

Simple Acts That Make a Difference

BY JOAN FOUHY AND EVAN PAGE,
CO-CHAIRS, ST. MARY'S SOCIAL
JUSTICE MINISTRY

When we look at all the problems in the world, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. But then we recall the words of Mother Teresa: "If you can't feed 100 hungry people, feed one." This echo of Jesus' message in Matthew 25 inspires our parish community to perform simple acts that make a difference.

Our parish garden produces food for people who rely on food pantries and find it difficult to get fresh produce. And as part of our Share the Bounty program, parishioners with gardens drop food into baskets on their way into church.

In the past six years, our Little Brown House has provided a home for eight families in transition. Parishioners have supported the Little Brown House through gifts of time, money, and events such as September's Local Harvest Brunch and bake sales.

In October, parishioners donated two truckloads of furniture and household items to Donations Clearinghouse for people emerging from homelessness, recovering from a fire, or struggling in today's tough economic climate. Other adults, teens, and children raised money and awareness in last May's Walk for the Homeless.

And this past Lent, a family social justice team began what is sure to become a tradition—soup suppers with discussions for groups of all ages to raise family awareness of justice issues.

A global dimension

In the 1990s, St. Mary's made a covenant with St. Michel's parish in Roche-a-Bateau, Haiti. Through this 'twinning arrangement' we send \$800 a month to help support a parish where the average weekly collection is under \$1.00. Our Haiti weekends—in May and November—raise funds to meet that commitment. For the past two years, talks by Sister Judith Dupuy, director of the diocesan Haitian ministry, and a spirit-filled Haitian choir from Mattapan have strengthened our connection to Haiti.

Every Advent, several parishioners purchase animals for distribution by Heifer Project International to poor people in



Beautiful Share the Bounty vegetables were brought to the altar by an enthusiastic Harvest Procession which took place on September 28.

developing countries. Several plaques—each representing \$5,000 in gifts—are located near the patio entrance of the church hall.

Our fair trade coffee campaign grew out of an awareness that big conglomerates pay coffee farmers less than what it costs them to grow their coffee. By paying a fair price for coffee and other crops, groups like Equal Exchange raise the living standards for farmers and communities. In addition to selling hundreds of pounds of coffee, our fair trade campaign has prompted local retailers to carry more fair trade items. At our parish Craft Fair in December, a variety of fair trade products will be available for gift-giving.

Benefit concerts featuring local talent

have raised money for local needs and those in many parts of the world—including victims of genocide in Darfur, survivors of the earthquake in Pakistan, the efforts of Catholic Relief Services in Somalia and Bangladesh, and the work of Evan Cuthbert, our former youth minister and his family who are Maryknoll lay missionaries in Bolivia.

For the last few years, we have played a key role in organizing an ecumenical candlelight prayer vigil for peace on the Shrewsbury Common. Although this occurs on the anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq, it includes every country engaged in war or serious conflict. And on Pentecost Sunday, we invite parish families who come from many parts of the world to take part in a global solidarity offertory procession.

Joan Barry Brings Enthusiasm, Expertise to Principal's Job

BY MARY DONOVAN

There's a new face in the principal's office at St. Mary's, but a familiar name. Joan Barry has picked up the reins put down last June when Joanne Gannon retired. The new principal, long time St. Mary's parishioner and parish council member has a fine resume to back up a warm smile and welcoming manner.

She has impressive middle school experience: she taught at the Westchester, New York school system for 20 years while she lived in Manhattan; she was associate principal in the Wachusett Regional school system for seven years; she was assistant principal in the Shrewsbury Middle School for seven years; she headed up a new middle school in Westford. Four years ago she retired from middle school and went to work as director of development for a consulting firm, Teachers 21.

She did that for two years, she said, but she missed the kids. She saw St. Mary's job advertised in the bulletin and talked to Fr. Mike. The rest, as they say, is history.

She loves being back in the school environment.

"When I'd been here a few weeks, I knew this is where I belong," she said. "It's an absolute jewel of a school, once you've been here and seen the teaching going on. It's great working in a school this size. You know all the kids."

She admitted that she doesn't know all the names yet, but she recognizes everybody.

"I'm working on the names," she said.

Her goal is to put into practice her experience



Joan Barry, St. Mary's School new principal is delighted to head up this "absolute gem of a school."

as a principal and the insights she learned at the professional learning community. She is aware of her experience coming together, she said.

There are some things even she had to learn, however. She found out she had to be in the Christmas play. She learned she would have to dress up for Halloween and that she'd have to sing. Her biggest learning curve she said is K through 12. Remember, she had always taught middle school.

"Praise the artwork of one child," she said, with a rueful smile, "and you have to praise 27."

Her experience at St. Mary's is demonstrating the value of the K through 8 arrangements.

"You know the children – see them grow," she said.

In addition, it keeps the older ages more in line with what they should be doing for their age, she said. It's a family atmosphere with older and younger students. She finds that students support one another.

"One of the trends in education today is finding ways to connect students. At St. Mary's, we don't have to look - it's there," she said.

This is a great place to be, she said. She praised the very caring, hardworking staff and the tremendous support given the school by the parents. In addition, she said, the Catholic tradition is so strong; it's wonderful to be able to support it.

Telephone Connection Keeps Homebound in the Loop

BY VIOLA JEFFERSON, PARISH NURSE

Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said, "We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love." This call to ministry very nicely sums up a new aspect to St. Mary's Health Ministry's visitor program, called "St. Mary's Telephone Connection".

The Telephone Connection is the brainchild of Fr. Mike and Virginia Baroud, who is legally blind. Virginia, a longtime friendly visitor in her driving days, told Fr. Mike she missed being able to reach out in that fashion. Fr. Mike, who always recognizes the goodness others have to share asked Virginia how she'd feel visiting by "phone". Always ready to heed God's

call, Virginia was delighted and quickly responded, "I could do that!"

Fr. Mike and I discussed this new idea, and of course, it sounded good to me. Virginia and I then talked about forming a visiting ministry called "St. Mary's Telephone Connection." And so it began.

As Parish Nurse, I maintain a list of parishioners who are currently homebound and receiving visits from Eucharistic Ministers, visitors, our priests and the parish nurse. After reviewing this list and identifying about 18 parishioners who might be candidates for a friendly phone call from Virginia, I sent letters introducing the "Telephone Connection" and giving each person the opportunity to "opt out." I'm

delighted to say that no one opted out.

This ministry provides another way for parishioners to stay in touch with each other and connected to the parish, to hear a friendly voice, and to add another pleasant event to their day. Virginia calls both men and women, and they chat about anything and everything, including personal events, town happenings, and of course, St. Mary's events and occurrences.

If you or someone you know would like to receive phone calls from Virginia or another volunteer, or if you would like to volunteer as a friendly caller, please contact the parish nurse, Vi Jefferson, at 508-845-2193 or by email at jeffersonv@stmarys-parish.org.