



*The delegation during its travels in southern Chile.*

## *Strangers No Longer*

*by David Kelly, C.P.P.S., Director of Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation*

To the south—very far south—Sr. Donna and I experienced the power of hospitality. We traveled to Chile, to do a training with brothers and sisters of the Missionaries/Sisters of the Precious Blood. Along with Santiago, we had representatives from Peru, Columbia, and the southern most tip of Chile: Purranque and Valdivia. We were invited to share the process of the Peacemaking Circle (Círculos de Reconciliación) and how it can be a tool in the ministry of reconciliation. We gathered in Santiago for a three-day circle training and then led men and women of the parish of Preciosa Sangre in Cerro Navia (outskirt of Santiago) and el Colegio San Gaspar in Santiago in an experience of circles. We then traveled to the southern-most parts of Chile where we again led parishioners of San Sebastián in Purranque

and Preciosa Sangre in Valdivia in an experience of the circle process.

Sr. Donna and I came to Chile to carry with us what we have learned here at PBMR, but we returned home feeling connected in a new and more profound way with the communities in Chile. Each gathering was a powerful testament to how people of various cultures and experiences can come together and build a bond of respect and love. There were tears as we shared painful memories, and there was laughter and shouts of joy as we celebrated new relationships.

As often happens when you open yourself to others, we found common ground in the shared spirituality of the Precious Blood. These were men and women, young and old, who had a commitment to living out the spirituality



of the Precious Blood in their daily lives. Perhaps, that in itself was not all that surprising. But what was both moving and challenging was the way in which they literally opened their lives to us, ensuring that Donna and I felt like we were part of the family—a hospitality that diminished any sense of being a stranger. They lived out Paul’s message to the Ephesians: “So then...you are not foreigners or strangers any longer; you are now fellow citizens with God’s people and members of the family of God” (Eph 2:19).

As we experienced our brothers and sisters in Chile, we witnessed their willingness to sacrifice their time and energy in order to make us feel at home—as though our presence brought them a stronger connectedness with the family of the Precious Blood. When we were not in Circle, they spent much time with us as we visited many communities and took in the beauty of the country.

There are two core values that I believe underlie the work of reconciliation: hospitality and accompaniment. Hospitality is the work of ensuring that each person feels



*Sr. Donna Liette, Sr. Maria Luisa Miller, and Fr. Antonio Baus in front of the school Colegio de San Gaspar in Santiago, Chile.*



*Reconciliation Circles at Colegio de San Gaspar.*

that not only are they welcome, but that their very presence brings life and meaning to who we are. Hospitality is anything but a “soft” undertaking. Hospitality is sacrifice, giving of oneself in order that my brother and sisters are “home.” The second core value, accompaniment, is the lasting commitment to one another that is needed to bring about reconciliation. It is the act of walking with another in joy and in sorrow. It is the hard work of staying present even when times are tough. I think of Jesus accompanying the disciples on the road to Emmaus from death and desperation to resurrection and joy.

In speaking of hospitality, I cannot help but think of Pope Francis; his picture is commonplace throughout Chile: in churches, marketplaces, and street corners. He seems to embody the spirit of hospitality—making room for all within the body of Christ. We have all seen the images and stories of him as he reaches out to those who are on the fringes, those who have been excluded by the world. His message is that there is room here; he sees the Church as being richer when we embrace those outside the gates. His embrace of those on the outskirts of society seems to bring him great joy. His face is radiant as he kisses the man who suffers from leprosy, washes the feet of the youth who is incarcerated, or embraces the elderly man suffering from mental illness. Pope Francis recognizes that only in the freedom and joy of our brothers and sisters are we truly free and filled with joy.

Our experience in Chile was a gift of hospitality and relationship; an experience in which men and women, young and old, found common ground and became all the more rich because of it. Sr. Donna and I returned to Chicago with a renewed sense of the very values that underlie the work that we are privileged to do: hospitality and a commitment to one another as brothers and sisters, regardless of class, position, or disposition.