even in a spiritual sense, faces at every turn. It will never be easy for a religious volunteer to get inside a prison. One must continually strive for mutual understanding with prison officials.

How then am I going to explain to solid Christian people like the majority of prison officers that we are all prisoners, all equally untrustworthy, or that I find it necessary, whatever the obstacles, to attempt to teach and heal prisoners, to set captives free in mind and heart? Will he understand that I can't celebrate the millennium prescription "to set the prisoners free" in any reasonable way, as

Isaiah prophesied, if I cannot see them in some way as equal and as fellow travelers? Who will hear the spiritual cry of the prisoners I am to free?

The more I think the more I wonder. Is this task even in my hands at all? How can I hope to bring reconciliation to any prisoner, man or woman, whose experiences and background are so very different from my own? Dare I attempt to reconcile this fellow human being with God, with himself and with the persons he has wronged? Am I indulging in a fantasy of mission that is beyond me? What does God really ask of me with regard to people that I cannot free physically and probably would not dare to let go free, even if I could? Is it all just more words, sweet things to say in a magazine article, but impractical in deed?

Christ the Reconciler

The first step is to ask who the prisoner is before God. Who is this fellow human being whom I hope to bring to reconciliation? Do I grasp that God is all love and that God's love enfolds human beings not according to their offenses or merits, but as spirits held in the embrace of Infinite Mercy, with no past or future other than God? This inmate may have a long "rap sheet" of violence, abuse, addiction, deception, even depravity, yet he is, as I am, a creature of God worthy of great respect. If I do not live happily in the depth of my own nothingness, admiring the condescension of my Creator, I am in no position to make a judgment or negotiate a process for anybody else. I must wait on the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit quickly supplies understanding. Though we must work toward fulfillment of the millennial promise of freedom for prisoners, it will be only a fruitless attempt if Christ is not healing each person individually from within. Our free will is a sacred citadel where not even God intrudes. There is no magic formula for freeing a prisoner from his past. As we quickly learn, there is no wand the U.S. Department of Justice can wave over our

What does God really ask of me with regard to people that I cannot free physically and probably would not dare to let go free, even if I could?

troubled Department of Corrections that will reform prisons. So we persevere in asking, how can I help? From what are prisoners to be set free? Who can cut the bonds?

As a person who has dedicated her life to the blood of Christ, I know well the power of this blood. I clap my hands daily celebrating this effective sign of God's mercy in Blessed Maria's hymn to the blood of Christ. Yet I do understand that God wants from me a course of action empowered by this Blood.

Prisoners in the specific modern meaning of that term are those who in this imperfect world are being punished for evil deeds. They are variously housebound, confined in a specific building, physically impeded from moving out of one specific place without handcuffs, perhaps in fetters to restrict their freedom of movement, or locked behind the door of a six-by-nine foot cell twenty-three hours out of every day. All prisoners, whether in the highest security or not, are limited in communication, sometimes totally limited through years in lockup. They are often partially confined by censorship of mail, no free access to telephones, no right to use computers, and strictly guarded during visits from a set list of relatives or friends.

One quickly realizes that to understand the psychological and spiritual inner experience of a prisoner, unless one has actually been imprisoned, is hardly possible. We can, however, enter what Joe Nassal has called the "conspiracy of compassion" if we make the effort. We think of the original Jubilee phrase about prisoners as it has been understood by an unbroken line of Scripture lovers. Isaiah urged release of prisoners seven and a half centuries before Christ. In our own day, Gustavo Gutierrez sees the "release of

prisoners” as a political-spiritual movement of liberation and our spiritual advisors have called it an integrated part of millennial observance.

How then do I share the effort to release the prisoner? Often I have said that if I could teach just one word to the whole world it would be *respect*. Once we have looked into the reality of creaturehood and understood what it really means, we are totally subjected to our creator and in awe of every other fellow-creature. We bring respect to every son or daughter of God, especially to anyone with whom we hope to share reconciliation.

We are all equally empty before God. We can only be reconcilers if we ourselves are reconciled to our all-precious, God-given nothingness, and are completely convinced that within each prisoner, as within ourselves, there is the seed of true liberty and joy in being a son or daughter of God.

Centering on Sacramental Principles

Anyone who feels called to brave the tight security of a prison to share with a prisoner and be his companion on his way to full spiritual life needs to be imbued with the sacramental principle. Each day a prison worker must renew the understanding of Christ’s incarnation as the bridge between body and spirit, between human beings and God. It is still true that a majority of the prisoners have been baptized, and therefore have entered at least to some extent into sacramental life.

All prisoners, though, even those who have not had direct contact with Christianity, live in a world of sense knowledge. We know spiritual things only in symbols. All prisoners are in a restrictive phase of their lives when, if ever, they are likely to be thinking of their spiritual future. When a Hispanic prisoner who is culturally Catholic but has, at least for a time, misplaced his Catholic heritage, asks for a blessing, the worker’s hand touching him with the sign of the cross becomes a sacramental sign of

God's action, reviving within that prisoner his tradition of faith and tilling the soil of his heart for a new planting.

When a Black prisoner is invited to be proud of his ancestors, who accepted faith in Christ from a people not fully carrying it out themselves, he may join the volunteer in singing a few words of a Negro spiritual or recalling a great person like Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King. That is a sacramental event also for him, calling up a cultural memory which helps him to "look over Jordan" and begin again to believe in his value before God.

At every moment, the prison volunteer must be ready to serve as a transparent voice and hand to the Spirit—a sacramental minister even of those who are not prepared for sacramental communion. There is deep meaning in simply placing the pyx on the heart of the person to whom the prison volunteer is speaking, but who cannot receive the sacred Host. Deprivation of experiences of the sense of touch (and therefore of sacramental life) is perhaps the greatest drawback to rehabilitation. Eighty per cent of prisoners return more than once to prison, not having learned while in prison the right use of their relationships.

Because of our human dependence on symbols to experience spiritual meaning, I tend to adopt symbolic gestures or signs. As a prison chaplain I have experienced the passing on of grace that happens through symbolic gestures. Let me give you a few examples of the kind of quasi-sacramental events that occur regularly when a non-ordained minister shares with inmates our gift. Blessings and prayers accompanied by the sign of the cross are so natural that inmates use them in praying with and for one another.

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Recently, when a man died during the night in the prison where I serve, his neighbor across the hall (a non-Catholic Christian whom I'll call Bill) greeted me excitedly the next day to tell me about his friend's last hours. He and a companion had watched with the dying man who, although friendly, had consistently refused spiritual help from the chaplains. "Sister," Bill said, "I think he really gave himself to God at the end. I couldn't call you and the chaplain wasn't here, so I got some water and blessed Tom on his forehead and on his hands, and he didn't object. In fact, he smiled. I think he was pleased."

Bill was very happy to have been able to do what he could to send his friend Tom on to God. Having been able to offer Tom a "sign" of God's love, he hoped that, even if his friend had always refused to admit that he believed or prayed, God had received him in his infinite mercy.

Non-Catholic Christians are likely to seek for what is, in its outcome at least, a sacramental method of prayer. When an inmate passes the volunteer minister in the hall, he is likely to ask for a blessing "because my head hurts" or "because I don't feel good." Always there is a sense of the need for some physical sign of grace. Once a short-term prisoner whose wife had a physical breakdown over the trauma of his arrest and confinement asked me each day to pray for her. When she got better, he thanked me profusely. He needed a sign of God's attention to his need.

I could tell many such stories, but will conclude these tales with one of a cancer patient whom I knew well, who asked me for "The Last



Rites.” He had heard his Catholic wife talk about the Sacrament of the Sick and wanted that sign from me. I had no trouble getting the proper permissions, since this most important blessing would be sacramental but not a sacrament, and a non-ordained person was permitted to give it. This cancer patient set the date for his death-preparation for a Tuesday in November. He folded his hands and shut his eyes, lying in his sickbed motionless. As I prayed over him and blessed head and hands with ordinary olive oil, he entered into deep silence. When he did not speak afterward, I thought perhaps he had suffered an attack. “Are you all right?” I asked.

“God is here,” he said.

Six weeks later he died without any fear. As he told me on Christmas Day, four days before his death, “I told God just to come.” The Spirit had worked through a simple creature seeking to set a prisoner free.

Practical Suggestions

Prisoners must first be freed inwardly to profit from outward improvements in the system. This inner growth can be helped by direct contact with sacramental faith. It may not be possible for you and me to achieve this direct contact, given the barriers that arise out of the difficulty of maintaining security. How then will we carry out our directive to release the captive and free the prisoner?

First, we will spend time meditating on the meaning of true human freedom and invoking the power of Christ’s redeeming Blood on the hundreds of thousands in the United States and throughout the world who are imprisoned both inwardly and outwardly. Praying in this way we will gradually notice and remove from our conversation any clichés about prisoners, because we have reflected on the identity, we share as redeemable creatures of God.

We will also explore other possibilities to help, such as speaking out when others indulge in meaningless clichés about

prisoners or writing to an individual prisoner. When we write or visit, we carefully follow any regulations arising out of security and avoid any condescension. We can also be a true neighbor to any friend who has a spouse or a child in prison. In prayer, the Spirit of God opens doors according to our desires.



For Reflection

Who are the prisoners with whom you feel called to share the reconciliation won for us in Christ's blood?

Impelled by Christ's blood to set the captive free, identify those being held in prisons of emotional distress, addictive behaviors, unresolved resentment, rage, guilt or grief. How can you help to set them free?

How are you being held captive? Where do you sense the need to experience freedom in your life? Spend time in prayer and meditation on the meaning of true human freedom. Invoke the power of Christ's blood on the multitude of people throughout the world who are imprisoned both inwardly and outwardly.



Sister Pauline Grady is a USA Adorer of the Blood of Christ who has served as teacher, librarian, archivist, writer, translator, and prison chaplain. She is the author of many articles and books, including Joy in the Planting.

Go Fly A Kite

A Jubilee Ritual

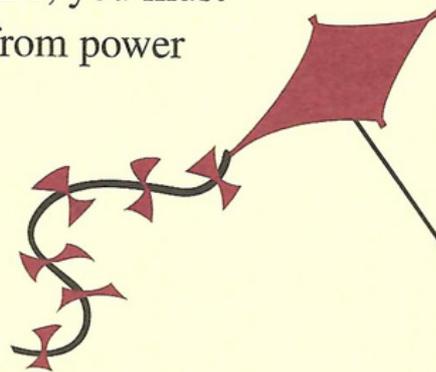
Have you made plans on how you will welcome the new year of 2001? If not, then allow us to make a suggestion:

Go fly a kite!

The suggestion comes from a visit to Korea a few years ago where I learned they have a very interesting custom on New Year's Eve. Here's how it works: If you want to forget the bad events of the past year, or our past life, or the past century; if you want to let go of all those painful or unpleasant experiences; if you want to make a fresh start, here's what you do. Write down your resentments and regrets that weigh heavy on your heart. Write down the events and experiences that caused you pain. Write down the attitudes of self-pity or pride that have grown into habits you want to change. Write down any past deeds for which you want forgiveness. Write down whatever in your life you want God's help to change. Write all these down in a litany of self-disclosure and attach them to a kite. Then, take the kite outside and fly it high in the air. When the kite is almost out of sight, cut the string.

This ritual of flying a kite on New Year's Eve 2000 might be a symbolic way to announce a year of favor from our God. One of the meanings behind a Jubilee year as reflected in the Hebrew Scriptures is the forgiveness of debts. In a symbolic way, when we cut the kite string, we cut our losses. We forgive the debts of those who have hurt us. We start the New Year with a clean slate.

Of course, when you fly the kite, you must be in an open field, far removed from power lines. You don't want the kite to hit a power line because you may get burned. Avoiding power lines seems to be good advice not just in flying a kite but in all aspects of life.



Flying a kite is actually a national pastime in countries like Korea, China, and Japan. But it is not only for sport, but has spiritual significance as well. In addition to the New Year's Eve ritual with its religious implications of cutting the string to old resentments and regrets, kites are sometimes flown at night over a house to ward off any evil spirits that may be hovering in the air. Not a bad idea considering that some places in the northern hemisphere it will probably be cold on New Year's Eve 2000 and the evil spirits might be looking to come inside to keep warm.

So what are we doing this New Year's Eve when some hold fast to the belief that the new millennium really begins? As we tried to "Open Wide the Doors to Christ" in the year 2000, why not make room in the year 2001 for all the hope, joy, love, and forgiveness that is found in God's Word by cleaning out our hearts of all the despair, sadness, resentment and regret. Write it on a kite and let it take flight. Out of sight, out of mind and heart, we can begin 2001 by welcoming again the Word made flesh who announces a year of favor from our God