

Salt

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Gracias a las Hermanas B.V.M.



Faces of Hope:

Enlightenment for the Journey

Mission Statement: As Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we are called to participate in the mission of Jesus. Our choice of ministry is in keeping with our BVM mission: being freed and helping others enjoy freedom in God's steadfast love. *BVM Constitutions, No. 10*

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2009 Calendar

April

- 19 St. Mary HS Alumnae Luncheon, Hilton, Oak Lawn, Ill.
- 25 Intercongregational Associates Day, Sinsinawa, Wis.
- 26 Immaculata HS Alumnae Luncheon, Chateau Ritz, Chicago

May

- 3 Mass of Resurrection for Friends, Family of Deceased BVMs, Mt. Carmel, Dubuque
- 12 Prayer Vigil and Walk Commemorating Immigration Raid in Postville, Iowa
- 16 BVM Associate Picnic, Salem, Ill.

August

- 2 Golden Jubilarian Celebration, Mount Carmel

September

- 13 Diamond Jubilarian Celebration, Mount Carmel



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On the cover: Women in Guayaquil, Ecuador, surround their mentor, Ann Credidio, BVM (back row, center) as they announce their thanks to the BVM sisters and to Ann for Mary Frances Clarke Scholarships awarded from 1999-2008. Read about this and other BVM grants in Mary Marten's article, on pp. 6-7.



SEASONing

Dear *SALT* Readers,

When this issue of *SALT* was planned a year ago, no one could have predicted that the virtue of hope would become such a universal need. The economic plunge has affected us all personally and globally—and drastically.

The new realities have forced a reexamination of the priorities in our lives, and the values we hold essential. We have been called to let go, to simplify, to shift from our participation in a runaway consumer culture. We have been called to immerse ourselves more fully in the essence of Christ's life: the Paschal Mystery of suffering, death and resurrection.

The just-completed season of Lent arrived on the threshold of nature's springtime. We hearkened to the variety of bird song, looking expectantly for the green of jonquil stems pressing through the hard earth, and turning our faces to welcome a warmer sun.

Even as we stretched toward spring, nature's life-force reached into our being, drawing out from latency the seed that is our own invincible passion for life.

These past months with their ascetical feel may have extended the outreach of our arms, expanded the capacity of our hearts, widened our peripheral vision and opened up surprising depth in our individual and communal soul.

The writers in this issue have discovered a depth of hope both within themselves and in their encounters with others. It is a belief, says one, in "the ever-present possibility of transformation."

- *SALT* asked BVMs, an associate, a parent how the virtue of hope sustains them in difficult times. Their responses may resonate with your daily struggles.
- BVM ministries which engender hope are profiled, as is a young woman whose BVM education has contributed to her becoming an agent of hope.
- And a BVM sees signs of hope among nations as Israelis and Palestinians work together for creative solutions to the tragic, turbulent conflict which engulfs them.

Entering wholeheartedly into this Easter season, we are surely being "lengthened into life." Through our very real experiences of limitation and vulnerability, something may be happening in us: a personal and communal transformation that is God's way of guiding us into a new alive and vital future of God's creative making.

Our consciousness of our vulnerability can help us focus on the basics, life and solidarity. It helps us unmask the superfluous, unnecessary, and even dehumanizing elements that a certain standard of comfortableness introduces into normal life.

New life and fresh goodness emerge in the commitment required by vulnerability: Solidarity becomes real; simplicity becomes necessary; and because the future is no longer closed off by our security and certainty, our eyes are peeled wide open to the surprising gifts of God. The experience of limitation and

Hope Is the Thing with Feathers

by Emily Dickinson

*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all.*

*And sweetest in gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.*

*I've heard it in the chilliest land
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.*

vulnerability is liberating. It invites us into a sphere of personal and communal creativity with nature, with other people, with ourselves and with God. (paraphrase, Jon Sobrino, *Where Is God?*)

As we search for and then celebrate signs of spring, the Mystery of Life is at work, subtly and grace-fully drawing us through cruciform experiences surely and inevitably toward new life and resurrection.

Our prayer for you in this Easter season is that of Scripture: "May the God of hope fill you with such peace and joy in your faith, that you may be filled with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

Mary Ann Zollman, BVM

Thina Thale, BVM

Jeri Hades, BVM



God of Hope: *Trusting in the Holy Mystery*

by Kathy Conway, BVM

Some years ago Elizabeth Johnson wrote in *She Who Is* that “the image of God functions.” Ever since then I have been trying to unravel that sentence and to be more aware that how I image God has a very direct effect on my attitudes and actions.

I don't think my experience of God is unusual. When I was a child, God was a larger-than-life parent watching and protecting me from harm and I felt safe within the well-defined boundaries of my faith. Some time in my teen years, God became judge, rewarding good behavior, punishing the bad. I began demanding small sacrifices of myself to please God. In my thirties, God became an intimate friend and my desire to pray more deeply and extend the love I'd been blessed with to the earth's poorest moved me to action. I followed a call to work among the poor of Ecuador whom I came to know as my sisters and brothers.

Then for a time, I lost any image of God as personal and close. The immensity and mystery I was coming to know could not be contained in the word “God” and I toyed with a nonpersonal, rather scientific image of God, but that image too failed for me!

Today I find myself relating to a God who is both mystery beyond understanding and yet closer to me than my own breath. Though this image of God can be awkward and not easily discussed, paradoxically, it is this God that gives me hope.

Living Hope-Filled Lives

Hope is sorely needed in our 21st-century world. The experiences of war and violence, greed and corruption, economic turmoil and diminishment have become the context of our lives and can lead to acedia—a kind of “I don't care”

attitude because we feel inadequate and overwhelmed.

Kathleen Norris, in her book *Acedia and Me*, describes hope as “the ever present possibility of transformation” (p. 114). It is a deep belief that each of us *can* make a difference, that transformations on a personal, congregational, church and world level can and do occur.

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The image of God as ultimate mystery and intimate presence nourishes and supports hope and encourages us to trust the movement of God in our lives. This Creator God, Holy Mystery, is continually drawing us beyond our present securities into the unknown, a place both tantalizingly exciting and fearful.

Bill Thompson, SJ, as he was dying, used this image in his recorded interview with Dr. Miles Sheehan, SJ and I paraphrase:

All my life God and I have been on a tandem bicycle, I steering from the front, God behind supporting and helping me. Now we have changed places. God is steering and I'm behind holding on. I don't know where we are going or how long the trip will last but I love and trust the One in front who has been faithful to me.

God is not only Holy Mystery drawing us always toward deeper and more complex truth, but also the One who, through the Incarnation and grace, is intimately present to me, the One in whom “I live and move and have my being” (Acts 3:28). God is the living yeast within me, expanding from within my love for all beings and my yearning for union with Godself. This inner God strains for the God just beyond the horizon.¹

Hope is the profound awareness that just as each of us experiences many small deaths and rebirths, our communities, institutions and societies are also caught up in larger spirals of life, death and transformation. As with all living things, the experience of life, death and new life is a constant pattern.

I believe we are living in a “Mary Magdalene” moment—that time she spent wandering lost in the garden, seeing but not recognizing Jesus there with her. Perhaps during this Holy Saturday moment we, like Mary, are being called to let go of old dreams and make space for new and yet unseen possibilities.

All we have known and loved has died or is dying, a transformation is occurring but, to use another resurrection image, the butterfly has not yet emerged from the cocoon. Perhaps we are being drawn to identify God present and beyond us in a new and yet unrecognizable guise.

In these times of change and diminishment, may we have the courage to surrender in hope to our God “whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we could ask or imagine” (Eph 3:20).

Footnote:

1 Thanks to Karl Rahner, SJ, German theologian, for this image.

About the author: Kathleen Conway, BVM (Richard Marie) is a chaplain at Palos Community Hospital, in Palos Heights, Ill.



Hope in the Holy Land?

by Mary Christine Athans, BVM

As I write this in January 2009, Palestinian rockets target settlements in Israel, and Israeli bombs demolish areas of Gaza. Is there any hope for peace in the Holy Land?

Situational Events

Tribal warfare has always been endemic to this region. I would like to share briefly some ideas regarding the situation in the Holy Land and then offer examples of peace-filled dialogue on the grass roots level which I believe can give us hope!

In the *New York Times* (12/14/08), the governor of Bethlehem, Saleh Tamari, stated: "Israelis are paranoid because of their past, while Palestinians are paranoid because of their present." Vatican spokesman Jesuit Federico Lombardi told Vatican radio on Dec. 28, 2008: " Hamas is a prisoner of a logic of hatred, Israel of a logic of trusting in force as the best response to hatred." (*Chicago Tribune*, 1/1/09)

How do we unshackle ourselves from paranoia and hatred?

Rabbi Brad Hirschfield in "Windows and Doors" states: "The most persistent...prison in both Gaza and Israel exists in the minds of Gazans and Israelis...each side is imprisoned not only by the bombs that rain down on each of them, but by spiritual/intellectual paradigms which help to define their identities as nations." (See beliefnet.com/windowsanddoors.)

Grass Roots Experience

I have been involved in interfaith relations for many years. Because my initial experiences were on the grass roots level—as executive director of the North Phoenix Corporate Ministry (a cluster of five Protestant churches, one Catholic church and two synagogues) in Arizona, I have always believed that

meaningful interaction between religious groups must take place on the local level if it is to endure. Directives from on high may be helpful, but dialogue and action must involve "ordinary people," if there is to be religious understanding.

I taught in Jerusalem for a semester, lived at Tantur near Bethlehem, interacted with both Palestinians and Jews in that "troubled but Holy Land," as we would often pray. Both then and now, I see glimmers of hope in some grass roots models for Arab-Israeli coexistence.

Oasis of Peace

Neve Shalom/Wahat as Salam—which literally means "the oasis of peace" in Hebrew and Arabic—was founded by Bruno Hussar, an Egyptian-born Jew who converted to Catholicism and became a Dominican monk. He founded *Neve Shalom* in 1972 halfway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem on land leased from the Latrum Monastery.

A village of families—half Jewish and half Palestinian—was established with a primary school which until the late 1990s was the only example of Jewish-Palestinian bilingual education. In 1977, the first course in conflict resolution was held for Jewish and Arab high school students. The village established the School for Peace in 1979 which has become its centerpiece. University students and adults participate in encounter groups, workshops and seminars led by Jewish-Arab teams. *Neve Shalom* has served some 45,000 youths and adults over the years.

Elie Wiesel has written: "When Jews and Arabs get together, work together, live together, they create their own miracle: *Neve Shalom* is such a miracle—it deserves our warmest support, for it justifies our highest hopes." (See Joseph V. Montville, " *Neve Shalom: A Model for Arab-Israeli Coexistence?*" *Middle East Quarterly*, December 1998.)

Dialogue and Encounters

Other organizations and activities working to dialogue and create inter-

faith encounters bring hope to this troubled land. Their grass roots commitment to building peace provides not only an example but also opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

- The Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA) is a grass roots organization devoted to interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural study (www.interfaith-encounter.org).
- Women's interfaith encounters with Jewish, Christian and Muslim mothers and daughters meet to discuss healing and suffering as it is understood in Jewish, Christian and Muslim texts. IEA Executive Director Yehuda Stolov responded in January: "I...deeply believe that the grassroots people and communities are the key for a sustainable peace."
- Young Jewish and Palestinian musicians come together for a joint rock concert at the YMCA on King David Street in Jerusalem sponsored by the U.S. Consulate. Their slogan: "The mic is more powerful than the gun!"

Rabbi Ron Kronish, director of the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel, reflects: "The question is how do real people live amidst conflict, and how can you best mitigate it, meaning having a little less hatred." (See *New York Times*, 10/18/08.)

A little less hatred—a little more hope! These and other groups are dedicated to promoting interfaith opportunities which will hopefully allow all to one day say

"Peace! Salaam! Shalom!"

About the author: Mary Christine Athans, BVM (Christophil) is professor emerita at the Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity of the University of St. Thomas (Minnesota), and adjunct faculty at the Catholic Theological Union and Loyola University Chicago.



Women in Guayaquil, Ecuador, say thank you to the BVM sisters and to their mentor Ann Credidio, BVM (back row, center) for Mary Frances Clarke Scholarships awarded from 1999-2008.

Grants Exemplify BVM Values and Mission

by Mary Martens, BVM

The card had a short and simple printed message, “Thank you for the hope you have given.” It arrived from an overseas project to which the BVM Hunger Fund had responded with a contribution.

“Thank you for your continued prayers and support during my academic endeavor,” read the handwritten note from a recipient of a Mary Frances Clarke Scholarship.

“We have benefited greatly not only from your financial support, but from your partnership with us and commitment to this ministry. The local BVM sisters have been a boon...” This message came from an organization that received a BVM Ministry Partnership Grant.

With the outreach provided by these three funding resources, the BVM congregation continues its mission and ministry by giving financial support at a time in its history when personnel resources are fewer. Although internal needs are many, this outreach remains the reason for existing as an apostolic religious community; it is a way to

share in a variety of ministry projects that carry out BVM core values and ministry goals.

BVM Hunger Fund

As part of the BVM mission of “being freed and helping others enjoy freedom in God’s steadfast love,” the Hunger Fund assists “projects that work for systemic change and/or alleviate hunger or provide emergency hunger relief, especially where women and children benefit, and in areas other than the developed world.” Funds come largely from donations by BVMs and friends. Most of the requests come from religious communities that have missions in other countries.

Three times a year a small committee of retired sisters at Mount Carmel meets to discuss the requests and to disburse a total of \$34,000. Typically, the amounts given fall between \$1,000 and \$2,500, depending on the number of requests.

During the current budget year, monies have been distributed to:

- A holistic health care program for adults and children struggling with HIV/AIDS and hunger in Botswana

- An orphanage in Guatemala, for purchase of beans and rice for 89 children
- A center in Rwanda that assists those affected by the 1994 genocide there
- A center for street children in the Philippines, for food
- A diocese in Sudan that gives refugee survival kits to those fleeing Darfur
- A school that educates and feeds children in Kenya
- Women and children in Uganda to help improve nutrition
- Students and adults in the Dominican Republic to provide critical food, vitamins, minerals and medicine

Mary Frances Clarke Scholarships

Closer to home and reflective of the long-standing BVM commitment to education, the Mary Frances Clarke Scholarships have as their purpose “to enable minority/poor women, 18 years and older, to continue their education.” Through direct contact with a BVM who acts as reference and mentor, the applicant receives a small grant of

\$1500, renewable once, to use toward a GED certificate or degree program, to improve specific job skills, to provide opportunities for improvement in current employment status.

Applications may be submitted at any time during the year, and are read by two BVMs who judge whether the guidelines are met, and ascertain that the BVM contact person who recommended the woman will keep in touch with the applicant as she pursues her goals.

Goals are as varied as the applicants. From Missouri, "It's my dream to be a doctor and help low-income families when they need medical treatment." From Ghana, "Please, I want to continue my education (in Ghana) because I want to be a better teacher and help upcoming young women become well-balanced candidates to fit well in the Ghanaian society." From Iowa, "I am enrolled in the LPN program and will be

for two years. I have already requested this scholarship...and I will need a little more assistance." From Ecuador, "I decided to continue my education (in Ecuador) for a better future and to help my parents."

Ministry Partnership Grants

Annual Ministry Partnership Grants involve a more formal process of application, evaluation and accountability. Each application must be recommended by a BVM who has firsthand current or recent knowledge of the ministry or project. Applicants complete a form which includes an itemized budget and a detailed description of the ministry or project's intent, purpose, objectives; and an explanation of how it fits with BVM vision and values guidelines.

A committee of BVMs and an associate read all applications, and members divide the task of contacting the

applicants and the BVM references. Finally, the committee convenes in spring to discuss the applications. This spring approximately \$143,000 will be disbursed for 2009-10, with a maximum of \$10,000 per request. (See below for 2008-09 disbursements.)

Each recipient of a ministry grant completes a formal evaluation indicating accomplishments because of the grant and any problems or unanticipated developments encountered. Whether through one of these formal grants, a scholarship or a donation to alleviate hunger, it is not only financial support that links BVMs in partnership with others, but also hope, love and commitment to mission.

About the author: Mary Martens, BVM (Loras) is an administrative assistant to the BVM Council and a member of the Communications Advisory Committee, Dubuque, Iowa.



Grant Recipients in 2008-09

- Alternatives with Education in St. Louis, Mo. provides certified teachers for year-round quality education programs to prisoners and ex-offenders.
- Azzarelli Outreach Clinic in Kankakee, Ill. serves the poor who lack health benefits.
- Earthlinks in Denver, Colo. offers a "First Steps toward Employment" program to help individuals move out of economic poverty.
- Latinos en Acción in Marshalltown, Iowa empowers low-income immigrants to act on their own behalf.
- DePorres Delta Ministries in Marks, Miss. offers medical care and social services to the poor.

Additional recipients include:

- Day Worker Center of Mountain View, Calif.
- Dominican Center for Women in Milwaukee, Wis.
- The Life Center in Frenchburg, Ky.
- St. Therese/Parish Nurse Ministry in Kansas City, Mo.
- Su Casa Catholic Worker Community in Chicago, Ill.
- Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual in Silver Spring, Md.

BVMs (l. to r.) Frances Loretta Berger, Muriel McCarthy (Baptist), Mary Ellen Caldwell (Eugenio), Gracia Schmidt, Marguerite Neumann (Marguerite Christine), Mary Martens (Loras) and Therese Kane (Thomas Ann) study materials received by the Hunger Fund Committee.

"I decided to continue my education (in Ecuador) for a better future and to help my parents." —Ecuadorian student



Moving from Grief to Hope: *The Importance of Grief Ministry*

by Jane Rogers, BVM

Grief is always uninvited, yet it arches in and defies you to ignore it, coming in all different sizes and shapes. Grief always demands attention. When someone comes seeking help to move through a loss, the first requirement is to listen to what the person is able to share. This is done slowly.

Because God created His children as unique individuals, people come with their own nationality, personality (extrovert or introvert), relationship with their loss, experience of how and when it happened, neglected past losses and learned behavior according to how well their parents modeled grief to them. In this setting, people are invited to share their story.

I share with them what a grief process entails. It means moving through the “experience of grief,” which involves five phases or dimensions:

1. Acknowledging the loss
2. Experiencing the pain
3. Readjusting to the loss
4. Reinventing emotional energy
5. Reconciling the loss

Critical to the grieving process is a readiness to enter into it. For the first months or years, depending on the loss, a person’s body automatically numbs out the pain or cushions itself to survive. It is when the numbness begins to lessen that the pain is the worst. At this time, people inquire about help because, as some express it, they feel they are going crazy.

Some family members and friends who do not view grief as a process may presume after a couple of months that the person should be over it! When a person shares having experienced this kind of response, my suggestion is to ask the questioner, “What is it you want

me to get over?!”

The question now becomes, “How do I get through the so-called experience of grief?” This journey *through* involves telling the story and feeling the feelings. It is called mourning or grief gone public. It all sounds so simple, but it is extremely painful and difficult.

When you are invited to tell your story and feel the feelings, good listener(s) are imperative to the process. Good listeners are those who do not give advice and do not get angry because you are not getting over the experience.

Support Groups

In time and with hard work, those who mourn can come to a peaceful place where they embrace the experience, as painful as it is, and feel reconciled with their grief. Their mourning must be embraced over and over, and a group can often be a safe place to do that because each person knows the process and each helps the other move through it. In a sense their own grief can become somewhat dissipated. Grief has a way of making one very sensitive to the feelings of others. Groups are not for everyone, however.

Support groups can provide a safe place where one can embrace the pain and do the work slowly. I feel the name of the group is important. “Grief and Growth” is the name we chose. The term *growth* reflects the active, ongoing process of mourning. Every loss presents us with choices. We can choose to move through loss, feel all the pain and come out on the side of growth. We can refuse to acknowledge the loss, hold on to it and repress the grief. We can get so caught up in the grieving itself that we refuse to move on, turning chronic grief into a lifestyle. Growth is a choice!

The space where the group meets warrants privacy and confidentiality. The ambience should

be welcoming and include incandescent lighting, a seating arrangement that provides good communication (no tables), kleenex and refreshments. Using different symbols and images at every meeting demonstrates that time and effort have gone into the group’s coming.

Meeting times can vary. Our group met six consecutive weeks as it assured more people could keep the commitment.

The Facilitator

The role of the facilitator is important. A good facilitator enjoys people, believes in what groups can do, and understands the basics of group dynamics. I believe that a consistent facilitator is best for continuity and education, and that the facilitator’s greatest gift is a caring presence.

The facilitator must be able to:

- Acknowledge other people’s pain
- Respect how others grieve
- Use supportive language to validate rather than minimize their loss
- Avoid phrases such as “at least” and “God’s will”
- Help others cherish the memories

The facilitator’s commitment to support others in their grief is a compassionate gift. Those in grief are the most memorable teachers.

For me, a passage from *Cries of the Heart* by Wayne Simsic sums up this journey through grief to hope:

*Happy those whose strength is in you;
they have courage to make the pilgrimage!
As they go through the Valley of the Weeper,
they make it a place of springs.*
(Ps. 84:5-6)

About the author: Jane Rogers, BVM (Jananne) is a former grief minister at Corpus Christi Parish and Trinity Hospice, in Fort Dodge, Iowa.



Support in Numbers: Groups Nurture Bonds of Understanding

by Joanne Lucid, BVM

Many of us have participated in various groups, informal and formal. Varied incarnations of these groups include book clubs, prayer circles, peace circles and neighborhood advocacy groups. My most recent experience with an informal group came while I was visiting Mes Amis, a beauty salon on Grand Ave. in St. Paul, Minn.

While my grey tresses were being chopped, my beautician and I chatted about recent books that we have enjoyed. From this conversation sprang the idea to start a book drop-off for clients coming to the shop to enjoy and share with each other.

To begin, we went to an antique store on Grand Ave. and bought a small bookcase to hold our bounty of reading material. We purchased a Comment Book so that the women might write and critique the books that they enjoyed. All of this provided a means of informal support and stimulating conversation.

BVM Bookies

Some of us in Minnesota belong to the BVM Bookies, another active book club. Our group meets monthly to share thoughts on the writings of such authors as Alice Walker, Elizabeth Johnson, James Cone and Karen Armstrong.

Our next meeting covers Karen Armstrong's book, *Islam*, and a new Vatican release. Benedict XVI invited Catholic and Muslim theologians to the Vatican for a seminar on principles that may help all of us work together to condemn terrorism, protect religious freedom and

Then and now, weekly support meetings help rid the feelings of isolation that many experience.

fight poverty. So together we will study Armstrong's book and the recent memorandum from the Vatican, to satisfy our common quest for knowledge, inspiration and spiritual deepening.

Time to Share

Ultimately, support groups help members to form a bond with others as they share common experiences. While working within the HIV/AIDS community in St. Paul/Minneapolis, I found a major way to assist families and persons living with this disease.

Then and now, weekly support meetings help rid the feelings of isolation that many experience. These meetings involve discussion of topics often considered taboo: sexuality, disease, illicit drug use and mortality.

Often Catholics who generally do not feel welcome in their parishes because of their sexual identity come together for affirmation, friendship and to assert that they have a right to be part of the greater whole, in this case the Catholic Church.

Catholic parents come to share their personal stories and to become strong advocates for acceptance of their children. It is particularly important for parents to know that there is a place for them to come as they suffer with the

knowledge that their children are often rejected by members of their own families, as well as the pains of societal discomfort with diverse sexual orientation and the HIV disease.

Jim Maurer, director of Park House, a day care center for persons living with HIV in Minneapolis, facilitates several support groups at the center. He coordinates a summertime family camp for households affected by HIV. The difficult and challenging aspect for families is communication—for parents, talking with their children about the parent's infection; for children, asking questions and letting go of fears.

The groups enjoy listening to visiting speakers. Doctors, social workers and chaplains offer assistance and advice for families that struggle with ongoing issues. Clearly the greatest benefit for group members is the opportunity to share with others who truly understand what it is like to live with this disease.

Many times the groups enjoy sharing not only their personal stories but also ethnic foods, which helps nurture relationships and build on their time together. It is amazing during the camp week to see families strengthen their bonds with children in tow, finding time to address important issues for their future that help them carry on.

All of these ways of being with one another in a group environment offer strength, inspiration, fun and challenge to "keep on keeping on" and to live life with hope.

About the author: Joanne Marie Lucid, BVM (Michael Mary), former director of AIDS ministry for the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis, enjoys retirement and volunteers at San Miguel School, in Minneapolis, Minn.

Living with Alzheimer

A Matter of Love

by Jean Byrne, BVM



Laurian McDonald, BVM participates in testing with Emmanuel Anderson, PhD, MS, BSN, a research nurse clinician for the Rush Institute for Healthy Aging.

Alzheimer's disease is a condition that strikes fear into our aging process. BVM Associate Sheila Feeney said that she was terrified when diagnosed with Alzheimer's, but went on to make her own arrangements in an assisted living situation with areas to which she can transfer as needed. She is peaceful and open with her life, adapting as she goes.

Once termed "premature senility," Alois Alzheimer, MD challenged the concept that severe memory problems were inevitable in aging. Knowing this fact provides hope, despite the threat of the disease. Hope comes through research into its causes, like that of the Religious Orders Study at Rush University Medical Center, in Chicago.¹

More than 1,000 older priests, religious sisters and

brothers are participating in this program that tries, through evaluation of the participants' lives, to determine mental and physical conditions, abilities, responses, etc. on an annual basis, ending with the donation of their brains for analysis and comparisons.

The BVM congregation joined this program in 1994 and many at Mount Carmel have participated, as have I.² The evaluation meetings are quite thorough and include recall of oral material, physical evaluations, dexterity, muscle tone and measurements of strength as well as a brief meeting with a psychiatrist. The information is computerized and thoroughly studied.

The team from Rush will be here in June, and we welcome them as friends. Although most of us may not live to see the benefits from the study, the hope is that someday the ravages of this cruel disease will be only history and that we helped a bit.

The Human Side of Alzheimer's

For the present, personnel here who assist the affected sisters with this condition in Caritas Center are fond of them and feel privileged caring for them. Vanessa Hoffmann in cosmetology has a strong bond with her Caritas Center clientele and feels they have much to teach her. For example, one sister who strongly resisted her efforts finally told Vanessa she was frightened when she worked on her but would gladly cooperate if Vanessa simply would tell her what she was doing. Problem solved by the patient!

All caregivers emphasize that the residents have dignity, are not responsible for their unusual behaviors, are

mer's Disease & Safety

always to be treated with respect and never patronized. Conversations also will be more successful when the topics deal with the past and flow naturally without probing questions.

Mary McCauley, BVM, first vice president during construction, was deeply involved in the planning of the dementia areas of Caritas Center. She states,

“The special care units were designed to offer our women as safe and as home-like an environment as possible to help them feel good about themselves, knowing



Mary Jamesita Keller, BVM performs a resistance exercise as part of the Rush Study testing.

they were loved and safe; never feeling diminished because they could not remember. We did not allow practicality to supersede the homelike environment even if that might have been more efficient or easier.

“The individual was paramount, giving each sister her own space and privacy in a setting tailored to her need, avoiding any stimulus like colors or furniture that could cause uncertainty or fear. We planned a chapel where they could pray if this was still a part of their ability.

“Cues were important, so we created personalized identity cabinets outside each room because photos and familiar personal objects make rooms easier to find than names or numbers. The atmosphere in the area is informal and although we needed our women to be secure, we never used the term ‘locked unit.’ The women were to be able to move in and out accompanied by an aide or friend, if this was good for them.”

The crew from HBO films an event at Marian Hall.



THE ALZHEIMER'S PROJECT

Sisters of Charity, BVM who are part of the Rush Study will be featured in one part of a four-part HBO documentary called “The Alzheimer’s Project.”

This multiplatform series takes a close look at groundbreaking discoveries made by the country’s leading scientists, as well as the effects of this debilitating and fatal disease both on those with Alzheimer’s and on their families. Maria Schriver executive produces with HBO’s award-winning “Addiction” team to create this unprecedented television event.

Days and times for the film’s airing are listed in Central Standard Time. Please adjust your schedule according to your viewing location.

Sunday, May 10
8:00 p.m. – “The Memory Loss Tapes”

Monday, May 11
6:30 p.m. – Supplemental film: “Grandpa, Do You Know Who I Am? with Maria Schriver”
7:00 p.m. – “Momentum in Science, Part 1”

Tuesday, May 12
6:00 p.m. – “Caregivers”
***7:00 p.m. – “Momentum in Science, Part 2”**

“Momentum in Science, Part 1 and 2” is a state-of-the-science report that takes viewers inside the laboratories and clinics of 24 leading scientists and physicians, revealing some of the most cutting-edge research advances. Part 2 features the Sisters of Charity, BVM.

Although there is no cure for the disease, HBO’s “The Alzheimer’s Project” shows there is now genuine reason to be hopeful about the future.

*This part features the Sisters of Charity, BVM.

Although most of us may not live to see the benefits from the (Rush) study, the hope is that someday the ravages of this cruel disease will be only history and that we helped a bit.

Deb Doyle, coordinator of pastoral care, shared this story:

“The following experience showed me how important it is for a sister to have her own space and memory cues:

“A resident’s well-loved brother died and I went to her room taking the family picture from her memory cabinet. The sister, who couldn’t communicate in a way we could understand, began her usual monologue.

“Then I showed her the picture, coming back to her brother and telling her how sorry I was to tell her that “Joe” had died. I held her hand while telling her, and she began rambling again, but during the hour after I told her about Joe, I heard her say two words I could make out, ‘Love...Joe!’

“I had been given time to process this with no sense of urgency and finally she was able to tell me that she loved

‘Joe.’ The staff knew I was there and never interrupted us because of their schedules. This is a tribute to the staff and to the purpose of this unit: meeting each sister where she is.”

BVM Associate Ruth Bertels, as her husband’s personal caregiver, shares another aspect of living with the disease:

“I think you cannot stress enough that the caregiver, especially a spouse, must respect doctors’ and nurses’ advice about when it is time to place the patient in a good nursing home. I didn’t do so, and the result was tragic, misplaced love.

“Afterwards, in the nursing home, when I left at night I put my picture on his stand with a simple note telling him when I would return. If he

became agitated, the nurse would show him the picture and that helped.

“As he was dying, he had the strength to clasp my hand! He died one evening and then the nurse and I knelt and prayed. Afterward it seemed that he was with me, saying as he always had, ‘Everything is all right now.’ It is, and I am blessed.”

Two books on this topic that I found very encouraging are *A Dignified Life* by Virginia Bell and David Troxel, and *Creating Moments of Joy for the Person with Alzheimer’s* by Jolene Brackey.

Footnotes:

- 1 The Internet has many helpful resources, the Rush Study among them.
- 2 A total of 194 sisters joined, of whom 86 have died; all but three have completed autopsies.

About the author: Jean Byrne, BVM (Jean Francis) is a researcher in the BVM Center’s Archives Office, in Dubuque, Iowa.

More about the Rush Study

The **Religious Orders Study (ROS)**, which began in 1993, is a collaboration between Rush University Medical Center in Chicago and a number of other medical centers across the country. The study involves more than 1,100 participants from 40 religious groups in 12 states (including the Sisters of Charity, BVM in Dubuque, Iowa and Chicago).

Information in the study helps researchers discover links between changes in the brain as a person ages and the development of Alzheimer’s disease.

The volunteer participants, age 65 and older, agree to yearly medical and psychological evaluation and brain donation after death. The study has outstanding follow-up (95 percent) and autopsy (90 percent) rates. Current emphasis is on enrolling African American and Hispanic Catholic clergy as participants in the study.

The ROS is funded by the National Institute on Aging through 2011. The Institute expounded on the study in its 2006 review for continued funding: “The Religious Orders Study Core is a model for outstanding research, and admired for its thoughtful organization, meticulous management and scientific impact.”

Dr. David A. Bennett, director of the ROS, commented, “The success of [this study] is attributed to the dedication of those...who have volunteered to work with us in combating one of the most common and most feared problems of aging—Alzheimer’s disease.” (*The Palm Tree*, Winter 2006)

According to the Rush website (www.rush.edu/rumc), the ROS involves members of religious groups “because participation is primarily an act of altruism and religious persons have demonstrated a willingness to participate in projects which primarily benefit others, including projects requiring organ donation.”

Rush Study research assistants Brittany Howard (seated l.) and Christine Saba (standing) conduct testing with Alice Caulfield, BVM (Alissio) (seated r.).



HOPE...

When individuals face difficult and challenging times, how does the virtue of hope sustain them? Through such trials, what gives them hope as they journey?

Summarizing the concept of hope presents a difficult challenge. The six reflections in this section bring that challenge into perspective as each one offers a unique insight but also common themes.

The commonality is what makes us all aware of our humanness and reliance on God's love. It is at the darkest times of life that we seek out God's illuminating presence to brighten the moment which provides the hope that we need to move forward in the journey.

God weaves into our lives threads of light, threads woven through days and years to gradually bring to view the purpose and meaning of existence. Common threads woven throughout are essential pieces of purposeful living: community of care, solidarity in action and creative, youthful change that leads to new solutions and growth. These topics lend themselves to illuminating who and what brings us to hope.



HOPE



Live It, Regina!

by Regina Megivern, BVM

The journey to follow Christ that I received seven months ago and that I will be following the rest of my life has been a time of grace, growth and suffering.

My physician and oncologist diagnosed "lymphoma everywhere" and that chemo was necessary. "Chemo?" I asked. "If I am going to have a quality of life that is not life giving for me and the congregation, then I prefer not to do that." But the doctors agreed that because otherwise I was very healthy, I was a viable candidate. The oncologist gave me two goals: think positively

and "drink, drink, drink." When I asked if that meant more than water, he just smiled. I added two more goals: prayer and "go with the flow," both life-giving factors for me.

I made a concerted effort to be positive. I avoided, "Why me, Lord?" I did ask why I was unable to pray Scripture or even remember it. The answer came swiftly: "Live it!"

Yes, I struggled during this time, but I knew it was for my spiritual growth. I needed lessons in patience, giving up control, practicing acceptance and above all, letting go. I finally realized that if I went with the flow, I would be peaceful with God's will. The effects of chemo, weakness, exhaustion, emotional turmoil, extreme pain at times, fear, loneliness and an all-consuming chill were difficult, but they helped me relate to others' sufferings.

Believe me, I learned humility when I lost all my hair. Caps, hats and scarves helped, I guess; at least they helped me practice both humility and simplicity.

God's love and presence was with

me by day and especially during the very painful nights. I knew that love and care would see me through and I felt that loving touch from my community, associates, family, friends and especially our caregivers whose compassion, prayers and encouragement brought hope every day.

My current diagnosis is positive; however, I will be taking Rituxan once every three months for three years to keep me healthy and stable in days ahead. At present I feel better than I have for several years although periodic evaluations will be part of my life.

I don't regret any of this period of growth and I know more than ever that God is sustaining me with love, joy and peace, even if there are times when He may lead me where I think I would rather not go.

About the author: After Regina Megivern, BVM (Verna) ended her teaching career she ministered as director in a house of prayer for 11 years, then served as a hospital chaplain for 10 years before retiring to Mount Carmel in 1993.



Hope: A Moving, Significant Word in Any Language

by Helen Gourlay, BVM

With a new presidential administration, new hope fills the air and airwaves. Across the country and world, we lift up hope that all of us together can make a better, safer, more inclusive and compassionate world.

"We get by with a little hope from our friends." This sign greets me every day at 8th Day Center for Justice, in Chicago, where I work. We used the slogan for an open house. The sign remains on our walls, reminding me daily that I am not alone in my efforts to have my voice heard on the issues of the day. My hope would be meager

if my efforts alone were responsible for changing the world. Working with others at 8th Day and linked with myriads on the Internet, including BVMs and associates, I am in solidarity with others invited and called to make a difference on one issue or another.

Through struggle and hard work, positive changes have come over the years in the country, church and world. Hope inspires actions to bring into reality a future world where each person will be given dignity, where dissent will be permitted without punishment, where wars and torture end.

Before the presidential inauguration, 8th Day participated in Camp Hope. Subtitled "Countdown to Change," vari-

ous peace groups for 19 days before the inauguration took turns holding signs near President-elect Obama's home in Hyde Park, encouraging him not to forget his campaign promises. Persons, including myself, took a turn standing in January cold and snow, not in protest, but in a spirit of celebration and anticipation (hope). This was an action of hope.

In September, 8th Day will celebrate 35 years of presence and action on behalf of hope for a better world. I'm glad, with the staff and others, to be a promoter and doer of hope.

About the author: Helen Gourlay, BVM (Frances Helen) volunteers at 8th Day Center, in Chicago.



BVMs Theresa Caluori (Martin Jerome) and Bette Gambonini (Esther Mary) (l.) and Helen Gourlay (Frances Helen) (r.) keep vigil at Camp Hope, near Obama's Hyde Park home.



Terms of Hope: Responsible Lending and Long-Term Sustainability

by Gretchen Parrish, BVM Associate

As a member of the BVM committee SEA (Shareholder Education and Advocacy), 2008 was a very interesting year. On one hand, the market was grim. Many of us watched our personal investments shrink at a pace with only one unhappy precedent. On the other hand, perhaps the most effective stimulus for change is dissatisfaction with present circumstances. There is open conversation about the ethics of corporate decisions for the first time in recent memory and the debate appears to be moving public sentiment in favor of needed changes.

The change in the tone and volume of the debate over lending practices is

the most notable and promising for me. Not so long ago there was little meaningful debate on the subject. There were only a handful of people working on corporate responsibility and a few regulators suggesting that consolidated debt and mortgage obligations (CDOs and CMOs) needed to be better regulated. Mark to market was not the best accounting strategy because the combination was leading to very profitable, unsustainable, and predatory lending practices.

Nobody was willing to engage in the debate to the extent necessary for real change. CMOs and CDOs, and credit default swaps (similar to insurance policies for CMOs and CDOs), were printing money for investors and the loosening of lending standards meant a tremendous rise in home ownership and consumer spending. There was neither a market nor a public rationale for change.

A quick Google search will yield plenty of video from earlier hearings on the subject. It is particularly inspiring to see the shift in both market and public perception from hearings in 2003 to the present day. Despite its late arrival, hearing powerful people use the words "responsible lending" gives me great hope that we will see better regulation and protection in the future.

The other encouraging shift for me is in the area of executive compensa-

tion. I support the ideas that executives should be paid well for their leadership and that their compensation should be tied to investor interest in the company. However, there comes a point when too much cash is being siphoned out of corporate accounts into executive bank accounts.

Imagine how much smaller the Wall Street bailout would have been had the excessive compensation over the last 10 years been available in each company's capital reserve. It is encouraging to hear the idea of reasonable limits floating around the ether. It gives me hope that there will be future protection for small investors who have been able to do little more than watch their investment checks go directly to the CEO's paycheck.

There appears to be a global awakening to the idea that short-term profit is not as crucial as long-term sustainability. It gives me great hope that we will see a rebirth of personal responsibility in corporate decision making. SEA gives me a wonderful opportunity to participate, in however limited a capacity, in the process of reflection and change. What better seat could there be for this moment in time?

About the author: Gretchen Parrish is a BVM Associate and member of SEA. She resides in Indianapolis, Ind.



A Blighted Earth. What Gives Me Hope?

by Gayle Brabec, BVM

What gives me hope in the face of environmental degradation?

Mountaintop removal is a serious problem. Coal companies move the earth surface in order to strip mine the coal lying beneath it. This relocated

topsoil blocks streams and causes land slides, a big problem in Kentucky, West Virginia and Tennessee. Recently terrified citizens across the country witnessed the spill of a billion gallons of coal ashy sludge from a retention pond. This spill covered 300 acres, destroying homes and waterways. Coal companies occasionally display a green area that has been restored, but this does not really address the destruction of the landscape or the practical reuse of the land.

Beyond the mountains, in the cities, developers in places like Lexington, Ky. have had a free hand in building new suburbs, while abandoning older areas. Besides increasing pollution, this geographic spread of housing and commercial property hinders the possibility of mass transportation.

In the midst of this waste what gives me hope? Diverging from a complacent



Gayle Brabec, BVM (Luellen) enjoys time working outdoors.

HOPE

past, even skeptics are beginning to believe that global warming is a reality. In Kentucky, Governor Steve Breshear has appointed a director to address environmental problems.

What gives me hope? The reaction to the exorbitant gas prices and the troubled economy motivated more commuters to car pool, seek public transportation or bike to work. Small hybrid cars are much in demand while SUVs are available at enticing prices.

What gives me hope? Universities are

researching alternate forms of energy, and high school and elementary school students now have an interest in recycling. This serious reason to hope stems from a recognition that creation is God's handiwork and not ours to destroy.

What gives me hope? The urban agricultural boom in cities such as New York, Boston and San Francisco provides a great way for low-income families to enjoy a healthier diet.

What gives us all hope? Besides a broad realization of the truth of global

warming, growth in the use of public transportation, hybrid cars, the agricultural boom in urban areas and university research of alternate forms of energy, the creativity of God's people gives us hope.

About the author: Gayle Brabec, BVM (Luellen) is the director of the Life Center in Frenchburg, Ky. Its vision is economic stability for the people of Menifee County through literacy, gardening, sustainability and participation in revitalization efforts in the county.



Insights Project Visions of Hope

by Pat Peach, BVM

In the fall of 2006, Cheryl Ybarra, a gifted leader in our parish, envisioned an outreach ministry open to all. She and our pastor, Father Ray, hoped to serve a hot dinner every Friday evening to neighbors in need. Although we do not have many homeless people in our immediate neighborhood, there are day laborers, low-income families, older

folks, some who struggle with addictions and many who can barely stretch their budget to the end of the month. About 120 parishioners responded to the invitation in the parish bulletin to get involved and were quickly divided into service teams. Thus was born our Project Hope.

Every Friday afternoon about 20 volunteers arrive at the parish hall—some set tables, others draw kitchen duty. On Fridays I look forward to leaving school promptly so I can arrive in time to be part of this wonderful parish project. I needn't worry; when the guests have gone, there are stacks of dishes to be washed and dried and put away until another week.

Donations to St. Vincent de Paul Society fund the groceries, and many loving hands slice, sauté and serve the dinner to 90-130 of our neighbors. Our guests come for a good meal, and all of

us—guests and volunteers—leave each week grateful for this project of hope.

The students I teach at Pasadena City College are another great source of hope to me, hope for the future. Ours is a two-year college that opens the doors to everyone; and everyone is who comes. From all over the world, with every level of insight and inclination, they come, some to learn a skill, some to earn credits for transfer.

I love teaching them, hoping they may come to like math, of course, but grateful just to walk with them a while on their journey to adulthood. One trait that I find endearing about this generation is their tolerance for others and their ready acceptance of diversity. Twenty years ago educational conferences held diversity workshops in abundance. Something took hold, and today in my students I see the lived results.

The third great source of my hope is the wonderful work done by nonprofits, groups like ourselves who carry on the purpose for which they exist, promoting health care, jobs, safe neighborhoods, adequate food and water, regard for human rights, loving care for the planet and, fortunately, much more.

How gratifying to see young people drawn to these issues, and nonprofits providing the invitation and opportunity to be involved. For example, at a family gathering last Christmas I watched children and teenagers oohing and aahing over their gifts. Brianna, 17, unwrapped a thick tome and immediately cracked it open and started reading. A year ago the teens and preteens were immersed in one of the *Twilight* books. Curious about her interests this year, I asked Brianna later what book



Kitchen workers volunteer with Project Hope, including Cheryl Ybarra (second from left) and Pat Peach, BVM (Janet Irene) (third from left).

she had received. She gave me a big smile and turned it around so I could see *Doctors Without Borders* across the cover. My aunt told me that Brianna had also listed “donations for Darfur” on her Christmas gift list.

With so much good and so many caring people in our world, we certainly can be hopeful about the future!

About the author: Patricia Peach, BVM (Janet Irene) teaches math at Pasadena City College, in Pasadena, Calif.



Dean Manternach spends a quiet moment with his 14-year-old daughter, Thea.

What Gives You Hope in the Future?

by Dean P. Manternach

My wife, Linda, and I have four children. As a parent I can testify, along with many parents, that children are both signs and agents of hope. The curriculum of modern family life in a technological age requires renewed simplicity and seeing things sacramentally. Children can be sources of divine surprise and renew us in hope.

Children are signs of hope because they show resilience in the face of difficulty and that reshapes all of us. As a parent I am struck by the resilience of my own children to withstand the forces that hurt them at school or at home. They can forgive easily. They accept persons for who they are, not by external characteristics alone.

When I help my youngest child, who struggles to read, hope looks like perseverance tackling insurmountable texts. When parenting a child through a

moral defect, hope emerges with positive behavior changes. Children are not only signs of hope for the growth they witness, but also for the changes they effect in us as parents and in community. Hope has a communal dimension.

Our children are agents of hope. Agents effect change. They point out our weakness, call us to new awareness of hypocrisy, ask difficult questions and desire us to be faithful to the things we say we value. They lovingly accept us in our faults and this can empower us to change and correct them.

Through their many activities they call us outward, expanding the circle of care from our own self-interest to caring for others and the wider world. When we are called to conversion and become more of who Christ calls us to be, what better future could we hope for? We become families embodying hope when we look to each other in daily activities and expect to be renewed. Hope is born at home.

About the author: Dean Manternach is chair and assistant professor of religious studies at Clarke College, in Dubuque, Iowa. He is the brother of LaDonna Manternach, BVM.

Salt Briefs



Ann Ellen Quirk, BVM will be honored this month with the De La Salle Award from Lewis University, in Romeoville,

Ill. This prestigious award is presented each year to individuals who provide extraordinary service and leadership for the benefit of the community and region.

Ann Ellen is pastoral associate at St. Rose Parish in Wilmington, Ill., where she also founded the Kuzma Care Cottage, a warehouse food pantry. Ann Ellen continues her work

at the pantry and in the community, providing service to those in need.



Anita Therese Hayes, BVM was recently honored by Operation: New View Community Action Agency for her nine

years of service on the board. Anita Therese served as the board delegate for Dubuque Area Congregations United (DACU), an associate member of Operation: New View.

Operation: New View serves low-income people in three counties in eastern Iowa. The organization focuses on planning and operating programs designed to eliminate poverty and provide ways to help people reach their full potential.

Anita Therese enjoyed her time on the board. She said, “Operation: New View is wonderful! They continue to do such good work for the poor.”



Mary McCauley, BVM (Mercedie) is honored by the Chicago New Sanctuary Coalition this month for her work as an immigration

justice leader. The inaugural celebration “Immigration Justice: Postville and Beyond” honors Mary for her powerful witness to the struggle for justice at the time of the massive immigration raid at Agri Processing Plant in May 2008 and her efforts to meet the needs of the immigrant families and the Postville community.



Loyola University, Chicago, has announced that fundraising for the Carolyn Farrell, BVM Endowed Chair in Women and

Leadership is complete. They now work to identify top scholars to fill the chair. Fundraising efforts were made possible by friends of the Gannon Center and Mundelein alumnae.

Carolyn Farrell, BVM (Lester) was the founding director of the Ann Ida Gannon, BVM Center after facilitating its development when Mundelein College merged with Loyola in 1991. The Gannon Center’s mission is to educate and foster women leaders to transform their environment for the common good, and prepare women to lead extraordinary lives.

Volunteerism Commands True Engagement in Service

by Elizabeth Avalos, BVM

The phrase “Not a day OFF but a day ON” was coined in the late 1990s as a motto for people to engage in a service project on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Over the years, indeed, many people have done service on that day. The downside of this day of service, however, is many people only do it once, instead of often, or consistently, or persistently in order to make a positive change in their local area. The upside, on the other hand, indicates that many take the concept of service beyond the one-day affair.

These unknown, unsung people decide that they can for a length of time engage in service as a volunteer and stand in solidarity with those who are vulnerable members of our human family whether in or out of this country.

One such person who became a year-long volunteer and ministered in Ecuador is Jennifer Stiefel. Her leap to becoming a long-term volunteer did not just happen, similar to most individuals. For these people it takes time, and a great deal of listening to one’s heart desires and the whispers of God’s urgings.

Jennifer listened carefully to the words being spoken at Clarke College, in Dubuque, Iowa where she was a student, words that called her to care for others. She listened to the faculty at Clarke who encouraged and supported her desire to give service. Besides support, Clarke also provided opportunities for her to move out of her comfort zone and find new modes of living out Catholic social teaching in order to better understand the BVM core value of justice and the Gospel message of peace and solidarity.

Jennifer’s first volunteer experience while a student at Clarke was during spring break her freshmen year when she went with a group of Clarke students to Hesed House in Aurora, Ill. Rose Marie Lorentzen, BVM (St. Carol) was the founder and director of Hesed House. Jennifer returned there dur-



Jenny Stiefel shares her time with students from Nuevo Mundo (New World) School, in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

ing spring break of her sophomore and junior years as well.

In the summer after her junior year Jennifer went with a Clarke delegation to Ecuador for 10 days to volunteer in Durán, an impoverished area outside of Guayaquil. For her those 10 days were a life-transforming experience. As Jennifer said, “It gave me the motivation to spend a longer time in Ecuador.”

After graduation, Jennifer volunteered for a year in Durán and lived at Rostro de Cristo Center. During that year she and other volunteers facilitated several retreats. Her interaction and building of relationships with the economically disadvantaged of Durán was at the medical dispensary where she worked in the mornings and at Nuevo Mundo where she taught in the afternoons.

Nuevo Mundo’s mission is unique. Started by BVM Associates Pat McTeague and Sonya Rendón, the mission educates pre-K to secondary school students from the poor who live in Durán and the affluent who live in Guayaquil. The morning students are the more affluent and they provide a portion of the school’s funding by paying tuition. Students from Durán are bussed to Nuevo Mundo in the afternoon and are able to get a better education than they would in their own city.

Jennifer learned much about God, neighbor and life during her time in

Durán. “What was so fascinating to me when I went to Ecuador was that I intended to fill the needs of the people there—as it says in Matthew 25, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned. I intended to be the servant.

“What I discovered was that through the hospitality and generosity of the people I met, I was the one who was served. My neighbors generously opened their houses to me and fed me, when I was sick they took care of me. They comforted me and welcomed me, the stranger, into their culture.”

Jennifer is now teaching theology at Wahlert Catholic High School in Dubuque, Iowa. She brings her experiences of service from Ecuador and Hesed House into her classroom.

Long before President Barak Obama called all of us to give service in our own communities, Jennifer took seriously the call to caring for one’s neighbor and followed her heart’s desire by engaging in BVM ministries both in and out of this country. “As human beings, we need each other,” said Jennifer. “I’ve been very blessed in my life and will try to offer something to others whenever I have the means.”

About the author: Elizabeth Avalos, BVM (St. Augustine) is an associate coordinator for the BVM congregation and resides in Sunnyvale, Calif.

One Volunteer's Journey Shows Hope



What I discovered was that through the hospitality and generosity of the people I met, I was the one who was served.

—Jennifer Stiefel, volunteer

Salt

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A Call for Nationwide Awareness and Commemoration of the Postville Immigration Raid

Tuesday, May 12 marks the first anniversary of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid on Postville, Iowa involving 389 workers.

You are invited to stand in solidarity with these people and their families as many gather for this nationwide day of remembrance to promote awareness of the devastating effects of raids across the country.

The event is a unified call for comprehensive immigration reform, just labor practices, family unity and an end to raids.

The Prayer Vigil and Remembrance at St. Bridget's Church, in Postville, begins at 4:00 p.m., and ends with a solidarity walk to Agriprocessors.

Nationwide, all are urged to participate in various ways:

- All faith communities can sound a call to justice, such as ringing of the church bells or blowing of the shofar, at 10:00 a.m., the time the raid began.
- Text of the prayer vigil and remembrance will be available for adaptation for local use after April 15 at www.postvillest-bridget.org.
- Individuals and towns are encouraged to don red ribbons as in Postville on the day of the raid.