

## Precious Blood communities share common history

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Chronicle Writer

More than 160 years ago, a mother and son laid the groundwork for two religious communities to serve the Diocese of Toledo.

In the 1830s, widow Maria Anna Brunner attracted a following of women to help her care for orphans and the poor in Switzerland. She had heard the preaching of Missionaries of the Precious Blood founder St. Gaspar del Bufalo while on pilgrimage to Rome and subsequently devoted herself to a life of prayer and good works. The Sisters of the Precious Blood were formed in 1834, according to a community history provided by the Sisters of the Precious Blood.

Nine years later and after his mother's death, Father Francis Brunner brought members of her community to Peru, Ohio, to help care for German immigrants.

With a similar devotion as his mother, Fr. Brunner had joined the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in Rome, says Missionary of the Precious Blood Father Yuri Kuzara, director of Bellevue Sorrowful Mother Shrine.

Along with the sisters, Fr. Brunner brought priests and brothers of his own order to serve in northwest Ohio at the request of Cincinnati Archbishop John Baptist Purcell.

The two communities shared a devotion to the Precious Blood and worked together in northwest Ohio under the leadership of Fr. Brunner.

"We're redeemed by the blood of Christ," says Missionary of the Precious Blood Father Robert Kunisch, former director of the shrine, explaining the communities' devotion. "Everything he suffered through his own life, shedding his own blood, it's a sign of the tremendous love Christ has for all of us."

Fr. Brunner established four major mission centers in the diocese, including Peru, New Riegel, Marywood and Glandorf, according to "History of the Diocese of Toledo, Volume I," by Father Lawrence Mossing. From those centers, the priests and brothers served Catholics throughout what later became the Diocese of Toledo.

"They were like traveling missionaries, bringing the sacraments where they could. They were traveling on horseback in those days," Fr. Kunisch explains.

While the priests traveled, the sisters taught immigrant children and cared for orphans.

Both communities were under Fr. Brunner's leadership until the church issued a general directive in 1887 stating men's and women's religious communities could not be under the same leadership or own property in common, says Precious Blood Sister Noreen Jutte, community archivist.

In 1850, Fr. Brunner, keeping a promise to Mary, built a shrine in Bellevue in thanksgiving for safe travels to America.

"He wanted a place where people could go and honor the Blessed Mother," Fr. Kuzara says.

He chose the patronage of Our Lady of Sorrows both because of the church's suffering in Germany and the connection to the Missionaries' spirituality.

"(Mary) witnessed the blood shedding of her divine son," Fr. Kusch explains.

As the oldest shrine to Mary east of the Mississippi River, the shrine now serves about 50,000 to 80,000 pilgrims each year.

The Missionaries of the Precious Blood continue to serve at the shrine and at parishes in the diocese, including Ottawa SS. Peter & Paul, Glandorf St. John, Kalida St. Michael and Continental St. John the Baptist.

Marywood Gaspar del Bufalo near Bellevue bears the name of their founder, although the Missionaries do not currently



**Precious Blood Sisters Kostka, Simplicita, Sixta and Ursina teach children in the Glandorf in 1902.**

*Photo courtesy of Sisters of the Precious Blood*

**Missionaries of the Precious Blood Fathers Harold Brown and Gene Wilson pray with pilgrims at the Bellevue Sorrowful Mother Shrine's outdoor Pieta Chapel.** *Photo courtesy of Missionaries of the Precious Blood Father Yuri Kuzara.*

serve there. Fr. Kuzara compared St. Gaspar to St. Padre Pio, saying St. Gaspar had the gift of bilocation and many miracles were attributed to him during his lifetime.

Founded to renew the church in Europe after Napoleon persecuted the church, the Missionaries continue a similar mission in America.

"So we try to do the same thing — to bring about reconciliation and renewal in the church and to spread devotion to the Precious Blood," Fr. Kuzara explains.

### Sisters of the Precious Blood

After living briefly in Peru, the Sisters of the Precious Blood opened a convent in New Riegel within a year after their arrival in the U.S.

The community grew rapidly, and in 12 years, Fr. Brunner founded 10 convents for the sisters in Ohio and Indiana, including Glandorf, Maria Camp and Marywood in the Toledo Diocese, Sr. Jutte says. Each convent held 50-70 sisters.

While the sisters taught the immigrant children and cared for orphans, "prayer was a very key component of why they existed," Sr. Jutte says.

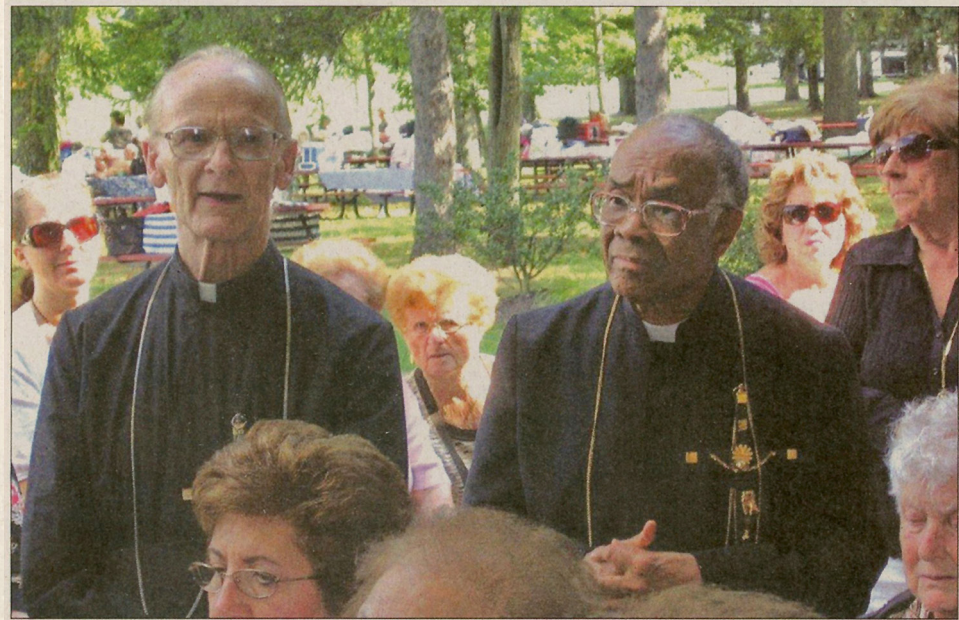
The sisters began Eucharistic adoration during the night in 1844, a practice they continued for more than a century, according to the community's website.

The sisters taught in New Riegel public schools until 1976 when a decreasing number of sisters led to the closure of the New Riegel convent. The sisters also taught in the Glandorf public schools until 1996, with 148 years of service there, Sr. Jutte says.

The sisters continue to minister in the diocese, serving as teachers at the high school and college level, as pastoral associates and one sister provides tutoring for adults at the Cherry Street Mission, according to Precious Blood Sister Rita Rogier, catechetical leader at Toledo Good Shepherd and St. Thomas Aquinas.

The sisters continue to follow their charism of prayer as they serve in their ministries.

"Our prayer life is lived out through serving others," Sr. Rogier says.



**Precious Blood Sister Karen Elliot listens to her Mercy College medical students discuss ethical pros and cons. The Precious Blood Sisters have worked in the Diocese of Toledo for more than 100 years.** *Photo courtesy of Sisters of the Precious Blood*



## Centenary Cross Schedule



During the Oct. 7, 2009, opening liturgy for the centenary celebration of the Diocese of Toledo, Bishop Leonard P. Blair blessed a special cross that is to travel to every parish and religious institution in the 19-county diocese.

The cross continues its journey in the Blessed Teresa of Calcutta Deanery, located in Toledo. Its upcoming schedule follows. Visit the Centenary section of catholicchronicle.org to view a map pinpointing each stop on the cross' journey.

### Jan. 9-10

Toledo St. Hedwig  
419-419-241-4179

### Jan. 11

Toledo Central Catholic  
High School  
419-255-2280