

## **TO LOVE IS TO LET GO AND BELIEVE....**

*by Sister Adele Thibaudeau, OSF*

In 1985, just thirteen years ago, after teaching summer school at Cardinal Stritch College for two summers in the Religious Studies Department, I took the position of Director of Campus Ministry. To this point in ministry I had taught grade school and high school and now Youth Ministry at the college level. I had just completed a master's degree in Religious Studies at Mundelein College, Chicago and had also completed teaching high school Religion, pantomime, and English classes for six years at the Academy of Our Lady, Chicago. The students were all young African-American women. I soon learned to use appealing images and examples from their culture. It was an education for me, one I puzzled over as to how I could continue this rich experience in my new north side of Milwaukee environment. As I now look back, preparing for a sabbatical leave, I am pleased with the many opportunities and challenges that have come my way, many of which I have been able to effect with team work and consultation. Endeavors fall into specific categories: multiculturalism, global awareness, volunteerism, Franciscan values, and service learning.

I've discovered that as a Franciscan woman I have a great deal of passion for all of these topics for they are a call to the dignity of each person and the common good. I have found myself invested in them with great energy and delight, inviting others to share my enthusiasm for the projects that have evolved along the way. Perhaps it is love for people that keeps drawing me to a bigger and better world and an endeavor to make it so with students and staff.

I was here only a short time and could see that our students of color had no one like themselves to confide in or have as a role model. Inspired to pursue a campus minister to fill this role, we were blessed to locate Rev. Trinette McCray, an ordained American Baptist and woman of many talents and gifts. She has proved herself both a vigilant and fine educator on the topic of racism, always inspiring and challenging the staff to become aware and implement just policy and action in this regard. It is continual work and at times a very frustrating endeavor in our culture. However without this effort and investment I believe we would be even further away from our ideals as a Catholic and Franciscan Institution. I owe a debt of gratitude to Rev. McCray and all who have been touched by her powerful and wise counsel.

Having lived with returned Sister missionaries in Chicago, I recalled their challenge to call upon them for assistance. To my amazement, they were ready to come to our campus, under the leadership of Father Rocco Puopolo a Xaverian priest. We devised our first 'Global Awareness Week' and have been fascinated ever since. I also shared our program with the Catholic Campus Ministers of Wisconsin and must say that the idea has caught on so much so that now the missionaries are so much in demand that we are fortunate to have them here every two years. As the Missionary speakers have been invited into classrooms for some ten years, comments of faculty and students continue to be full of awe and delight at the lives of such self-sacrificing and often heroic individuals. At times students themselves have been inspired to do service in other countries, both short and long term. It has been our pleasure to have these graduates return, often, to address students at the annual Volunteer and Donor Appreciation

Luncheon. Knowing that this exciting program will not continue unless it is placed in the hands of someone just as enthused as myself, I am delighted to report that Laine Philippa, the Director of International Programs, a full-time employee as of this year, is willing to continue Global Awareness Week, two years from now in February, 2000.

My initial job description included serving meals with students at both St. Gall's and St. Benedict's each month of the school year. I wondered how I would ever retain an interest in this task. I prayed for the strength to love the hungry people and serve them as guests. My prayer has been answered and so have my annual requests of the Stritch Faculty, students and staff to donate the two thousand dollars needed annually to pay our food service. Just this year we dedicated a wooden and brass plaque with names of groups, staff, and students who donate at least one if not more entire meals (\$125.00) for the hungry. The dedication was to Pat Braun, a librarian who died last July. Pat would both serve the meal and regularly donate money for milk for the children at St. Gall's. In a way having her name on the plaque is an indication on just how much we partner with excellent lay people in our ministry. The first name on the plaque after Pat's is Sister Doris Pehowski's, OSF, my predecessor and the person who, for nine years prior to my role as Campus Minister, led students in serving the hungry of Milwaukee. We make every effort in our van ride to the meals sites to engage the students in reflection on why we do this as a Franciscan Institution dedicated to becoming compassionate and just people in society.

In addition to the regular meals for the hungry, we have added work with Habitat for Humanity, holding drug exposed infants at St. Coletta's of Illinois for a few hours on a Saturday. This has become a favorite of many students, although an entire day's journey. We have been unable to locate a similar program in the local area where students do not need many hours of prior training to participate.

Annually we have made our way to Bother Regis, SVD, warehouse in New Holstein where donations of medicine samples and other items are repackaged to be shipped to the missions. Students are eager to be a small part of such a big endeavor and return excited and inspired. Each year we attempt to place the responsibility for the planning of these events in the hands of the students who take leadership. Some years we are amply rewarded. Others we are not. A most exciting year was 1997-98 as a group of twelve students joined in preparing to go to Gainesville, Florida on an alternative Spring Break. We enjoyed the leadership of Nick McLain, who knows how to dialogue well with his peers. Our fundraising was successful with some grants from the Lilly Grant for multicultural affairs easing our way. The students were exceedingly fun to be with, mature, and able to work out problems together. At the conclusion of that wonderful year Nick was awarded the Cardinal Stritch Award for Outstanding Service and I was awarded the St. Francis Award by the Alumni Association. Together we celebrated and will cherish the story of 'Rosie Tugerson's House.' As a special 'thank you' to the students I wrote the following poem (and illustrated it with colored overhead transparencies for the Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon).

'Rosie Tugerson's House'

Look through the naked studs  
straight through to the concrete slab.

Dream of home and bath and friends and food  
as wild nails fly and plywood grows  
to cover walls and roof.  
And hammers ring in raucous rat tat tat  
as skillful feet climb narrow ladders and many helping hands  
lift trusses skyward to form the gable firm.  
Then 'toe-nail' those two-by-fours in place  
and lay those shingles down  
and pound with pride against years of rain  
and leave your heart inside.  
Our habitat grows high with joy.  
A Holy Week, indeed!  
We've learned to give ourselves in love  
encountering those in need.  
Humanity laughs joyfully with Easter morning glee!  
We've learned another way to live, a new way to be FREE!  
It's Habitat for Humanity.

The joy of their faces and their serious contribution of forty hours of hard labor, from nailing plywood to pounding shingles in place, made that Holy Week a very special one in our memories.

The Service Learning Movement has become popular these last few years. After attending conventions on the topic, I was fascinated. I began to recognize our service with students could be learning much more about poverty and its root causes in the classroom. I was inspired by Barbara Manger, a wonderful Art teacher here. Barbara had been assigning students to find a location in the city where their art would be a gift to those in need. Together they researched an idea and place and then collaborated on the final masterpiece: huge stuffed furniture and pillows in shapes of asparagus bunches and apples for an abused children's center or a composite of many different pieces of fruits or vegetables, each perfectly shaded and arranged on its plate, all neatly arranged in colorful whole. This last painting is hanging in the dining room of Casa Maria, Milwaukee's Catholic Worker Shelter for homeless families. After taking administrators, students and faculty to a major conference on Service Learning we returned to begin our own program. The concept would require faculty to give the option for assignments that would involve service and the reflection on that service to embody the goals and concepts of that discipline. For lack of any official appointed person to lead this effort, I made it this year's goal to establish service learning in the classrooms. Sister Florence Deacon stepped forward as a respected person to be our pilot. A graduate student, Kathy White, selected this for her senior project. Our interaction with agencies, students and faculty has been both challenging and rewarding. We learned much and Kathy, under the direction of Sister Coletta Dunn, documented our first year and our conclusions. I am happy to be leaving the project under the leadership of sister Coletta Dunn.

My first year here it made sense to select a week to celebrate our Franciscan Heritage around the October 4th Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. It has become an annual event. Since then, I have served on the committee, led by Sister Camille Kliebhan, to define our Franciscan values for higher education.

Annually we have students witness to them at orientation. We have students go out and serve others in our city on their first Saturday here. Just this year the OSF Administration has appointed Sister Rose Sevenich to work with all our corporations on the Franciscan values. I have created a presentation entitled 'Spirituality and the Workplace and The Sisters of St. Francis.' My own attendance at the Tau Center Franciscan Challenge, Winona, Minnesota and at the first and second Franciscan Theological Conferences and a pilgrimage to Assisi to mark the 800th anniversary of St. Clare of Assisi have all sustained me in the effort to make these values come alive at Stritch. To take wisdom and history that is so old and yet so relevant and shape it to minds and hearts of people today is an exciting challenge. Father Jim Lobacz, diocesan priest and our campus minister, has been working with Sister Rose in planning and leading our corporations as they feel their way into this important work of identity and leadership of laity as we pass on our legacy. Last year we were able to send Father Jim to Assisi for a pilgrimage. I am confident, as Father Jim (an excellent teacher and preacher) shapes this project with Sister Rose, we will find our way to new meaning and processes to convey our values.

In closing, I have found this writing to be an exercise in remembering the last thirteen years and so many of the wonderful people I have had the joy and privilege to minister with. I suppose because I have loved it all so much it is hard to let go and trust, I will find a new depth and approach to the same calling or a new call to ministry upon completion of the sabbatical year I am about to begin. I leave with a prayer that the gift of peace and the work of peace-making, so dear to St. Francis, will take on new meaning and call us all to new hope at Cardinal Stritch University.