



Images from the Day of Healing

Mercy

by Sr. Donna Liette, C.P.P.S., PBMR Staff

It is December 8, 2015 and Pope Francis has just opened the Jubilee Door in Rome and proclaimed a year of Mercy! In Chicago, Peace Circles were being formed around the city as a way of participating in a "City-Wide Day of Healing." Several years ago, PBMR was one of the Chicago groups that initiated this city-wide Day of Healing.

In the early morning we gathered with women in the nearby shelter and listened to their stories of the pain of being forgotten, of being lonely, abused and left with all the responsibilities of parenthood. As they held the talking piece, they shared their struggles of finding jobs and safe housing for their children. They cried for healing, for love, for the comforts of a home. I once read: "People start to heal the moment they feel heard." We saw this in the faces of the women as we concluded the circle in the backroom of the neighborhood shelter.

Due to the recent events in Chicago, with videos and reports of police brutality, we invited our District

9 police officers to join us at PBMR in a healing circle with the hope of opening doors to more positive relationships between police officers and our youth and their families. So minutes after the Healing Circle at the Women's Shelter, a circle of fifteen very diverse persons came together with the three police officers: young and older, black and white, men and women, Christian and non-Christian, religious, rich and poor.

After the opening ritual and check-in, it became a safe place where youth could speak of their experiences of racial profiling; where a woman of privilege could speak of her need to sit and listen to the woman next to her suffering from extreme poverty and fear; where police officers spoke openly of their struggles—as one said, "Where do I begin?"

The police officers told of being mothers, wives, daughters, being Black (African-American) before being Blue (police officers). Mothers spoke of the pain of losing a child to gun violence; another losing her son

continued on page 12

to years of incarceration when he was only 14; another spoke of losing her son to the streets and the stories continued of hurt, confusion, and need for healing. After 90 minutes, we asked that each circle participant say a word or two of how they were leaving the circle. We heard: “inspired, honored, heard, thankful, hopeful, relentless determination, healed.”

Several minutes later, we knocked on the barred door at the Corner Store, known for drug activity and recent nearby killings, and it was opened to us and to the corner neighborhood—gang members, mothers, dads and the neighborhood homeless, some in wheelchairs paralyzed from gunshots. We stood in circle around Daniel in his wheelchair, and as the talking piece went round the circle one could feel the group bonding, listening to one another’s fears, frustrations, concerns for peace and healing. This is our neighborhood—as Daniel pleaded, “Lift us up, don’t put us down,” and to the woman who just moved into the neighborhood with her children, he said, “Welcome to hell.” Not sure that was healing, but he kept it real!

We walked a few more blocks to our PBMR art gallery, and as we opened that door, we saw men and

women gathered, all who had experienced the sentencing of their child to life imprisonment. Today the Rice family had a story to tell. On December 1, their son Gerald Rice, who was sentenced to life without parole in 1985 at the age of 17, was now re-sentenced to 60 years, which with good time he has to now serve only 30 years. Gloria Rice, Gerald’s mother, with a smile that stretched from ear to ear, announced Gerald would be coming home on February 18, 2016! Tears flowed, as all of the family members were so overjoyed for Gerald and his family. Gerald is now 47 and will soon be starting his new life outside prison walls. For 30 years Gerald’s family visited him, wrote him, supported him and never gave up hope and faith that someday Gerald would be home. Now Someday is only 69 days away! It was a day of hope as we joined with those in Rome and throughout the city and world, opening doors, offering healing and mercy and tenderness. It is a jubilee year, and as men and women of the Precious Blood, are we not even more challenged to heal and to offer tenderness in our broken world. OPEN DOORS! ♦