

Feeling the presence of Christ in St. Lucia

by Sister Janet Haverkamp, OSF

At the beginning of December, a four week stay in the eastern Caribbean was not even remotely in my plans. But within the space of two days, I had committed myself, along with Sister Marian Einck, to assist Sister Mary Lee Cox in St. Lucia.

It was already night when we landed in the Vieux Fort airport, very near to the convent where Sisters Mary Lee Cox and Frances Nosbisch live. Warm winter clothing was soon shed in the presence of the warm tropical climate of St. Lucia!

During the following days, Sister Marian and I, became acquainted with foods and juices native to St. Lucia. We ate the common foods the poor people of St. Lucia eat. Sister Mary Lee took us on a walking tour of Vieux Fort – places it would be helpful to know – grocery store, bakery, bank, etc...

We used public transportation called “buses” (a van seating 15 people) to travel longer distances. Children going to school and adults going to work rode the bus with us. Sometimes people squeezed in and there were more than 15!

I accompanied Sister Mary Lee to five of the eighteen schools in which she works. We were out of the house by 7:30 a.m. and walked to the various designated spots to catch the bus going where we wanted to go – up the eastern or western coasts of St. Lucia. Generally we rode the bus a distance up the coast, then got off the bus, walked across the road and up another road to wait for a bus going up to the mountain school.

Mountain roads are narrow and winding. The mountains are steep and valleys narrow. People tend to build on the ridges to catch as much breeze as possible in the hot climate. The Atlantic or Caribbean were visible on the horizon from many of the schools.

Amidst the verdant, tropical beauty, the native peoples work to make a living and educate their children. Sister Mary Lee works the schools in the southern part of St. Lucia. Resources in the schools are meager. I saw no art work, not a single crayon, and very few books for the children to read. None of the five schools I visited had a library. The reading ability of many of the children is below grade level.

A great many of the houses were very small, crowded together, perched on whatever space is available. The narrow, winding and hilly streets have open cement gutters on either side to catch waste water from the houses and to drain the water in the rainy season.

The children at the schools were welcoming, full of energy, and delighted in running as fast as they could, often barefoot. They all wore brightly colored uniforms so that the poor children didn’t stand out.

I was touched by the simplicity and generosity of the women with whom we worshipped at the daily 6am Mass. They were older women



Sister Janet Haverkamp reads to an eager group of school children.

whose deep faith brought them to Mass. They sang loudly, with gusto. The words of the songs were very meaningful and addressed today’s issues. They walked to Mass in the January darkness, as we did. Only I had on sturdy shoes with good arch supports, and they had on flip flops.

Water was precious and scarce in January when we were there. For several days there was no water pressure. The Sisters do have a large black plastic tank that holds extra water, but that too is used very carefully and needs to be carried into the house. Since there is no water pressure for days at a time, we pray for rain and fresh drinking water for St. Lucia.

Being in St. Lucia with Sister Mary Lee helped me to understand the difficulties and beauties under which she and Frances labor to bring the presence of Christ. I am grateful for their presence among the people in St. Lucia. ■

A Place to Call Home

Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, DC by Sister Carol Besch, OSF

Frustrated by an immigration system that fractures families and is neither fair nor humane, 750 participants at this year's Ecumenical Advocacy Days conference (March 19-22, 2010) met to educate themselves and to take action on legislation that will welcome immigrants, protect refugees, and prevent displacement for millions. Three Dubuque Franciscans, Sisters Shirley Fineran, Camilla Hemann, and Carol Besch, joined in this ninth annual conference. Sister Shirley reflects on what the experience meant for her: "It was a journey of hope and faith and a renewed commitment to justice for our undocumented sisters and brothers who are seeking a safe, humane, and productive life in the United States."

Saturday morning included a moving testimony from Sr. Mary McCauley, Dubuque BVM, who spoke about her experience in ministry during the Postville, IA raid of May 12, 2008. Laura Rico, a U.S. citizen, related the challenges of life since her husband was deported and then imprisoned



Sisters Shirley Fineran, Camilla Hemann and Carol Besch attend the Ecumenical Advocacy Days conference held in Washington, DC.

strong effective laws while providing families with the option of staying together. It is not fair to keep a father from his children. It's not fair to keep a husband from his wife."

The remainder of Saturday and Sunday morning was spent in a series of workshops across multiple tracks (Africa, EcoJustice, Global Economic Justice,

Latin America, Middle East, Peace and Global Security and U.S Domestic). Each 1.5 hour workshop was filled with information and statistics of the global migration of peoples. Often the data was supported by personal testi-

monies of people whose lives have been impacted by the global injustices that force so many people to migrate from their country of origin.

Sr. Camilla reflected on her experience in one of the workshops. She said, "Those present believed that in the eyes of God, all are created equal and that everyone needs to be treated with respect. I continued to learn how every one of us has a family history of being an immigrant at one time or another. As we shared our stories, it became clear that the reasons why people immigrated in the past are not that different from those of the people who arrive today."

On Sunday afternoon the Advocacy participants traveled by

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- Sister Camilla Hemann

when he tried to return to their family of four children. She now singly supports her children as she also copes with cancer. Laura concluded her testimony with these words: "It's not fair to strip a family of its dignity. We need

the Metro train to the National Mall to join 200,000 persons for the "March for America" rally in support of comprehensive immigration reform.

This event featured a range of local, regional and national faith, civic and political leaders, including Cardinal Roger Mahony, a staunch supporter of immigrant rights. "Being part of the march made me think that one small voice cannot be heard," Sr. Camilla observed. "However, when we come together in numbers, our voices are strong. There was a lot of energy in this group of people who came from all over the world." After returning to the conference center, Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ (anti-death penalty activist

and author of *Dead Man Walking*) inspired the gathering with the story of her life journey of awakening and committing to the call to love through justice.

The first light of Monday morning found the advocacy crowd out of the hotel and onto seven huge buses taking them to Capitol Hill where they visited with Senators and Representatives from their home districts. Sr. Shirley visited with Rep. Steve King (IA District 5) to convey her views on comprehensive immigration reform and urged him to provide a legal means for citizenship for the millions of undocumented workers. Srs. Carol and Mary McCauley joined a larger Iowa delegation that traveled by bus from Des

Moines to participate in the march. They visited the offices of Representatives Braley, Boswell, and Loeb sack and those of Senators Grassley and Harkin.

Reflecting on her experience of the weekend, Sr. Carol commented, "After more than ten years of working with immigrants in Iowa and knowing close up the difficulties they face every day, this weekend was a wonderful opportunity to join with others and advocate for a just solution for all the displaced persons who seek a new home in our country. It is clear to me that Christ appears in the person of the migrant, who comes to us as the stranger waiting to be welcomed." ■

Sustaining our Franciscan Ministry

by Sister Cathy Katoski, OSF, CFRE, Director of Development



In the mid-1980's the Leadership Team of the Dubuque Franciscans established a special fund called "The Ministry Fund." Although our ministries had very often been among those who were poor and needy, modern times required that our sisters now earn a salary for their work.



The Ministry Fund was established with a two-fold purpose:

- to pay a stipend and living expenses for sisters who were called to serve in poor parishes,
- and to assist programs and projects that enable volunteers to work, to be of service, and to promote social justice.

Over the past twenty-five years thousands of persons have known the love and presence of our God through the many sisters and projects that have been funded by this fund. In 2009 the ministry of eighteen sisters and fourteen additional projects was funded by the Ministry Fund.

Ministry Fund grants can relate to one of three categories:

- Salary grants which provide a salary for a Dubuque

Franciscan ministering among people who are economically poor,

- Collaborative Ministry grants which assist the congregations ventures with other congregations/groups on behalf of economically poor people, or
- Direct Assistance grants which support another type of ministry or project of benefit to people who are economically poor.

Those completing grant applications are asked to:

- reflect on how the grant directly affects the lives of people who are economically poor,
- demonstrate ways that the grant will help change structures which oppress people who are marginalized, and
- develop leadership and empowerment skills among those people who are served by the grant.

The Ministry Fund will enable the Dubuque Franciscans to sustain their ministry for future generations. Donations from benefactors marked "Ministry Fund" on the donation envelop help us to sustain this fund and its ministries. ■

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Mission Statement of the Dubuque Franciscans

*Rooted in the Gospel and in the spirit of Francis
and Clare, the Sisters of St. Francis live in
right relationship with all creation.*

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Why give stock? There is a great tax advantage for the donor. Even after the great decline in stocks in recent years, many have now again appreciated in value. Making a stock gift to a charity will enable you to avoid paying capital gains taxes on the gain on the original investment. On top of that savings, you will receive the tax deduction for the total amount of your charitable gift.

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Keep "searching" for your favorite Franciscans! ■