

Working Trip to Miami is a Labor of Love

ANN E. IACCARINO

Early last spring when my daughter, Allie, was finishing her second year of the St. Mary's Confirmation Program, I attended an informational meeting about summer service trips and was subsequently asked to chaperone a Habitat for Humanity trip to Miami.

My initial reaction to being asked was to be afraid! As a mother of four busy daughters, I was overwhelmed at the prospect of being in Miami the first week of summer vacation. I was fearful of all that it would entail, including figuring out the scheduling of the trip and my responsibilities associated with it. I had doubts about my ability to lead a group to inner city Miami, a place unfamiliar to me. I had no idea if I had the skills and strength to work on a job site. I didn't know if I could figure out the logistics of such a trip, competently supervise our students, and make this a meaningful spiritual journey for them.

And in all honesty, it sounded a bit "out of my comfort zone." We would sleep on a gym floor in a local church on sleeping bags and shower in the public restrooms. We would shop for and make our meals in a small communal kitchen. It's 100 degrees in Miami in the summer! I didn't know if I could do it and provide the support and comfort to our young people, some who were away from home for the first time. These concerns weighed on me as I considered the prospect.

What started as fear began to change. My eyes opened to the unique opportunity to work side-by-side with my daughter, Allie, as we put our faith into action and serve. As I put my thoughts together, and quieted my doubts, I agreed to give it a go. As we began to plan, I became excited.

We put together our team of four willing and able chaperones: Mario Kerr, David Lizotte, Dawn Nelson, and me. Each brought to the table a different set of gifts and offered them to the group. Each of the 19 students who committed to the trip was responsible for raising \$800 to pay their way. We organized a walk-a-thon, sold t-shirts, held an electronics recycling day, and sold raffle tickets to fundraise.

On Sunday, June 28, 2009, the families of the students gathered at the airport in Providence, RI, to see us off and bid us well. That evening we arrived at the church where we would spend our week. The minister of the church welcomed us and gave us a tour of our accommodations. We set out our sleeping bags on the gym floor with a girls' side and a boys' side. We grocery shopped that first evening, made our lunches for the following day, conducted our first evening reflection, and got to bed looking forward to the work

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- Ann E. Iaccarino

ahead.

Our daily routine consisted of: 5:30 a.m. wake-up, 6:30 a.m. reflection and prayer, a simple breakfast, clean-up, lunch-packing, loading in the vans and hitting the road by 7:15 a.m. The four vans traveled in tandem, an hour each way, to the site in Homestead, Florida. Outside, we laid 6,000 square-feet of sod, painted a house, and cleaned up a house and a yard. With sparse tools, lots of muscle, tremendous spirit, and good humor, we got the job done.

We arrived back "home" in the evenings, exhausted, but proud. After taking turns showering and working to prepare our supper, we ate together, cleaned up, grocery shopped, made lunches for the following day, and settled in for our evening reflection. The reflection, led alternately by one of the four groups, included a song, a reading, and time to share thoughts and feelings about the experience as a group and individually. This was my favorite time of day because I was consistently impressed with the insights shared, which

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Mary's since its earliest years. It is the foundation of our parish life and mission.

Reaching Out to families in time of sickness and death, supporting those who have experienced the loss of a job, crisis in a relationship or are worried about the long-term effects of this past year's economic downturn is what we seek to do. *Reaching Out* to support the incredible works of charity provided by St. Anne's Human Services and the educational programs of our parish and school involves hundreds of volunteers each year. *Reaching Out* in new ministries beyond our parish and town to the young, pregnant women at Visitation House and the recently incarcerated men now living at Dismas House speaks of the desire to continue finding ways to serve those who are in need in the name of Christ. The growing number of parish teens who volunteer as

brought out the best in everyone.

We also had time for fun. There was lots of hair braiding, friendship bracelet making, laughter, music, dancing, hoops, ice cream, and cards. After five days of this routine, we were depleted, exhilarated, moved, transformed. We reaped the joys of closeness that comes from toiling together, experiencing something new, and serving something greater than ourselves.

I thoroughly enjoyed being with our St. Mary's young adults. They were kind and compassionate to one another, to the families we met, and to the other Habitat workers. I was impressed over and over again by how good and how whole and how holy these young people were. They were willing, loving, generous, inclusive, honest, gracious and grateful to one another. What really struck me was how much we worry about our teenagers, where they are headed, who they will become and how afraid we are of all that can go wrong. And yet, these young men and women showed us how good, sincere, capable, and grace-filled they are.

This experience showed me we can find God in all places and people when we are open, when we are not afraid, when we are willing to step out of our comfort zone and to trust that the giving answer is the right one. I encourage our young people to take advantage of these parish service trips, and the adults to put aside their doubts and say, "Yes," to running these trips. The prayer of St. Francis says, "For it is in giving that we receive," and I have found this to be true. I hope you will experience the same.

peer leaders on the Confirmation Retreat Team and who, in record numbers this past summer, served people in need in Miami and West Virginia (Habitat for Humanity), the terminally ill children at Camp Sunshine in Casco, Maine, and the children of Great Brook Valley (Young Neighbors in Action) all give us hope as we look to the future.

Our parish community is alive in faith, vibrant in worship, education and service, as we seek to Build Up a community that reflects the life of God's own Kingdom. The pages of this Fall newsletter are filled with stories of good stewards who are simply seeking to live a life of gratitude and faith. May their stories lift you in this Season of Thanksgiving as we continue to grow together in faith and discipleship.

Michael J. Rose

Operation Christmas Child A St. Mary Preschool Service Project

BY MARY ROHANNA & MARY COTE

St. Mary Preschool of Shrewsbury (Programs A, B, and C), in keeping with their Christian values, will be reaching out to those in difficult circumstances by becoming involved in a project called "Operation Christmas Child." This Christmas, they will share the love and hope of Jesus Christ with needy children in a country such as Uganda or El Salvador by using a simple shoebox. Operation Christmas Child is a project that every member of the family can participate in by contributing a gift-filled box. It is wonderful to see the delight in the preschoolers' eyes as they help less fortunate children in a meaningful way. St. Mary Preschool began the project on October 27. Please visit www.SamaritansPurse.org to find out how to participate in Operation Christmas Child.

Playing Together



Priests and people celebrate the Family Festival

Christmas Mass Schedule

Thursday, December 24
Christmas Eve

4:30 pm

Two Vigil Masses
St. Marys Church
St. John's High School

7:00 pm

Vigil Mass with
Children's Pageant

12:00 am

Midnight Mass with Choir

Friday, December 25
Christmas Day

9:00 am

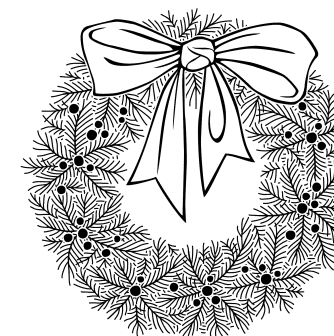
Christmas Mass

11:00 am

Christmas Mass

CHRISTMAS BENEFIT CONCERT

*Sounds
of the
Season*



Friday, December 11, 2009

7:00 pm

St. Mary Church