

The Advocate

Saint Brigid Social Ministries Newsletter
Volume II, Issue 1, Winter 2003

Missionaries Complete First Month in Africa

By Mary Dawn Reavey

In December, St. Brigid parishioners John Nadworny and Mary Dawn Reavey completed formation in Rome and began 2-year missions in Africa. John is now a teacher in Malawi. Mary Dawn is a nurse practitioner in Tanzania. Following are excerpts from Mary Dawn's letters home.

December 20, 2002...I'm finally here. I arrived in Dar Es Salaam at 7:15 AM Tuesday and felt like I was walking into an oven—it was already 95 degrees. "Dar" is a spread out city, with much of it rural. There are women everywhere in traditional dress with huge baskets on their heads and babies tied to their backs. The tallest building is about five stories. The Tegeta Mission, where we live, is an hour drive from Dar Es Salaam. Tegeta is a village of approximately 2,500 families who live in shanties placed haphazardly along dirt paths with deep holes. The mission is at the back end of town and consists of the parish church, the Sisters' house and chapel, the dispensary, a primary school, and the volunteer house—all separated from the village with a fence. Dogs are let loose after dark to help protect the property. The volunteer house is small with concrete walls and floors, and fans to try to keep it cool. We have a stovetop but no oven, and a shower but no hot water. We each have our own bedroom—my bed is an old door with a 6-inch piece of foam on top. We sleep under mosquito netting to shield us from the insects. Our diet consists of rice and beans, tropical fruits, and a few vegetables. We boil and filter all our water.

...The dispensary is larger, with more supplies than I expected. They have gloves, but no sterile ones or sterile drapes. They have adequate amounts of basic medicines. The staff makes their own plastic bags and fills them with enough medicine for a treatment dose. Anyone with a spare moment makes the bags or fills them. The staff sees patients of all ages with the most common diagnoses being severe infections related to AIDS and malaria. Patients start lining up around 7:00 AM before the clinic opens at 8:00, and they are evaluated on a first come, first serve basis until everyone has been seen. Clients pay cost for medicine and labs but not for the evaluation. The dispensary is known throughout the region for its care and availability of medicines. All members of the staff open the day by praying together for about 15 minutes.

January 25, 2003...A month has elapsed since I arrived in Tanzania—a month filled with many rewards and challenges. The electricity is off about a third of the day, everyday without a pattern. There is no water about as frequently. We hand-wash all our clothes, and despite the heat, they are never completely dry due to the humidity. We have more than our fair share of bugs and critters—ants, spiders, and mosquitoes abound and when we turn on the lights four or five lizards dart up the wall. I have discovered that there is much to appreciate in everyday life in the good old USA!

...Christmas was very different. Due to extreme poverty, celebrations were centered on the Mass. Mass started at 10:30 PM and lasted two hours. They had twelve altar servers and a choir with two conductors. The men sat on the right side of the church and the women and babies on the left. Children older than 15 months sprawled out on the floor on the right front of church, kept in check by two older women ushers. The celebration was lively and beautiful with lots of incense. The church was packed, and about 200 more people stood outside...*Continued on page 2.*

Volunteer During Holy Year

By Alison Gibbons

The bishop has declared 2003 to be a holy year. One of the holy year's goals is that individuals and families perform a work of charity each week. St. Brigid Social Ministries has many organizations that would love your help. Below is a list of our groups and contact numbers. You'll find more detailed information at our website, <http://stbrigidparish.org/socialministries/>.

- **Birthline:** Provides services to women seeking to keep their babies. Clairemont Center: 858-270-2497
- **Border Outreach:** Serves the poor in Tijuana, Mexico. Ministries include constructing a formation home for nuns, visiting children in an orphanage, and assisting migrants at a border shelter.
Construction--Sean Allen: 858-274-1070
Orphanage--Paul Cofrancesco: 858-349-7942
Border Shelter--Matt DeCarolis: 858-495-9017
- **Cloisters Prayer Service:** Monthly prayer service for residents at a convalescent home.
Les Sherman: 858-274-7080
- **CCSA:** Organization of beach-area churches serving local poor and homeless. Jack Blevins: 858-272-0163
- **CROP Walk:** Annual walk to raise money and awareness for hunger both globally and locally.
Amber Rieder: 619-543-1429
- **Give Back Sunday:** Monthly donation drive at St. Brigid to support various local charities.
Joan Marler: 858-274-3623
- **Health Ministry:** Promotes the well-being of the parish through health faires and other events.
Rita Hatch: 858-459-4770
- **Mass Transit:** Drives parishioners who cannot drive to and from church. Ginny Gistaro: 858-483-3155
- **Prison/Detention Ministry:** Provides prayer services and religious items to detainees in juvenile hall.
Pat Hulburt: 858-490-0507
- **Pro-Life:** Promotes, supports, and defends the sanctity of life from conception to natural death.
Gloria Williams: 858-566-4476
- **St. Vincent de Paul Village:** Feeds homeless at the downtown shelter each month.
Lisa Flynn: 619-294-2639
- **Van Project:** Raises funds for a new 12-person van for the parish. Sean Allen: 858-274-1070
- **Wednesday Homeless Dinner:** Collects food donations and serves a full dinner to PB homeless the third Wednesday each month. Alison Gibbons: 858-581-6968

St. Brigid Missionaries in Africa (*con'td from p.1*)

...I have started going on home visits to AIDS patients on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday evenings. Over 70% of the dispensary patients are HIV positive or have developed AIDS. We treat the symptoms and infections related to AIDS, but there isn't any antiviral medication available to slow the progression of the disease. Here is a typical home visit: We walk into a one room shanty with a dirt floor, with no electricity, running water, or furniture. We find the patient lying in the corner in the stifling heat, covered with flies and mosquitoes. A fire is built on the floor in another corner to cook rice or bananas—if they are lucky. Often a child of 10 or 12 is the primary caregiver. If the patient is unable to walk, we are the only access to care. It is very humbling to hear the gratitude the patients express for the little bit of help we are able to give. Yesterday, I went with one of the Sisters to visit a grandmother who lost all five of her children and their spouses to AIDS and is now raising six grandchildren, three of whom are HIV positive or have developed AIDS. The grief is palpable.



There are also numerous AIDS orphans—we have about 30 who hang out around the front door of the volunteer house. They crave attention and will wait for hours for us to come out. We even have several girls who wait all day in the dispensary for a staff member to have a free minute to chat. I try to spend a couple of hours

either reading or talking to them in the late afternoons. They are so cute, loving, bright, and helpful. They spy me coming home from town or from the market and fight over who gets to carry my packages—door to door service. I feel like the Pied Piper much of the time with a band of playful kids surrounding me.

Despite the challenges, there is much joy and many blessings in Tegeta. Thank you so much for all of your prayers, thoughts, emails, and letters. It is wonderful to be surrounded by so much love and support, it's the highlight of the week hearing from you. I continue to keep you in prayer. Mungu akubariki naakuweke. Kumbatia! Akupendaye, Mary Dawn

The needs of the people of Tegeta are immense. Children need vitamins to nourish their bodies and Swahili Bible story books to feed their souls. AIDS patients need medications and comfort items. Young men and women need funds for education. Could you or your group help organize a project or raise funds? Contact Alison Gibbons at 858-581-6968.

The Interfaith Shelter Is Here!

By Alison Gibbons

St. Brigid has been hosting eight guests from the Interfaith Shelter Network since February 2. The group, which consists of four women, four men, two children, and an infant will stay in parish classrooms through February 15, then move to another network church. The program is designed to provide temporary shelter and services to participants while they get back on their feet. Guests receive breakfast, a bag lunch, a dinner shared with the parishioners who helped prepare it, and overnight accommodations including bath and laundry facilities. The network also provides weekly counseling with an individual case manager, bus tokens, budgeting and career planning workshops, and daycare funding for children. We're already looking for volunteers to take on leadership roles next year, and this week would be a great time to stop by and see how the shelter is run. To get involved, call Steve Musser at 858-569-6362.

The Gospel of Life

By Gloria Williams

As we move into the Holy Year, St. Brigid's pro-life community embraces the words of our Holy Father who says, "The campaign in support of life is an appeal to each and every person...to respect, protect, love, and serve every life." [*The Gospel of Life No.5*]. Peaceful activism, education, prayer, and service are all promoted by the St Brigid pro-life committee. We commit to three or four events a year, such as "Bingo for Life," which supported the LRC Media Campaign. We sponsor the annual "Life Walk" in October to raise money for educational materials, speaking engagements, and the publication of the *Resource Guide* for pregnant mothers. Every February, the Pro-life Committee encourages parishioners to embrace the lives of both young and old through the "Valentine's Baby/Senior Blanket and Prayer Book Project." This caring effort helps comfort infants and seniors who would not normally receive much TLC on Valentine's Day. The Pro-life Committee invites you to pray with us. Our first "Holy Year Prayer Vigil" will be led by Monsignor Murray on Sunday, February 16th, from 1:00-3:00 PM. We will pray the rosary, meditate, and reflect on life issues with Stations of the Cross. We also invite all parishioners to get involved by attending an informal meeting. Our meetings are the first Thursday of every month from 7:00-8:30 PM in the parish library. Contact Gloria Williams at 858-566-4476 for more information.

Feeling Like Kings

By Sean Allen

The Feast of the Epiphany celebrates the arrival of the three kings to the manger, where they presented baby Jesus with gifts from afar. In Mexico, this holiday is called *El Dia de los Reyes* or "The Day of the Kings." Each Epiphany, St. Brigid teams up with St. James parish to bring down Christmas joy to poor families in Tijuana.

This year, the event began on Saturday, January 4th at St. James church in Solana Beach, where volunteers sorted donations, wrapped toys, bagged toiletries, and loaded the items into a truck for transport across the border. The following day, the group traveled to San Jose church in Tijuana, unloaded the truck, portioned out rice and beans, and handed out the items. Around 300 needy families were provided with toys, rice and beans, candy, blankets, and toiletries to brighten their holiday. In all, 27 St. Brigid parishioners and friends volunteered to help make the event a success. See photos at: www.stbrigidparish.org/socialministries/photo_gallery.html

Wanted: Van Many of our ministries desperately need a van for transportation. Call Sean Allen at 858-274-1070 to help with donations, fundraising, or organization.