

Missionaries of the Precious Blood celebrate bicentennial

BY CHERIE SPINO
Chronicle Writer

Drive the back country roads of the Diocese of Toledo, especially in the southern counties, and you'll find tight-knit Catholic farming communities that trace their histories to hardworking German immigrants.

Precious Blood Father Scott Kramer grew up in one of those communities — New Riegel.

He calls the town where he was shaped by the Precious Blood Sisters and Missionaries of the Precious Blood

the "cradle" of the Precious Blood community in the United States.

"We have very, very deep roots in the Diocese of Toledo," says Fr. Kramer, rector of Bellevue Sorrowful Mother Shrine.

This year, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood celebrate their bicentennial. Founded in 1815 by St. Gaspar del Bufalo in Rome, the order is devoted to the Precious Blood of Jesus that reconciles all.

About 500 Missionaries serve around the world. In the United States, the

order is divided into two provinces, in Cincinnati and Kansas City.

Precious Blood priests have ministered in dozens of Diocese of Toledo parishes since the 1840s and are still serving at the Bellevue Sorrowful Mother Shrine, Glandorf St. John the Baptist, Ottawa SS. Peter & Paul, Continental St. John the Baptist and Kalida St. Michael.

The order came to the United States in 1844 at the request of Archbishop John Baptist Purcell of Cincinnati, who sought priests to minister to Ohio's German-speaking farmers.

Father Francis Brunner, a Swiss Precious Blood priest, accepted the challenge and came with a contingent of priests and brothers.

"It is my humble opinion that [Fr. Brunner] was by far the greatest missionary that labored in northern Ohio," wrote Msgr. Lawrence A. Mossing in his "History of the Diocese of Toledo."

Fr. Brunner and his missionaries "cared for missions far and wide in the northwestern part of Ohio."

Priests picked up hammers and built churches; they tilled fields and cut wood; they traveled on horseback to mission centers in Defiance, Paulding and Allen counties and then to Seneca,



LEFT: Missionaries of the Precious Blood are known for being hard-working men who labor alongside those they serve. Father Scott Kramer, rector of the Bellevue Sorrowful Mother Shrine, pitches in at the Shrine Pilgrim Center to hang a clock that was used to call seminarians to their duties at the Precious Blood motherhouse near Carthage, Ohio. RIGHT: Father Mark Hoying, pastor of Kalida St. Michael and Continental St. John, says he needs to be among the people if he is to help them sense God's presence. So he gardens, attends parishioners' family celebrations and teaches teens to square dance.

Wyandot and Hancock counties.

The Precious Bloods' oldest continuous ministry is the Sorrowful Mother Shrine, Fr. Kramer says.

Missionaries of the Precious Blood work to foster peace, and the longer he's a priest, the more deeply Fr. Kramer says he comes to understand the order's charism, especially its emphasis on reconciliation. He hears confessions daily at the shrine.

"That's a concrete, powerful expression of part of our charism," he says, "that Christ shed his blood on the cross to reconcile us."

As a pastor in Kalida and elsewhere in the state, Fr. Kramer often promoted peace between parishioners. "We're all believers," he says, "but sometimes separated by all sorts of things. As a pastor I tried to break down those barriers."

Reaching out to the neglected is also important to the Precious Bloods. Priests shouldn't be on a pedestal, Precious Blood Father Ken Schnipke says. Like Jesus, they walk the earth.

"We're ministering among God's people in our own sinfulness and brokenness," says the Glandorf native, who is now a pastor in Celina and vice provincial director.

Precious Blood Father Tony Fortman, pastor of Glandorf St. John, takes this call seriously and tries to connect to those on the fringes.

He tries to be a loving presence to those who may not agree with the church on issues like abortion, homosexuality and women's ordination — "to show them that even a priest who agrees with the magisterium and is orthodox can have conversations and be loving toward them."

The Precious Bloods are known as a hands-on order.

"We're just simple, good, hardworking men," Fr. Kramer says. "We've always been known for that. We labored right alongside the folks."

One example: Precious Blood Brother Jerry Schulte. He made his final profession in 1958 and worked on the farm at the order's high school seminary near Canton. While he specialized in maintenance, he did a bit of everything: slaughtering cows, gardening, gathering eggs.

"A lot of the local people we lived and worked with, especially in Canton, looked up to us, because we were not behind the scenes," he says. "We were



Photos courtesy of Bellevue Sorrowful Mother Shrine and Kalida St. Michael

MISSIONARIES OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

Founded: 1815 by St. Gaspar del Bufalo in Rome. C.P.P.S. stands for *Congregatio Pretiosissimi Sanguinis* (Congregation of the Most Precious Blood).

Members: About 500 worldwide; about 180 in the Cincinnati province

Provinces: Cincinnati (includes a vicariate in Chile, missions in Peru and Guatemala and an *ad experimentum* mission in Columbia) and Kansas City (includes a mission in Vietnam)

Ministries: Serve in 20 countries at shrines, missions, colleges, parishes, prison and reconciliation ministries. Also serve as retreat and parish mission leaders and military chaplains.

Symbols:

- Missionary cross and gold chain worn with the cassock — a symbol of Christ's shedding of his most precious blood. At the bottom of the cross is the image of "Our Lady of Sorrows" and a skull and crossbones to teach us that Christ transformed death into glory.
- Chalice worn on coats — symbolizes Christ's courage and love, the source of daily strength.

in front."

After the seminary closed, Bro. Schulte spent time at the order's mission in Peru, worked as a hospital chaplain and became director of formation for candidates. Today the 77-year-old helps out however he can at Glandorf St. John.

For Precious Blood Father Mark Hoying, pastor of Continental St. John and Kalida St. Michael, the Precious Bloods are a family affair. He counts at least 15 cousins who are Precious Blood priests and an aunt and a sister who are Precious Blood sisters.

Drawn to the order's missionary spirit, Fr. Hoying has served in parishes in Florida, Virginia and Ohio and spent three years in New Zealand. One doesn't have to travel to have that "missionary spirit," he adds. Priests can find it in a parish setting, a hospital, or wherever he works with God's people. "We really

believe that God is everywhere," Fr. Hoying says. His job is to help people sense His presence.

To do that, he needs to be among the people, he says. So he tends a garden, raises pigs and calls square dances. He tries to attend as many family celebrations of his parishioners as he can. "I do all kinds of things," Fr. Hoying says, "because being with the people you see the face of God in ordinary ways."

Like other religious orders, the Precious Bloods' numbers are dwindling. But the priests and brothers know their work isn't done yet.

St. Gaspar spoke of 1,000 tongues proclaiming the wonder of God.

"I'm looking for more than a thousand," Fr. Hoying says. "I'm looking for the whole world to proclaim it. There's so much need for reconciliation. I think the only real healing of the world will be the Lord."



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