

Mercy Works

Volume 3 • Number 1

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Northeast Community • Committed to Compassionate Service



Dear Friends in Mercy:

One of our Northeast Community sisters has a bumper sticker on her car that reads, "If you want peace, work for justice." This slogan reminds us that human rights are inextricably linked to the state of the world in conflict.

As a community of peace, the Sisters of Mercy are committed to serving those whose lives have been shattered by war. We are dedicated to witnessing the conditions of the oppressed, speaking out against violence in all forms and educating others about the resulting violation of human rights. In this issue of *Mercy Works*, we feature just a small part of the work being done by sisters and associates in the Mercy Northeast Community to address our Critical Concerns for non-violence and social justice.

Over the past holiday season, we were truly gratified to receive your good wishes and generous financial support. Your gifts to the Northeast Community's Ministry Fund and to the care of our retired sisters will continue to make a difference. Thank you. We celebrate your connection to Mercy!

Sincerely in Mercy,

Ellen Kurtz, RSM, President
Mercy Northeast Community

Mercy students sign on for peace and justice

Sisters of Mercy gather each year at the gates of Ft. Benning in Georgia the weekend before Thanksgiving to protest the U.S. Army's School of the Americas (SOA). Last November, Sisters of Mercy from the Northeast Community were joined by eight students from St. Joseph College in Connecticut and St. Joseph's College and Catherine McAuley High School in Maine.

Raising consciousness at Fort Benning's gates began in 1990 when Father Roy Bourgeois, the founder of SOA Watch, and nine others fasted in response to the massacre of six Jesuit priests and two companions in El Salvador on November 16, 1989. In 2001, the SOA was renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), but by any name it is a combat training school for Latin American soldiers and its graduates are known to torture, rape, assassinate and massacre.

The SOA weekend of 2007 opened with an Ignatian Family Teach-in which included song, prayer, and guest speakers. Individuals shared inspirational ideas and discussed justice issues.

Members of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas leadership team, Sisters Mary Waskowiak and Linda Werthman, were guest speakers and participants. Linda's presentation at the teach-in on Friday evening was inspiring and enthusiastic. Mary spoke passionately to the 25,000 people who gathered at the gate on Sunday morning in remembrance of those who were killed in Central and South America at the hands of soldiers trained at the SOA. Mary pleaded, "*No mas! No more!*"

Allowing herself to be affected and changed, Melissa Smith's first time at the SOA will most likely not be her last. "This was one of the most intense, empowering and moving weekends of my life," said the senior at St. Joseph College, Connecticut.



TOP: Sister Dale Jarvis with representatives from St. Joseph's College, Maine. From left, Rebecca Hilton, campus minister, Dale, and students Amanda Proulx and Joshua Bell

MIDDLE: Mercy bless Institute President Sister Mary Waskowiak before her message of peace at the gates of the fort

BOTTOM: White crosses, with printed names of SOA victims, are left at the fort's gates during the vigil

Activist and educator brings it all home

At five o'clock on any given weekday evening in Burlington, Vermont, you might find Sister Miriam Ward and other citizen advocates at the top of busy Church Street standing peacefully in opposition to the war and U.S. occupation of Iraq. For over 30 years, Miriam has been a highly respected presence in the community as an educator, writer and organizer for peace and human rights. She has even inspired a poem by fellow activist, Bob Green. See below.

Miriam's work, however, does not end at the local level. She has been a first-hand witness to global human rights issues, traveling to Tunisia, Syria, Israel and the West Bank while doing post-doctoral studies. She has led some 30 alternative pilgrimage tours to biblical lands and made nearly annual trips to the Holy Land. While there, she works among oppressed people and

writes home about their situation. These experiences have resulted in her helping to found two local organizations: Vermonters for a Just Peace in Palestine/Israel, and the Burlington-Bethlehem-Arad Sister City Program.

Miriam recently retired as an adjunct professor in religious studies at St. Michael's College in Vermont. A founding and active member of Pax Christi Burlington, a chapter of a national Catholic peace organization, she continues to write and lecture on human rights and the Palestinian/Israeli

conflict. She works with many organizations in the West Bank and Gaza.

Miriam recently contributed to a book resulting from the 2007 Women's Conference at St. Thomas University, Miami, Florida. Her chapter deals with the lives of six Palestinian women, including an illiterate woman leader from Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Bethlehem. *Women Moving Forward, Vol. 3, Justice: Toward a System of Right Relationships*, published by Peace Education Foundation, is available on Amazon.com.

Sister of Mercy (for Miriam Ward, RSM)

Sister of mercy
With mercy we're blest
Lover of truth
Friend to the oppressed
Eyes of a witness
 softened by grief
Steadfastly drawing
On the well of belief

Sister of action
Playful and kind
She wants us to picket
Are you out of your mind?
All right I'll stand with a sign
And I'll sign with a flourish
Good hope and good friendship
I somehow will nourish

But you should go first
I prefer that you lead
And somehow I'll follow
Dear sister in need

— Bob Green



Sister Miriam Ward, second from left, at a peace rally in Burlington, Vermont

MERCY ASSOCIATE DR.

Laurie Gagne, professor at St. Michael's College, Colchester, Vermont, will address the topic of Catholic teaching on war and peace, on April 16. A follow-up film and discussion session will be held on April 30.

As the first of a three-part series entitled *The Legacy of Catholic Social Teaching*, the sessions are aimed at stimulating parish life and ministry and will be held in a parish setting.

Two additional engagements will be devoted to the topics of "Immigration" and "Economic Justice."

The series is presented by Pax Christi Burlington and made possible by a grant from the Sisters of Mercy and the Mercy Peace Initiative.

Winner of 50/50 raffle

September 26, 2007 was an exciting day for Florida resident Mrs. Rosella Aronica when she received the news that she was the winner of the Sisters of Mercy 50/50 raffle. "I don't believe it! I've never won anything before!" she exclaimed. She flew to Rhode Island where Sister Ellen Kurtz presented her with a check for \$7,500 in the Community's Cumberland, Rhode Island office.

Originally from Long Island, New York, Rosella moved to Florida several years after her daughter Michele, now vice president of the Northeast Community, became a Sister of Mercy in Portland, Maine.

Rosella said she plans to donate part of her winnings back to the Sisters of Mercy and to travel to Italy with her son next summer. With an age-defying enthusiasm and exuberance, she tells us that the secret to her health and vitality includes preserving social ties with friends, walking regularly, and practicing yoga and tai chi. "Since I've been here, Michele keeps reminding me to stand up straight," she said.

A total of \$15,000 was raised from the 50/50 raffle and will help the Sisters of Mercy improve the quality of life for poor, sick, and uneducated persons — especially women and children — through the Ministry Fund.



Mrs. Rosella Aronica, left, receives check from Sister Ellen Kurtz

A Legacy that comes from your heart

When the subject of planned giving arises, some non-profit organizations promote a dizzying array of "products" wrapped in financial incentives. Benefits such as estate tax savings, income tax deductions, and/or income-for-life plans are emphasized to entice donors into making a legacy gift.

Do financial benefits like tax savings really motivate folks to make planned gifts? For most people, no. Legacy gifts come from the heart. A bequest or other planned gift to the Sisters of Mercy might say, "We believe in the work of your ministry and we want it to thrive for generations to come," or "A Sister of Mercy has made a difference in my life and I am saying 'thank you.'"

Whether it is a simple bequest of cash or another asset such as stock, a retirement plan, insurance or real estate, a planned gift shows your enduring commitment to the work and lives of the Sisters of Mercy.

Of course, the Sisters of Mercy Northeast Community does not provide financial advice, but encourages you to consult your legal and financial advisors concerning any long-term charitable giving plan. If you or your advisor would like specific wording for bequests, or more information about the above options, please contact Trish Sweeney at (802) 865-6835 ext. 136, or e-mail tsweeney@mercynortheast.org.

Mercy WORKS

COMMITTED TO COMPASSIONATE SERVICE

ELLEN KURTZ, RSM
PRESIDENT OF THE NORTHEAST COMMUNITY

EDITORIAL BOARD:
GERRY P. SULLIVAN, DIRECTOR

MERCY NORTHEAST DEVELOPMENT TEAM:
IRENE NERNEY, RSM;
TRISH SWEENEY; AND DOREEN TUCKER

CONSULTANT: ANNE VACCAREST, RSM
DESIGNER: CHLOE VAN AKEN

15 HIGHLAND VIEW ROAD
CUMBERLAND, RI 02864-1124
PHONE: (401) 333-6333
FAX: (401) 333-6450

Women Helping Women

After 66 years of service, Sister of Mercy Anastasia Smith and five other "retired" sisters began teaching English and classes in U.S. Citizenship two years ago to the burgeoning refugee/immigrant population in Manchester, New Hampshire. Dedicated to helping women, the ministry offers a key element — child care — managed by the sisters and four retired public school teachers.

The ministry is thriving. Twenty-two women, mostly from war-torn African countries, come to classes twice a week for two hours a day. Five are now studying to become citizens; three have already become citizens; and two have filed citizenship applications. Anastasia finds that her students are extremely motivated about creating a better life for their children. She adds, "The women are remarkable and so eager to learn. Today, after working all night cleaning bathrooms at the airport, two women came to class before they had any sleep!"

Your support of the Mercy Northeast Ministry Fund would help ministries like Anastasia's to serve refugees and other victims of violence.



Save the Date!

The Sisters of Mercy will sponsor and host *A Celebration of Mercy* on May 8, when Governor Donald L. Carcieri will present **The Governor's Award for Service to Rhode Island** to Marie Langlois, managing director of Washington Trust Investors.

From 5 to 7 p.m., there will be wine tasting, hors d'oeuvres and the award ceremony at a location to be announced. This celebration will be followed by a 7:30 p.m. special performance of *The Drowsy Chaperone* at the Providence Performing Arts Center.

Tickets are \$125 per person. To purchase tickets, or for more information, contact Doreen Tucker at (401) 333-6333 ext. 15.

2007 Christmas Appeal update

Our sincere thanks go out to all who supported our 2007 Christmas Appeal. To date, we have received over \$105,000.

Some of the ministries of our sisters and lay co-ministers receive monies from our Ministry Fund to provide educational opportunities to poor persons, empower immigrant women with children to assimilate into our American culture, offer food and shelter to hungry and homeless people, and pastoral care to those who are sick.

Gifts made to the Retirement Fund help the Northeast Community meet the needs of our retired sisters and care for those now residing in assisted living centers and nursing homes.