

The Cup of the New Covenant

MISSIONARIES OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD
No. 19, October 2005

The Mission House

by Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S.

During recent years we have been reflecting upon the three pillars of our C.P.P.S. identity: mission, community, and spirituality. We have likewise framed this reflection within the context of being a society of apostolic life. According to Canon Law, each society of apostolic life lives community life according to its particular tradition and constitutions. In this issue of *The Cup* we would like to focus our attention on a particular aspect of our tradition which some affirm was Gaspar's unique contribution to living community life in his time: the mission house.

As I travel the world visiting our missionaries and discussing with them

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St. Gaspar's Idea of a Mission House

by John Klopke, C.P.P.S.

This article will attempt to explore part of the charism of our founder, St. Gaspar del Bufalo. It is the premise of this article that the mission house was a unique contribution of Gaspar and was a source of life both for the young Society of the Precious Blood and for the church.

BEGINNINGS

"Impelled by the love of Christ, manifested especially in the shedding of

his Blood, and sensitive to the needs of the church and to the society of his day, St. Gaspar del Bufalo founded a priestly institute. He attracted from the diocesan clergy a group of like-minded priests and united them by a bond of charity only instead of by vows. Living together in mission houses, they were a source of continual renewal for the priests and the people, mainly by preaching missions

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and retreats. In this nucleus the Society of the Precious Blood had its origin, and from it derives its spirit.” (Normative Texts, C1)

While Gaspar derived the structure of his retreats from other sources it appears that the idea of a mission house was his original idea. For example, in a document addressed to Pope Leo XII he takes great pains to distinguish what he and the early missionaries are doing from the practice of similar congregations.

From this document of 1823 it is clear that for Gaspar, the mission house is not a religious foundation centered upon living out the consecrated life. Rather, in a very real sense it is an essential component of “the Work” and the Work, in turn, is conceived of as nothing less than total evangelization. In other words, just as an idea of the Society does not fit exactly into the pattern of the religious congregations which Gaspar reviews, so too the “fit” of the mission house is not exactly that of a religious foundation.

A CENTER OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

The mission house was not meant to be a religious foundation for living out the consecrated life. Rather the house was more like a center of spirituality open for both priests and laymen to share in the spirituality of the missions. (Unfortunately the house was not open to laywomen because the temper of the time would simply not permit it.) To put it differently, there were neither devotional practices nor spirituality which were strictly “community” as opposed to those spiritual resources (such as the “true devotion” of St. Francis De Sales) which were available to the whole Church.

In a letter to Cardinal Cristaldi in 1826, Gaspar writes: “... our Houses are continuous Missions, open to all... our churches are open missions...” The mission house and the church were part of a well-ordered service unit, “open” to the people. The missionaries sought to reach people of every group and their

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ministry included hearing confessions, a nightly oratory for men, sponsoring organizations for young people and visits to hospitals and prisons. Gaspar also emphasized that within the mission house “assiduous study is made of the basic ecclesiastical subjects...”

GASPAR DEFENDS THE SOCIETY

Ten years after the founding of the community its continuing existence was precarious and Gaspar needed to defend it. In the important *Memorial* to Pope Leo XII in 1825, Gaspar notes that the

“Mission and Retreat Houses offer whatever is necessary to bring about, with the greatest possible rapidity, the conversion of souls, good example from every sort of grouping of people in the various dioceses which will then evaluate, facilitate and consolidate the education given.”

In other words, the mission house is open because it does not restrict its functioning and influence to a specific group or social level and because it aims at nothing less than total evangelization in order to present to the church a people prepared for witness, for ministry.

Gaspar also believed that the mission houses would be attractive to the diocesan clergy and that many would eventually become zealous participants in “the Work.” Our community has prided itself on its hospitality to local clergy but Gaspar conceived of the mission house as something more: an invitation to enter fully into

the Work motivated by the spirituality of the community.

Only a few years later Gaspar also had to write another defense to another Pope, Pius VIII. In a memorandum Gaspar suggests that Pius VII was the real founder of the Society. (How can you argue with a previous Pope?) Gaspar states:

“Eventually [Pius VII] recognized that it was of the highest advantage to establish residences in the various provinces so as to facilitate assistance to the bishops in the holy ministry of God, and, at the same time, to afford a sacred haven in those localities for anyone who would wish to make a retreat.”

While the mission house is independent of diocesan control it does not function as though independent of the pastoral program and planning of the local church. Such collaboration was emphasized in the Rule of 1841 as well as in our current Normative Texts which call for apostolic action in “cordial collaboration with the diocesan clergy, the religious and the laity.” (article C27)

He goes on to state that the Society does not have vows since it “would be directed to the clergy and for the clergy.” (The 1841 Rule states that the members belong to the “secular clergy.”)

A RETURN TO ANCIENT PRACTICE

Gaspar likens the life of the mission house to the discipline of the early church in which priests lived together in union. The pattern of daily life was not unlike that of the seminary of some thirty or forty years ago. Indeed, Gaspar did not conceive of a distinct community spirituality for the members. It was simply a priestly spirituality that he advocated.

The mission house was a center of great activity and hardly a cloistered retreat. The day of the missionary was a busy one of prayer and meditation, hearing confessions, visiting hospitals and prisons, and the evening oratory. On Sundays there was the “urban mission” which provided a “continual and shared cul-



C.P.P.S. Companions from North America at the well, San Felice

tivation of the people.” There were monthly conferences for various organizations, a monthly day of recollection, and yearly public retreats. The typical mission house might have been staffed by three or four priests and they must surely have been quite well occupied!

OBSERVATIONS FOR TODAY

What would a contemporary mission house look like in the light of Gaspar’s ideals? Obviously such a house could scarcely reproduce exactly the mission house of the early nineteenth century. For one thing, “the Work” was tightly focused on missions and retreats and thus any missionary could function in any mission house. Everyone was involved in the mission house because in effect there was nothing else to be involved in!

But, today, with the Society’s work having expanded into different fields, this is not the case. This means, then, as far as I can see, that there are two possibilities: 1) The mission house can be seen as one apostolate among many in the Society; its staff would be exclusively charged with carrying out this apostolate. 2) The mission house can be understood as the embodiment of the central thrust of the Society, involving all members and, because of this they, and not just the members assigned to a mission house, should be prepared and trained to share in its functioning.

Perhaps the preceding overloaded sentence can be clarified by means of an example: The Italian Province has as its stated policy that every member, according to his talents, should be able to be called from his

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assignment in order to assist the Province’s central core of the missionaries in the giving of a Mission.

My preference, obviously, is for something like this involvement of all in the mission house. It is a concrete way of recalling us to our vocation as it is so admirably summed up in the Normative Texts: “The Society dedicates itself to the service of the Church through the apostolic and missionary activity of the ministry of the word.” (article C3).

(The above article is a condensation of a longer article by the late Fr. John Klopke, C.P.P.S. For the complete article and for other documents on this and other topics of interest, please go to the website of the General Curia at www.mission-preciousblood.org/avdocs.htm). ♦

“The mission house and the church were part of a well-ordered service unit, ‘open’ to the people. The missionaries sought to reach people of every group.”

STRUCTURED FOR SERVICE: Perspectives on a Mission House for Today

by Jerome Stack, C.P.P.S.

GOD IN THE DETAILS

The saying “God is in the details” is often attributed to the architect Mies van der Rohe, but it could well have been Gaspar’s own motto. Anyone who has read any of his letters knows that he was a man who paid attention to detail, to the point of writing about how much was spent for food and whether or not cats should be kept in the houses. (No!)

While one might be tempted to judge Gaspar as a bit too involved in the fine points of community living, I believe that Gaspar’s attention to detail came from his awareness that structure is essential for the common life. Community does not “happen”: it requires work. This awareness is evident in the 1841 Rule, which clearly outlines the need for structure in the local community.

Here I would like to discuss briefly some themes that emerge from a reading of the Rule, along with some reflections on how these themes might be realized in community life today.

Prayer: Obviously Gaspar was concerned about the spiritual life of the community and recommended daily

meditation in common, meal prayers, and evening prayer together, along with an examination of conscience at midday and in the evening. (Rule, art. 10)

What I find interesting here is not so much that Gaspar wanted the community to *say prayers* together, but also simply to *be together in silent prayer*. How much does such quiet prayer play in our lives today? What might it be like if we were to structure regular time to be together in silent prayer each day? Gaspar also urges silence for other moments of the day as an aid to recollection. Perhaps this might be an antidote to lives that are increasingly bombarded by communications not only in person but also through telephones and the Internet.

Spiritual Renewal: Gaspar knew that his confreres could easily become exhausted by their apostolate and mandated a monthly day of retreat. (art. 16) He wanted a ten-day retreat each year, during which members were “to be free of every outside care and work.” (art. 16) As much as Gaspar was devoted to the work of the Society, he knew the importance of balance in his life and wanted the same for the members.

In today’s world, especially in certain cultures, there is a tendency to measure one’s self by one’s work. As someone once remarked to me when I was talking about how busy I was: “Are you complaining or are you bragging?” Yes, we are an active religious congregation, we are not contemplatives, but at the same time our work, however wonderful and fruitful, ought not to crowd out other important dimensions of our lives.

Especially in times when we may be experiencing a shortage of personnel, the temptation is simply to work

As John Klopke has pointed out in his article in this issue, the mission house was a “unique contribution of Gaspar and... a source of life both for the young Society of the Precious Blood and for the church.” Today many members show an interest in the idea of a mission house, not just out of historical curiosity, but because they believe that Gaspar’s idea is significant for our mission and community life today.

Clearly we cannot simply duplicate the style of life of Gaspar and his early companions. Gaspar and the early Missionaries had a narrowly focused apostolate—missions and retreats—and the mission house was an integral part of that ministry of total evangelization. While mission houses often had a church attached to them, the first missionaries did not engage in parish ministry as such, and Gaspar probably did not envision our contemporary situation in which our members are involved in a variety of ministries beyond that of missions and retreats.

Despite the differences between the circumstances of his day and our own, I believe that we can find in Gaspar’s ideas about the mission house some important qualities that should characterize community living today. I also believe that it is important to recall that, for Gaspar, the structure of the mission house grew out of the apostolate of the members. It took its form from its function: to support the Missionaries in the work of evangelization.

In this article, I would like to reflect on some ideas about community life found in our original Rule of 1841 and what they might mean for us today.

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harder and harder, with the very real danger of simply becoming too exhausted physically and spiritually to be effective at ministry and at community living. This becomes even more of a danger in those cultures where work has become an idol.

Study: Gaspar expected the members to “serve as examples to others by their knowledge of human and divine matters as well as by their conduct.” (art. 17) He directed them to private study as well as to holding “educational meetings” on appointed days of the week treating topics in theology, liturgy, spirituality, and preaching.

Gaspar expected the early Missionaries to spend regular time engaged in study and in sharing what they learned with others. In our often busy lives this call to ongoing education is certainly a challenge. Gaspar saw it not only as something of benefit to the individual but as important for the community, implying not only that people would be willing to share what they were reading but also that others would be receptive to them.

We might well ask ourselves if we have a similar dedication to study for the benefit of our confreres and if we take an interest in what others have to teach us. Do we value learning and serious conversation? Our Normative Texts call us to this (C9), but I wonder to what extent this value shapes our community lives. I find it significant that that C.P.P.S. candidate Juan Carlos Barajas mentions this as a feature of the Casa Central in Santiago de Chile in his article in this issue.

Roles and government: Gaspar’s well-regulated houses had clearly defined offices among the community members. There was a rector, superior, vice-superior (also the house secretary, librarian, and archivist), the mission director, retreat director (also in charge of the church and sacristy), and the house procurator. These were all chosen by

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a secret vote of the house members at the time when the Moderator General would visit. (articles 53-56)

We probably no longer have need for every one these offices in our houses today. At the same time, Gaspar knew that community life functioned best when people knew their roles,

knew who was responsible for doing what. A great deal of misunderstanding and needless tension result when responsibilities are not clearly delineated in a community.

Gaspar did not rely solely on these officers for the good order of the mission house. He expected that they would regularly call the members of the house together for a meeting, called a *congressus*. These meetings were to “regulate the daily community affairs,” to “carry out temporal affairs of graver consequences,” to arrange the mission work, and to assign men to carry out the work. (articles 57-60)

Gaspar was wise enough to know that unless people set aside time to discuss even ordinary matters there might not be clear and effective communication. While it is true that



Young members of the Congregation pray in front of San Felice

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Il Sangue di Cristo nell'Anno Liturgico: Commento dei Padri della Chiesa, dei Santi, dei teologi e degli scrittori (*The Blood of Christ in the Liturgical Year: Commentary from the Fathers of the Church, the Saints, theologians, and other authors*). Tullio Veglianti, C.P.P.S. Roma: Sanguis Editrice, 2005.

**If you are interested in these publications,
please contact the Generalate.**

our lives may be full of too many meetings, it might also be true that members living together may not be deliberate enough in engaging in dialogue about all those often small matters, those *details*, that are part and parcel of living together.

The danger of not having such meetings on a regular basis is that issues may not be discussed at all, may be discussed only hurriedly and in passing, or only by some members. Small matters can become big issues when people do not feel that their concerns are being heard or that they have a legitimate voice in community decisions.

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

That phrase is attributed to another architect, Louis Sullivan, who advocated that the design of a building grow out of its functional requirements. Again, I think Gaspar would be in agreement with this dictum, applied to the life of the mission house.

We often hear that Gaspar's emphasis was on mission and not on community life. That is certainly clear from the first few articles of the 1841 Rule. The mission house, however, was not just an afterthought and was not just a residence for the members: it was part of the mission itself. (Indeed, Gaspar calls the houses of the Congregation "continuous missions, open to all." (Letter 1309 to Cardinal Cristaldi, 1826) How the members lived together was impor-

tant for carrying out "the Work" of complete evangelization. Gaspar saw the mission house as a *form* of life dictated by its *function*, namely to be part of the mission of evangelization through preaching missions and retreats

Today, even though circumstances have changed in the 164 years since the approval of the first Rule, Gaspar's concern for structure continues to be an important concern. Like Gaspar, we too should give consideration to establishing modern mission houses with a view to how they contribute to carrying out our mission. Like Gaspar, we too need a certain amount of structure in our common life in order that we might also be well prepared and available

(both physically and spiritually) for "the Work." We should take great care to shape our common life with a view to making it integral with our mission.

Yes, St. Gaspar, the architect of the Congregation, clearly knew about good design. He knew that details were important, that form followed function, that structure supported service. He knew the value of common life to carry out the work of evangelization, or, as our Normative

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Texts put it, "The bond of charity unites the varied gifts of the members for the service of the Society and the Church..." (C8) ♦



Another view of San Felice

ALBANO LAZIALE:

The Challenge of Community Life

The house of Albano Laziale is of historic importance for our Congregation: it is the third community founded by St. Gaspar. Venerable John Merlini writes: "It pleased Divine Providence that, after giving the mission in Subiaco, the abbey of Cardinal Pietro Galeffi, then bishop of Albano, Canon del Bufalo and his companions conducted the holy missions in the Diocese of Albano, at the urging of the same cardinal."

The enthusiasm generated by the mission was so great that the people sought the ongoing presence of those holy Missionaries in their city. Through the intervention of the vicar general, Mons. Spolverini, Pope Pius VII gave the Missionaries the church of St. Paul and the attached monastery. Activity in the house began on 25 March 1821 and St. Gaspar established his residence there. From here he would leave for the missions and would return to be together with his "students" (*convittori*) for whom he wrote the Rule of the Institute in the monastery of Monte Cavo.

This is the very house to which St. Gaspar's body was brought after his death on 28 December 1837. Once the news spread, many people from the neighboring towns came to see his remains for the last time – so many, in fact, that they could not celebrate the funeral before 3 January 1838. The tomb became a place of pilgrimage and many testified to having received graces and favors from the saint, so much so that it was in Albano that the canonical processes for the beatification of our Founder began in 1840.

With this historical and spiritual background in mind, the provincial of the Italian province decided to present a few of us with the "challenge" of living together in a community that is diverse both in apostolates and in persons. Obviously, I am using the term "challenge" in a somewhat inappropriate way here,

by Benedetto Labate, C.P.P.S.

since it is not a question of a war or a competition but rather it is a challenge to our ability to join together – as persons and in our activities – the ministries in which we are engaged daily. All of this is an appeal for us to live that bond of charity which our Founder left us as the secret of our common life.

A PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE AND OF MISSION

It would be good to give a word of explanation to understand the situation. The Church of Saint Paul that was given to our community has functioned as a sanctuary of St. Gaspar for nearly two centuries (even if the official erection occurred only in 1999). It has drawn thousands of pilgrims from Italy and from the world who come to pour out their sufferings before the urn of our Founder and to ask for the grace they long for. The entire community is involved in the ministry of welcoming, spiritual assistance, and in presenting our identity.

Side by side with this work grew up, as if by a miracle, the whole activity of the Primavera Missionaria, that is to say the monthly newsletter of the missionary students which is aimed at promoting the figure of St. Gaspar and his spirituality in all of Italy, as well as sustaining our foreign missions.

A COMMUNITY FOR VOCATION DISCERNMENT AND YOUTH MINISTRY

The position of the house is well-

sited to being a house of vocation discernment, and its proximity to the city of Rome, along with the tranquility of the district of the Castelli Romani, permits young men who want to have an experience of our life to seek the refreshment of their spiritual thirst for God accompanied by prayer and the presence of the Missionaries. At the present time the community is offering hospitality to two young Sicilian men. One of them began special formation in the Congregation last February.

It is inevitable that vocation ministry would be linked to the work of youth ministry, currently directed by a young missionary ordained last September. In this way the Italian Province of the Missionaries, with renewed vitality and enthusiasm and along with our C.P.P.S. communities in Italy and the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, is addressing the urgent problem of youth and vocation ministry in the church in Italy with retreats, meetings, spiritual exercises, and other creative activities aimed at bringing young people closer to Jesus the Master.

A FOCUS ON POPULAR MISSIONS

Also connected to these activities is the office for popular missions and preaching, at the present time directed by the author of this article. In the past this house was the general headquarters of the "gospel workers" who prepared themselves for the great sowing of the seed of God's word and who returned here for refreshment and rest in God. Today, more than ever, living in this house gives me the peace of soul necessary

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Lay associates of the Congregation in the courtyard in Albano

to deal with the demands of extraordinary preaching. It is very encouraging to know that our Founder had chosen the house as a place to “recharge” himself after his apostolic work. It is also encouraging to recall that Venerable Merlini left his spirit as local director here, and that within these walls echoes the example of so many virtuous Missionaries who for years dedicated themselves to the task of preaching.

In addition, a Missionary who teaches moral theology lives in the house. Besides teaching, he is now the President of the Association of Italian Moral Theologians and is engaged in preaching spiritual exercises and retreats.

A MULTIGENERATIONAL COMMUNITY

Last but certainly not least, this community welcomes and assists aged and infirm Missionaries who, after years of sacrifice and faithful service to the Congregation and to the Church, are enjoying their final years surrounded by the esteem and the warmth of those who are still on the front lines. There are currently five Missionaries of advanced age,

all of whom fortunately are more or less self-sufficient. We recently lost the congenial presence of Don Enrico Morganti, who had been in a wheelchair for many years.

In sum, this is our community: varied and rich, diverse and beautiful. Not without a bit of boasting I can assert that we are a community that tries hard to put into practice what our Normative Texts, dealing with community life, have to say: “In order to foster this mutual aid to one another, the members give special place to the conferences and meetings of the community and to the daily gatherings for such matters as meals, recreation, and ordinary conversations.” (article C9) Among our many activities, what permits us to “be together,” to know one another, to confront one another, and to sustain one another, is eating lunch and supper together, common prayer in the recitation of vespers and prayers of the Congregation, evening recreation after supper, monthly spiritual retreats and house meetings in which we strive to have dialogue and thus communicate to others something of who we are.

We are certainly not a perfect community, but we are a community in

which we love one another. We feel the bond of belonging to the Congregation among ourselves, and this permits us to carry out our ministry with a greater awareness that we do not proclaim ourselves, but the Love that has sent us into the world and that says to us: “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13, 35) ♦

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THE EXPERIENCE OF A MISSION HOUSE: THE CASA CENTRAL IN SANTIAGO DE CHILE

St. Gaspar founded our Congregation by gathering together a group of priests animated by the same ideal, uniting them only by the bond of charity instead of by vows. The mission houses were a source of ongoing renewal for the clergy and the laity, especially through the preaching of missions and retreats. (C.P.P.S. Normative Texts, C1)

Today, however, we might ask if there truly are mission houses in our community. What are the mission houses in our time? What would mission houses reflecting the charisma of Gaspar look like?

We might imagine or plan a house of our Congregation where an international community life could exist. There would be a wealth of resources for responding to the needs of our world, with a diversity of cultures that would be a sign of unity for the world. There would be a diversity of languages, so that one of Gaspar's dreams could be realized – to have a thousand tongues to speak to all of the Blood of Christ. With the presence of people so different one could show a world that is globalized and individualistic a new way of living as brothers and sisters.

THE MISSION HOUSE: AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

A house of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood exists in Chile which today more than ever has such richness. Many great and true missionaries have passed through it, but today it is more than a residence of members of the Vicariate.

Today the *Casa Central* (as it is known to all) is the home for priests, a house of formation for future members, and a place of retirement. For this reason I would like to share with our reader the lived experience of the Casa Central of the Chilean

by Juan Carlos Barajas, C.P.P.S.

Vicariate, because in sharing this we can see the work of the Holy Spirit in our life. We can discover that Pentecost has become incarnated in our community and in the experiences of each member of the house.

I am sure that it is Jesus who calls us to live this vocation. I know that it is Gaspar who inspires zeal for the mission. I arrived in Chile as a young man with two other candidates from Mexico. We were not sent

work and he too became a part of the community.

Living in a house that counts members of different nationalities has certainly been an experience that is enriching, meaningful, and the most universal in my life: in this house and with these members I was learning to build community. This is a house where we live in an atmosphere of a worldwide family, so that in my mind there are already no borders, and I can say that I am a missionary for the world.

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to live in a seminary or in some house specifically for formation, but rather to the Casa Central, a place where several Chilean priest members, who worked in Saint Gaspar College, were already living. This would be my home and the place for my formation.

Not only that, but it happened that our director of formation, Fr. Wojciech Czernatowicz, would be Polish, something that for me was different and novel. As time went on, seminarians from Tanzania came to live at our house. They were open to having an experience of the apostolate that was different from that of their country.

Still later a seminarian from Perú and a seminarian from Chile joined us. Clearly, our family and my vision of community were enlarged. After a time Fr. Donald Thieman, C.P.P.S., a North American, arrived. Because of illness he had curtailed his apostolic

THE MISSION HOUSE: HOME FOR PRIESTS AND MEMBERS

The Casa Central is a place of rest and source of hope for the members who are ministering in the different apostolates of the C.P.P.S. in the city of Santiago. When one comes to the house, one finds not only people who are similar, but rather in fraternal encounter one is opened to a variety of nationalities, cultures, ages, experiences, talents, and mutual support.

Arriving at lunch time, the table becomes an ideal place for sharing the work of the day, with each one expressing his concerns or that which is an occasion for joy for himself and for the community. The seasoning of the food is not important, because although our palates may be different and our food distinct, we have learned to be tolerant and understanding with our brother. We

try to make the moment of sharing a pleasant one.

The table becomes a place of welcoming, relaxing, laughter, sharing, and the renewal of one's strength to continue with the day's work.

Tuesday is community day, because it is the day in which all of the C.P.P.S. priests and seminarians who live in Santiago meet to share a meal, topics of interest, and sometimes a few games.

**THE MISSION HOUSE:
A PLACE OF FORMATION**

The seminarians who live in the Casa Central are philosophy and theology students, some of whom are already temporarily incorporated into the Congregation. While others are not incorporated, this is not an obstacle to sharing our experience of formation and to helping one another in our journey.

From Monday through Friday we study in the Pontifical Major Seminary of Santiago. When we return to the house for lunch, Fr. Donald (now retired) always asks the students about new ideas in theology. He does this not only to stay abreast of the field, but also, as he says, to remind us that discussing such ideas was one of the ideals of Gaspar.

We seminarians, together with our formator, Fr. Wojciech, and Fr. Donald, organize various activities of the house related to formation, such as the schedule, discussion topics, and outings. In addition we engage in pastoral work on Saturdays, both in the parish of Nuestra Señora de la Preciosa Sangre and in St. Gaspar College. Sundays are devoted to outings, formation, and vocation ministry. Thus pass the days and years of formation and with them we are enriched and strengthened in our life, in our vocation, in our formation, and in our community life.

Another feature of the house is the hospitality which is very much alive in the Casa Central and which, for the seminarians, helps us and animates us in a special way, because seeing how the household communi-

“I believe that our call to mission in the world is urgent. The witness of our life in common already shows the progress of the Holy Spirit in the world in which we live.”

but that nevertheless there is something that unites us. Recently I realized the importance of the questions that people always ask us: What do you eat? What language do you speak? Is it difficult to live with such diversity? The Blood of Christ and fraternal charity are what unite us.

**THE MISSION HOUSE:
IN VINCULO CARITATIS**

I believe that our life and our apostolate reflect a commitment to living the *bond of charity*. In this bond one finds a sharing of the strengths and weaknesses in a spirit of mutual trust, an affirmation of each person, a spirit of ongoing reconciliation, a spirit of continuous conversion, a spirit of hospitality, and support and nurture for each of us, while the Blood calls us to be in mission in new places that are unfamiliar.

I believe that our call to mission in the world is urgent. The witness of our life in common already shows the progress of the Holy Spirit in the world in which we live. ♦

ty welcomes the priests who work in the south of the Chile, members of the C.P.P.S. from all over the world, and members of our own families, we have come to feel a special love for the entire Precious Blood family. For those who visit us, the community of the house has become a model of life and commitment.

Some are puzzled to see that we who live in the house are so different in culture, nationality, and language,



Members of the Casa Central together on an outing in the mountains

THE C.P.P.S. MISSION HOUSE IN POLAND

My first encounter with a C.P.P.S. mission house was in 1986, when I arrived for my first retreat at St. Gaspar in Częstochowa, Poland. Even now I remember people helping to carry my luggage, showing me the house, inviting me to help in the kitchen, etc. All this made a deep impression on me: it was a real community! On account of the “atmosphere” I found there, I immediately decided to join the Union of the Blood of Christ (U.S.C.). One year later, after finishing school, I decided to enter the Congregation.

Some years later my experience of the mission house was a little different: by then I knew that it is not so easy to live in a mission house. There were not only C.P.P.S., but A.S.C. Sisters (and later the M.S.C. Sisters), lay people of the U.S.C., people seeking freedom from addictions, for a new sense of their life, people who were lonely or just seeking an experience of living in a religious community, as well. We wanted to treat our houses not only as our residences, but as “continuous missions,” aware of St. Gaspar’s vision of the C.P.P.S. mission house. As I said before, it was not easy. If there were “normal” people living in the house it was OK, but sometimes it was really difficult. On the other hand it was very attractive – a true mission within my reach! In my opinion it was this openness to people in need in the mission houses that motivated many of us to enter the C.P.P.S.

For many years our “trademark” in Poland was a close collaboration with A.S.C. or M.S.C. Sisters and the U.S.C. members. I remember my feeling when the C.P.P.S. came out into the open in 1989 after the end of

by Grzegorz Ruchniewicz, C.P.P.S.

Communism in Poland, and I could live officially in the mission house: I was happy that I could be in my “family.” A difference between a

because it helped me in my own vocation. Their life experience, testimony of faithfulness, overcoming difficulties, and service to the Kingdom of God often put me to shame as a Missionary.



The Santa Galla Hospice and C.P.P.S. Residence, Łabuńki, Poland

diocesan seminary and our mission house was self-evident: all our houses were full of life, because there was always a group of sisters and lay people there. Personally I appreciated their presence very much,

FORMATION OF THE LAITY A PRIORITY

In our houses our first priority is organizing retreats for different groups: adults, youth, children, families, Alcoholics Anonymous, etc.

“In my opinion it was this openness to people in need in the mission houses that motivated many of us to enter the C.P.P.S.”



St. Lawrence Mission House, Częstochowa

Usually these take place one or two times a year (summer and winter vacations). Nearly every weekend (Friday evening till Sunday morning) there are days of prayer, primarily as formation meetings for the U.S.C. members. In other words, our main ministry in Poland has been the formation of the laity, but not only within the mission house.

Every year we have some parish retreats, sometimes even parish missions, especially during Lent and Advent. Usually they last three to five days, but sometimes eight to ten days. If it is possible there is a team of the C.P.P.S. Missionaries and lay persons who lead a retreat or a mission. We see that this is much more fruitful, and there are testimonies from many people confirming that it is important to see a group of witnesses, recalling the words of Jesus: “where two or three are gathered in my name I am in the midst of them” (cf. Matt. 18:20).

Of course, there are also other activities of some of our residences, for example: Hospice “Santa Galla” in the Holy Spirit Mission House in Łabuńki, Publishing House “Pomoc” (“Help”) in St. Lawrence and place for our students in St. Francis Xavier Mission House in Ożarów Maz.

SANTA GALLA: HOSPICE MINISTRY

A special place for us, as Missionaries of the Precious Blood, is the Hospice “Santa Galla” in Łabuńki. We were inspired by the words of the Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Evangelium vitae*:

“Threats which are no less serious hang over the incurably ill and the dying. In a social and cultural context which makes it more difficult to face and accept suffering, the temptation becomes all the greater to resolve the problem of suffering by eliminating it at the root, by hastening death so that it occurs at the moment considered most suitable...

“The Blood of Christ, while it reveals the grandeur of the Father’s love, shows how precious man is in God’s eyes and how priceless the value of his life. The Apostle Peter reminds us of this: ‘You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited

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from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the Precious Blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot' (1 Pt 1:18-19). Precisely by contemplating the Precious Blood of Christ, the sign of his self-giving love (cf. Jn 13:1), the believer learns to recognize and appreciate the almost divine dignity of every human being... (EV 15 & 25)."

We strive to practice these words by our service in the Hospice. There are always people who wait for our attention, help, prayer, or sometimes just our presence. Those who are so close to eternity are special for us, servants of the Blood. "The cry of the blood" of the Abels of today is so strongly heard in these people! Now there are twelve places for the sick, but we also care for many more who remain at home. We come to serve them as doctors, nurses, priests and volunteers. It is a very important experience of death and life: everyone can experience growth in meeting those who are so close to heaven. Hospice ministry teaches us to be more attentive to human suffering and to respond to suffering by our own presence and concrete help. The Santa Galla Hospice is a treasure: it forms us as "servants of the Blood."

A VARIETY OF MINISTRIES

Of course, there are also other activities in some of our residences, for example: the Publishing House "Pomoc" ("Help") in St. Lawrence, and the residence for our students in St. Francis Xavier Mission House in Ożarów Maz. For some years we opened our houses for other groups, too. These are different Catholic movements and communities that have their meetings and retreats. If it is possible we also offer the possibility for individual retreats.

In summary, you could generally identify three tasks of the mission house in Poland:

OUR AUTHORS

John Klopke, C.P.P.S., was a professor of philosophy and later a parish priest in the Pacific Province. He served on the C.P.P.S. General Council as Secretary General for four years. He died in 2003.

Jerome Stack, C.P.P.S., is Secretary General of the Congregation and a member of the Cincinnati Province.

Benedetto Labate, C.P.P.S., is a member of the Italian Province and currently is involved in the ministry of popular missions and retreats, residing in Albano Laziale, Italy.

Juan Carlos Barajas, C.P.P.S., a native of Mexico, is a candidate for the Chilean Vicariate studying in Santiago de Chile.

Grzegorz Ruchniewicz, C.P.P.S., was the director of the Polish Vicariate (now Province) and is now engaged in the ministry of missions and retreats.

- a residence of the C.P.P.S. members and candidates (community life and formation)
- a place of formation for lay persons (retreats, days of prayer, other meetings)
- a place of preparation for parish retreats and missions.

Now, in a new Polish Province we strive to strengthen our relationships within the community. In my opinion this is what "mission house" should mean for us today: the "bond of charity" for mission. As Jesus prayed: "That they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you... that the world may believe" (cf. John 17:21). ♦



"Our main ministry in Poland has been the formation of the laity, but not only within the mission house."

Continued from front page

issues of common interest, I often hear references made to the mission house. Indeed any number of our C.P.P.S. residences are called mission houses. However, there seems to be a variety of interpretations as to what constitutes a mission house. For some, it seems to be merely a new name which we give to a parish house. For others, it is the name given to any house where the Missionaries live. For still others, it is a legal term, distinguishing a mission house from a mere residence of the C.P.P.S. Thus, the term “mission house” is used in a variety of ways and seems to defy, at least presently, any clear cut definition.

THEN AND NOW

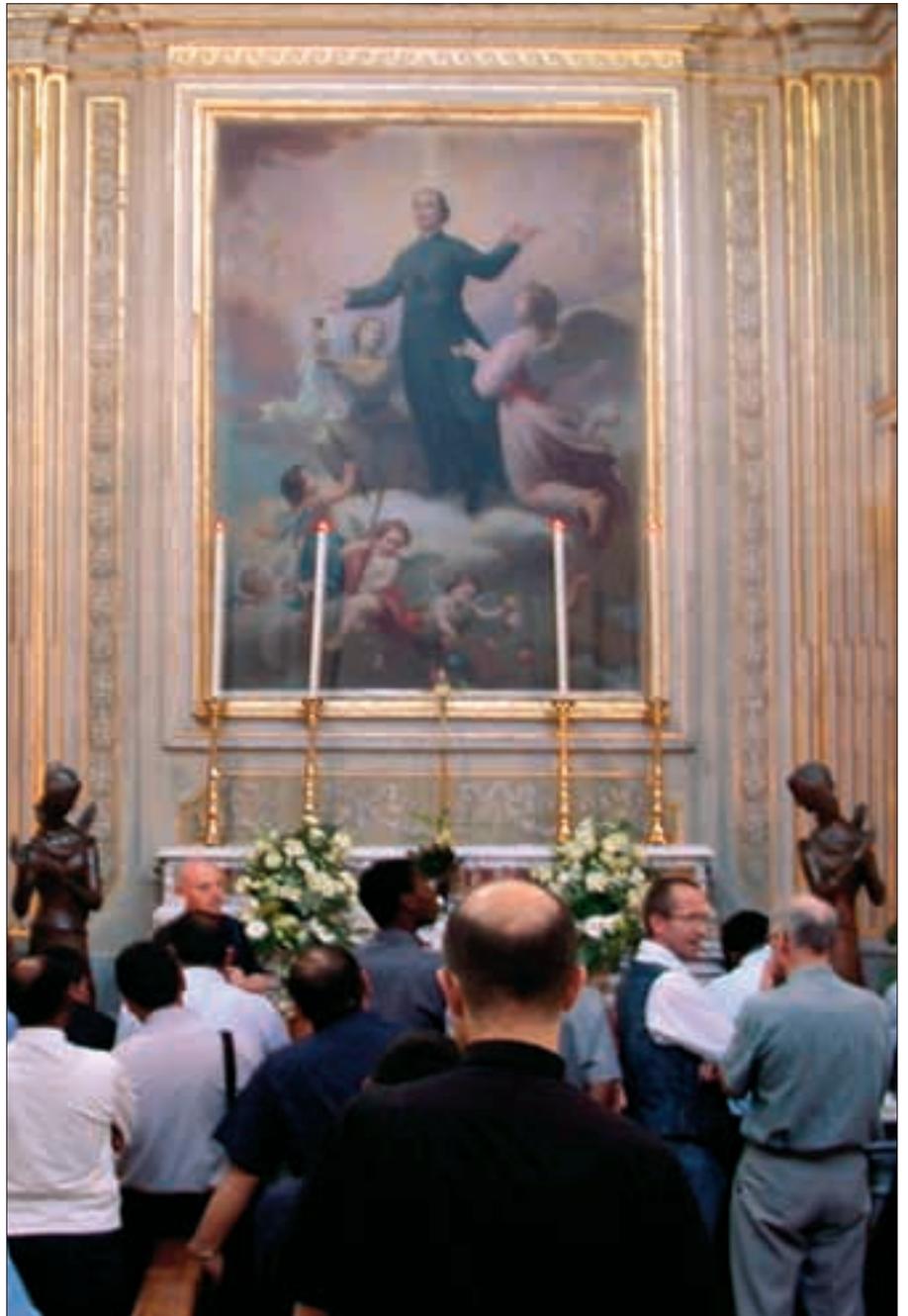
In the period in which St. Gaspar lived, parishes were basically administrative units under the care of diocesan priests. They dedicated their ministerial efforts to the celebration of the sacraments. There was practically no sense of community nor of collaboration and lay participation. St. Gaspar envisioned the mission houses as places where the Missionaries, living in community, could exercise the ministry of the Word and promote the participation of the laity in associations according to their status. The mission houses would thus contribute to the reform of the Church and would be places of “permanent mission.” Don Pietro Battista of the Italian Province, in a conference given in Albano in August, 2002, described the mission house as conceived by St. Gaspar:

“It was a house with a church attached, in which a group of missionaries, animated by the same apostolic ideal and by the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, lives fraternal communion, in community, for the purpose of transmitting it (the spirituality) to others through the witness of their lives and through their apostolic activity.”

“St. Gaspar envisioned the mission houses as places where the Missionaries, living in community, could exercise the ministry of the Word and promote the participation of the laity in associations according to their status.”

Today parishes are not merely geographical, administrative entities, but living communities of believers, centered in the Word of God, and with active participation of the laity. So many of the functions which St.

Gaspar wished to achieve through the activities of the mission houses, thus supplementing the needs not answered in parishes, are now being met in the typical parish community. This leaves us then the question:



C.P.P.S. formators visiting the Church in Albano. This was the first resting place of the body of St. Gaspar

does the concept of mission house carry some validity for us today? If so, what would some of its characteristics be? What differentiates a mission house today from any other parish house or rectory?

Don Gennaro Cespites, when speaking at a workshop in Giano for the C.P.P.S. formators in July, 1999, stated that the mission house was not only a place of support for the Missionaries who would then go out to preach popular missions, but was also a house “in permanent mission.” He claims that the function of the mission house according to our Founder stands on four pillars: 1) the spiritual life; 2) a house of welcoming; 3) collaborators; 4) and a place of pastoral renewal for diocesan clergy.

The mission house would be a place where the Missionaries themselves would be schooled in community life, grounded in prayer and in the spirituality of the Precious Blood. They would be open houses, welcoming the different lay groups formed by the Missionaries to continue the fruit of the missions and to extend pastoral activities to youth, women and men, and to the local pastors. These groups, called *ristretti*, were “the apple of Gaspar’s eye” as St. Vincenzo Pallotti described in his deposition for the process for the beatification of Gaspar. And the mission house would be a place of spiritual and theological renewal for the Missionaries and for the local clergy.

IN THIS ISSUE

The articles in this issue of *The Cup* will explore this concept from an historical point of view, trying to discern what some constitutive elements of a C.P.P.S. mission house might be, as well as describe several concrete experiences of how mission house is experienced in different parts of the world.

The lead article is a condensed version of an article written several years ago by our late Fr. John

“The mission house would be a place where the missionaries themselves would be schooled in community life, grounded in prayer and in the spirituality of the Precious Blood.”

Klopke, former General Councilor. Having studied various historical documents, he affirms that the mission house was an essential component of “the Work” and that the Work is conceived of as nothing less than total evangelization. The mission houses were an invitation to enter fully into the work motivated by the spirituality of the community. They were centers of great activity and hardly a cloistered retreat.

Fr. Jerry Stack, our General Secretary, offers us an insightful article on

“I believe that our members, living together in mission houses, united in the bond of charity, and witnessing to the Blood of the covenant and of reconciliation, can be in fact, “communities-in-permanent-mission.”

the structure of the mission house as envisioned by St. Gaspar, a man given to details. Throughout his article, Fr. Stack draws out implications for us today. An important point he makes is that the structure of the mission house was at the service of mission. He invites us to reflect upon how we might make the mission house a model supporting our varied ministries today.

The next article centers on the Mission House of Albano, the third community founded by St. Gaspar, in 1821. Fr. Benedetto Labate, currently living in that community, describes current-day life in the mission house. He notes the challenges of living in a community both diverse in apostolates as well as personalities. The community as a whole is involved in various ministries: that of welcoming and hospitality to the many pilgrims, devotees of St. Gaspar; the mailing center for the Province’s publication, *Primavera Missionaria*, aimed at promoting the figure of St. Gaspar and his spirituality and for sustaining the work of the foreign missions; ministry with the youth and a place for vocational gatherings; and a place for preparing for popular missions. The house also is the home of a professor of moral theology who likewise preaches retreats. It is the home of the retired and aged of the Province as well. With such variety of activities and personalities, the “bond of charity” is what holds it all together.

From Italy our attention is now directed to another experience of a mission house, this time in Santiago de Chile. One of our Mexican seminarians, Juan Carlos Barajas, describes his experience of living in an international community in what is called the Center House of our Congregation in Chile. Besides being home for our seminarians, hailing from various countries, it is also home for one retired priest, and two Missionaries who minister in St. Gaspar’s School. Juan Carlos enjoys the atmosphere of such a multicultur-

al community, with different age groups and ministries. He finds it a place for forging fraternal brotherhood through sharing their varied experiences and through their prayer together and their theological discussions. The house is also a place of hospitality and welcome for C.P.P.S. members working in the south and for visitors from abroad. All this makes him feel part of a worldwide community and strengthens him for the day's work. Once again, it is the Blood of Christ and fraternal charity that unites the members.

Our final experience of mission house comes from Poland. Fr. Grzegorz Ruchniewicz describes how he discovered his vocation through his contact years ago with the St. Gaspar Mission House in Częstochowa. Our houses in Poland are communities "in mission," often opening their doors to lay associates of the Union of the Blood of Christ for retreats and formation activities, as well as to people in need. This "openness" to religious women of the ASC and the MSC as well as to the laity is a special characteristic of our presence in Poland, and it is an important formative element for our candidates. As in the other experiences shared, it is a living

example of "the bond of charity" for mission.

CONCLUSION

Can the mission house offer us a viable and meaningful model for living community life for mission today? Does it still offer a real contribution to the search for living the fraternal life in today's society? Does it respond to the demands of mission, community, and to the spirituality of the Blood of Christ?

In a society fragmented and individualistic, where cultures mingle more and more, I believe that our members, living together in mission houses, united in the bond of charity, and witnessing to the Blood of the covenant and of reconciliation, can be in fact, "communities-in-permanent-mission." By forming communities characterized by hospitality and openness to the laity and other religious and clergy, we can provide those safe refuges where, praying

together, sharing our faith, and reflecting together, we can be centers of renewal for the Church and society.

St. Gaspar offered an original contribution with his concept of the mission house. We can do the same today, incarnating it in response to our present situation, today's apostolates, and to the needs of each culture. What does/will it look like? That is for each of us and our local communities to discern. At any rate, it will call all of us to conversion in order to transform our community "houses" or "common dwelling places" to true communities where we can live and witness to "the bond of charity" in the Blood of Christ, in which our lay associates and companions, as well as religious and local clergy can feel welcomed and invited.

I hope that the articles published in this issue of *The Cup* will move us forward in our reflections. ♦

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