



VIM Happenings

Autumn/Winter 2010-11

Volunteers in Mission – Bernardine Franciscan Sisters

Summer Reading Experience

Twenty-five VIM missionaries participated in a two-day Summer Reading Experience from June 24 to June 25. The missionaries ranged in age from 13 through 74, most coming from the Reading area. The mission service commenced with a Commissioning Ceremony during which all the participants received a TAU cross as a sign of their Franciscan commitment to serve others.

After advertising the event and recruiting the volunteers, S. Lynn selected four service sites: the New Journey Soup Kitchen, the Greater Berks Food Bank, Mary's Shelter and St. Joseph Villa.

The volunteers were divided into groups of four to five, each group serving a specific need at the sites. At New Journey, five volunteers prepared meals for some 120 people from the local neighborhood and then served them a simple but nutritious meal. S. Shaun Kathleen who served as a volunteer had this comment: "I was inspired each day as I served at the soup kitchen. The gratitude and graciousness of those served touched me deeply. I received much more than I gave. It was an honor to participate."

"I received much more than I gave. It was an honor to participate." Sister Shaun Kathleen.

At the Greater Berks Food Bank, Ed Cox, the supervisor and overseer of the warehouse, was pleased with the volunteers' sharing their time and energy and stated that the food bank serves several thousands of needy in Reading and the surrounding towns. Here, the volunteers packaged bags of food for nearby shelters and for individuals in need of some assistance. Lori Wilson, one of the VIM missionaries stated, "It was overwhelming to think that there are thousands of people in the area that go to bed hungry each night." Working with those less fortunate than ourselves certainly gives us pause and an appreciation for all that we have.



Volunteers joyfully work at the Greater Berks Food Bank.



These volunteers experience joy in giving to others at Mary's Shelter!

At Mary's Shelter, a home for young women with children, five volunteers worked on the grounds of the shelter. They weeded, hoed, planted and watered the outside gardens. The work was tedious as the ground was hard and dry, but as volunteer David Quinter said, "The work was done with great joy." At St. Joseph Villa, a residence for the retired Bernardine Sisters, volunteers prepared the tables and decorations for Sister Charity's 100th birthday celebration. The volunteers were elated that they could be part of such a milestone in Sister Charity's life!

Although the Reading Experience was short term, it was packed with the joy of giving. When the day's work was completed, the volunteers shared a meal together and then shared their experiences with other volunteers. They were grateful not only for the opportunity to serve others, but also for the blessings realized in their own lives. Linda Thompson Sakuit stated on the last day of service, "It was such an honor volunteering the last two days with the other participants in mission work. It gave me a clear and profound sense of how giving of one's time and self can lift spirits, both for the giver and the receiver."

VIM is grateful for all those who answered the call to serve God's needy in the Reading area. A special thank-you goes to S. Clare for her service in preparing all the meals for the volunteers. Hopefully, the Reading Experience will be repeated next year!



Volunteers pause for a photo after working at St. Joseph Villa!

VIM Serves in the DR

This summer a group of four women volunteers served in the barrio of Los Tres Brazos in Santo Domingo, DR, with the Bernardine Franciscan missionary sisters. The group consisted of a nurse, two ESL teachers and a music teacher. The daily schedule was filled from morning until evening with serving the poor in the barrio.

Amy John, a practicing nurse, worked with the local doctor in the mission clinic. There, they treated several children and adults suffering from a variety of illnesses. After working at the Clínica Médica, Amy, along with Marielle Lafaro, a teacher and translator,



Marielle and Amy enjoy spending some time with the local children in the barrio.

visited several ill, aged and infirm people in the community. A local community member guided them as they traveled through the streets of the barrio. Marielle commented on her experience with the local people: "The Dominicans were all overwhelmingly happy to meet and speak to us. They all seemed to really enjoy our presence in their neighborhood. I believe that our relationship with the local community and with the sisters was mutually life-giving."

Teresa Grasso and Annie delCollo taught ESL to both children and adults. Sister Valdair, the Director of the Mission, was particularly interested in the volunteers' teaching children with reading deficiencies and difficulties. In addition to the teaching schedule, Annie also taught music to the students at the mission school. Annie commented, "I teach them songs that are fun and that help them learn vocabulary and pronunciation. I also play and sing in the choir and teach music lessons to Vanessa, one of the young women who sings and plays in the local choir."

Living in community, praying together, working with the sisters and serving the poor made this experience an outstanding one for the four volunteers. Marielle observed, "We all reaped the blessings of the relationships we built..."



Marielle, Amy and Teresa pray with the local children while Annie (bottom) chats with the adults at the mission beauty school.



I highly recommend volunteering in Santo Domingo to anyone considering giving of themselves to serve the Lord. By serving our brother and sisters, we grow spiritually, and God will indeed bless us in more ways than we can imagine."

Don't pass up an opportunity of a life time! Volunteer!

Volunteering in Appalachia May 2010 – Pat Bader

Volunteering among the poor in the US is different from doing so in other countries. In the Appalachian mountain area of eastern Kentucky, many people are indeed poor, but we speak the same language with different accents and pronunciations, and we share the same national heritage. In many ways, volunteering in Appalachia was less stressful than my previous ten volunteer trips to Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.

This Kentucky volunteer trip was a follow-up to last year's. Donors to last year's trip shared in this trip by extension. However, this year I didn't take the quantities of children's clothes and school supplies, purchased with donor's contributions, to Appalachia as I did last year to the Dominican Republic Mission Center.

In Appalachia, we divided into two smaller groups to repair the homes of two families in David, Kentucky, 135 miles south east of Lexington.

The husband at one of the homes, disabled from a construction accident, was caregiver to his dad who died of cancer last March. His younger brother who has some physical and mental challenges assisted us with the work. His wife cleans rooms at a hotel in nearby Prestonsburg. A widow owned the other home where we worked. She works only part time at the Mission Gift Shop. Her husband recently died of cancer.

The limited income of both parties prevented them from purchasing building materials to repair their own homes. The donations of the 20 of us volunteers helped purchase the needed materials.

We worked for five days to repair and improve their homes. We visited with the families as we worked on their homes. They talked about their faith and trust in Jesus. We got to know them and became friends with them. We found out that they face the same types of challenges and issues as we face daily. They openly discussed their situations with us because they trusted us, making us feel part of their community. They expressed their appreciation of our help in refurbishing their homes.

Each evening back at our living quarters, we gathered to reflect and pray about our experiences of the day. We shared the positives and negatives of our work and interactions, and we got to know each other better and became our own small community.

Interacting with the families during the day and sharing with our small community in the evenings were the special blessings of the volunteer week for me.



Pat Bader, a missionary for several years, joins VIM in Appalachia.



Letter from the VIM Director

Mother Veronica Gredowska, the American foundress of our Bernardine Franciscan Congregation, was prayerful, humble and brave. She struggled most of her life to live a contemplative life, and she wanted to spend the rest of her time in a cloister in Zakliczyn. The Holy Spirit intervened, and she was told that she was appointed Superior of the small group of Sisters going to America to teach Polish immigrants.

At the age of 51, elderly in 1894, Mother Veronica started a whole new venture in her life, throwing herself completely into the hands of Divine Providence. There were many unknowns, including the inability to speak the language, a lack of money, and unfamiliarity with the new land of America.

We who are of part of Volunteers in Mission follow in the footsteps of Mother Veronica as we are "Called to Trust" as this ongoing mission unfolds to bring volunteers to serve the needs of the poor with dignity and love.

Join us either by volunteering your talents, praying for the volunteers or contributing funds so that we can do more to help transform the world.

Blessings, Sister Lynn

Congratulations!

VIM Member Weds!



Bryan Otruba and Camille Cloutier exchanged marriage vows on July 17, 2010 at Sacred Heart Chapel at the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters' Motherhouse. We wish Camille and Bryan many happy years together!

VIM and the ESL Program at St. Joseph Villa in Reading

Three members of the St. Joseph's Villa staff and their ESL instructors met with members of the VIM Advisory Board during the June Summer Mission Trip in Reading, Pennsylvania. Brenda Chimelis, Lydia Rodriguez and Fior Ysabel shared some of their experiences in the ESL program at the Villa.

The women, in a class of six students, meet voluntarily during their lunch hour with instructors Sister de Marie and Sister Karen Anne to improve their English skills.

Brenda, Lydia and Fior addressed the importance of the ESL program in helping them gain more confidence in their ability to communicate with residents and staff at the Villa as well as teachers, doctors, and other professionals in the community. They stated that the program has also helped them understand what their own children are experiencing in school and how to handle the demands of assimilating into a new culture. In the past year, the women have enthusiastically taken on the more rigorous task of preparing for their citizenship examinations.

Sister de Marie, who has taught immigrants as well as first grade for over fifty years, works to develop the students' confidence and understanding of basic

language skills: learning the alphabet, identifying sound symbol relationships, and improving vocabulary and handwriting skills. She employs a variety of techniques that utilize traditional flash cards, contemporary reading and vocabulary books, and impromptu games.

Sister Karen Anne, an instructor at Alvernia University, focuses on reinforcing basic language skills, developing comprehension skills, and studying the basic requirements for citizenship. Sister highlighted the importance of using materials that are meaningful, relevant and fun as well as practical.

Both instructors are passionate in their effort to encourage the students to develop their conversational skills with the



Sister Karen Anne enjoys her time with Fior in the ESL program.



Sister de Marie works with Lydia (center) and Brenda (left) on their English language skills.

residents and employees at the Villa. Sister de Marie and Sister Karen Anne form an exceptionally talented team with a broad range of experience. Their combined expertise provides for an educational program that is tailored to meet the needs of adults on staff at Villa St. Joseph.

VIM is most grateful to the Sisters for their dedication in working with the local staff at the Villa! The success of their program is evident in the students' happiness with their progress and their continued commitment to meeting with the Sisters over the last two years.

*"This is our calling: to heal wounds, to bind what is broken, to bring home those who are lost."
St. Francis of Assisi*

VIM Returns to Appalachia

From May 15 through May 22, a group of twenty VIM volunteers traveled to Kentucky to repair homes for two families in the eastern section of the Appalachian Mountains. The volunteers consisted of ten Alvernia University students and ten adults from PA, MA, NY and NJ. Prior to setting out for KY, the volunteers participated in a Commissioning Ceremony during which all the volunteers committed themselves to the Franciscan service to the poor.

The volunteers worked at two different sites about five miles apart. They worked on painting walls, replacing and installing wallboard, spackling, power washing and gardening. The more knowledgeable volunteers toiled on the tedious work of replacing and installing new plumbing, cabinets, windows, fascia, gutters and soffits. The families at both sites assisted with the work whenever they could. Although the work was demanding, it was fulfilling especially since the people so much appreciated our commitment to assist them. All of the volunteers felt that they received more than what they gave.

A few volunteers paid a visit to the site where they worked last year. "It was a delight to see Ruby and her clan again. I was also glad to see that they kept up with the house repairs. The place really looked great. Knowing that we had some impact on the lives of others is cause for joy! It reinvigorates your desire to lend a hand to others," said one of the missionaries.

Although this was a short term mission, all involved felt blessed to have had the opportunity to serve Jesus in others. Living and sharing in community and working with those less fortunate help us all realize the many blessings in our own lives.



In Kentucky volunteers at a local work site pose for a picture with family members.



VIM Needs Your Help!

Presently, VIM with the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters is planning to build a volunteer residence in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Each year several individuals and groups from various colleges and parishes willingly leave the comforts of their homes to share their talents and time to serve God's people in one of the poorest countries in this hemisphere. With the growing number of volunteers willing to serve the poor at this mission, the need for adequate housing is imperative.

The total cost of the project is approximately \$66,000 dollars. Generous individual donors have supported this project and have donated \$11,000 to assist us. We are most grateful for their gracious support; however, we must raise another \$55,000 to complete this endeavor.

How much we would appreciate your kind assistance in this undertaking. Whatever you can afford will be most appreciated. We thank you in advance!

You can make donations directly to S. Lynn, or you can donate on line at www.VIMbernardinefranciscan.org.

God bless you and keep you in His care!

**S. Lynn Pascoe,
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Please help our dream house a reality!

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