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Sr. Donna Liette, center, with the mothers of PBMR at the “Front Porch”

Gathering on the “Front Porch”

By Sr. Donna Liette, C.P.P.S., PBMR

As a little girl growing up in North Star, Ohio, I remember sitting on our front porch and waving to all the people who passed by on Route 127. Being farmers, we would run to our porch swing on a rainy day and watch the rain watering our fields. On weekends and evenings, neighbors gathered on our porch to tell stories and enjoy some ice cream and warm pie that Mother had just baked.

Last week when the temperatures reached almost 50 degrees here in Chicago, I sat with one of our mothers on her porch as she recounted her granddaughter’s murder. She described the pain of going to the court hearings month after month and re-hearing the horror of the night. She cries: “Will the pain ever leave? Will I ever find healing?”

I leave her porch thinking of the differences in our porch conversations.

Today on 51st Street in the Back of the Yards, PBMR has opened a “Front Porch,” a warm, open space for neighbors, staff, and participants to gather, share stories, connect, be fed physically and spiritually, heal pain, and celebrate friendship.

After more than five years of vacancy at the location, many were waiting with great expectation for those doors to open. Neighbors stopped to ask: “Is this going to be a Church? An art center? Will you be selling liquor?”

Then on Nov. 8, the doors did open, and we celebrated the radical transformation of what was once a neighborhood grocery/liquor store into a no-steps, two-room gathering place to lift spirits—not sell them!

The space hosts circles of all kinds—mother’s healing circles, youth circles, RJ leadership circles,

support circles for men and women returning from prison, staff circles, drumming circles, community Mass circle, planning circles—all for the purpose of healing harm and building relationships.

Although precious blood continues to pour out on the streets we walk and the porches on which we stand, we invite the community into a safe place—a comfortable corner where they can share with others their suffering, their confusion, and their hopes—and know they are not alone.

Everyday I'm at the "Front Porch," someone new stops by, someone in need of healing, longing for a place of peace—a mother with two young children asking for prayer, a young father walking home from work. Young, old, rich, poor, neighbors curious to discover whether this is a place for them. Anyone who needs some water, coffee, chips, cookies, or a hug should come inside. All are welcome here!

For those who saw the chaos and smelled the stench when the doors first opened in late July, the transformation has been amazing. Rats had their way but quickly learned they had lost their home!

Women at PBMR's "Front Porch"



Outside view of PBMR's "Front Porch"

Neighbors, funders, board members, attorneys, and friends of PBMR have been welcomed into this new creation, and they stand with mouths open in amazement—sometimes even to the point of tears.

Mothers were especially excited because they could not believe there was a place in their community where they can find peace, where they can experience a "Spa Love Day," where pain and disappointments can be shared, where reconciliation can occur, where frustrations can be drummed out and one's brain can be cleared!

Summer will offer all kinds of activities and "Front Porch" experiences as we set up easels outside and the community comes together to paint, chat, and barbecue, knowing they are safe to leave their porches and get to know their neighbors and the community in a new way!

PBMR continues to hear the voices of the community and respond as best we can to the call of our spirituality to build a community where all are welcome; all are seen as "in" the circle; all are offered radical hospitality, hope, and healing. Those who feel "far off" will be brought to the "Front Porch" through the Blood of Christ.

We invite all of you to come, especially this summer, to sit on The Front Porch to see and to engage as we build a community of love. ✠

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Change Service Requested

Join Us
at the
Table



"For me, life in community
is everything."
-Saint Gaspar del Bufalo,
founder

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of the
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