

## **Changing Lives, One Seed and One Stitch at a Time ~ Feature Story**

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### **So – Sow – Sew!**

## **Catholic Daughters of the Americas Support the Missions**

In-between rain storms on Sunday, July 22, 2007, East Bernard CDA Saint Bernadette Court 1108 members Jo Ann Cowan, Henriette Jalowy and Regent Terrie Vacek with husbands Robert Cowan and Dr. James Jalowy jammed a 10' X 10' X 5' pile of craft and sewing items into Vacek's Suburban. Filling every available space were also basket and soccer balls, base ball bats, tennis rackets, and roller skates. At the bottom of the pile was a sewing machine with stand. Sister Emelda said "It is believable that you have brought all of this for the poor, but it is unbelievable that it all came out of that Suburban".



(Photo- Sister Elmelda, Sister Ninfa and Henriette Jalowy standing with half the second delivery) Vacek and Jalowy headed out bright and early Monday morning taking the load of new fabric scraps and recycled items to meet Sister Ninfa Garza at the Missionaries of Jesus Guadalupe Convent in Brownsville, TX. They arrived promptly at 2:00 with a very excited Sr. Ninfa waiting for them at the gate where everything except the sewing machine was unloaded. From there, items are carried across the border one trip at a time into Matamoras, Mexico to the Missionaries of Jesus mission complex.

Ninfa, Vacek, Jalowy and the sewing machine were welcomed upon arriving at the mission by Alberto, a student resident. 'Berto' makes a living by attending to the various household and yard responsibilities throughout the mission complex and is currently working with the crew building the three room school building with a workshop in addition to making cabinets in the auditorium as an additional means of income.



Vacek and Jalowy toured the school building now under construction and scheduled to open with the return of students in August. There is no charge to students attending at either the day or the adult night classes. To further aid with education, the mission provides notebooks and pencils to those attending public schools. Jalowy, being a teacher for 38 years said, "I pray that many individuals will respond to the request to donate teacher aids providing these children a chance of a future beyond the walls of tin and pallets."



(Photo-Sr. Juliana Garcia)

Sister Juliana Garcia, who recently received the “Pro Ecclesia Et Pontifice Cross” from Pope Benedict XVI for fifty years of service working with and living among the poor, arranged a tour of the convent and mission areas that were not viewed during the 2006 visit.

Following a rain shower delay Sr. Ninfa took Vacek and Jalowy to see some of the local chapels, the medical facility-Clinica Santa Cruz, the temporary home for migrants-Casa Del Mirgante, and four colonias including a return visit to see Gabriella, the God Child of Sister Ninfa. Vacek said, “The highlights of the visit were to see how much Gabriella had grown, her mother’s excitement over two more pigs in labor, and the invite to enter the hospitality of their home.”



A long hard day of collecting trash



Sr. Ninfa with Gabriella in front of Gabriella’s home



Grandma preparing their dinner

The men and children travel the streets with their donkey and cart as trash collectors and all of the families in this colonia raise pigs for personal use and to sell the swine for income. “The animals roam freely with little distinction between what is home for either the pig or the residents. It is the most oppressed community I have ever seen. Henriette and I were warmly welcomed by the matriarch of the community and various members of the 28 families that reside there. How humbling it is to see their joy in the midst of such poverty and to receive a blessing from them as we began to leave. Her final (translated) words to us were ‘I have a rosary that I will pray for you. God bless you’ and she gave me a genuine hug.”

Following a light meal prepared by Sr. Ninfa (who only eats one apple for supper) the sisters, Vacek and Jalowy enjoyed the beauty of the garden at the Shrine of our Blessed Mother in prayer and reflection. Vacek asked the sisters what specifically is their greatest need. Sr. Ninfa’s immediate response was “prayer and vocations”. She added “I will be 67 on July 31<sup>st</sup> and in two years I will celebrate 50 years as a sister in the Missionary of Jesus Order. I want to have a special celebration

with 50 dancers to bring attention to the joy I experience through serving the poor. We're privileged to see lives changed. I also want to bring attention to our vocation and the need of young ladies stepping forward to experience life through service. If they would just come visit for a week, a month, or even a year and then allow the Lord to direct their future."

Humbly Sr. Juliana added, "We need financial support to have ample funds in providing a little food for the five communities we serve. We need about \$600.00 a month." On the first Friday of each month, approximately 130 elderly families and on the second Friday of each month around 150 with children under age four come to the mission to receive the bare basics: one bag of rice, flour and beans, a can of corn and refried beans, and a jar of cooking oil.

The next things that are greatly needed for the mission are cafeteria style tables and folding chairs, spiral notebooks, pens, pencils and art supplies. In addition, teacher aids such as reading tools with both English and Spanish, arithmetic flash cards, maps and any tools with English/Spanish corresponding words are needed. Due to the regulations and difficulty of bringing used clothing into Mexico, Sister is requesting that only new clothing and shoes (sandals) be sent.

The evening was cut short when mosquitoes forced everyone to their rooms. Vacek said, "Her room was as nice as many motels in the States. The Mission accommodations provide all the necessary comforts of home. Even without air conditioning, with the use of a fan she and Henriette had a good nights sleep!"

Tuesday morning following a healthy breakfast prepared by Sr. Juliana, the group visited the parish church, Christ the Rescuer (Cuasi Parroquia De Muestro Senor Del Rescate), Matamoras, meeting Fr. Jose' Hilario Garcia Mendoza. As the newly appointed Parish Pastor, he has the responsibilities of over 70,000 Catholics at the various 15 Mission Chapels. Fr. Jose' and the associate pastor provide 20 Masses every Saturday/Sunday, two daily Masses in the Parish Church, and two week-day Masses at the Missionaries of Jesus Chapel where about 200 regularly attend. The group visited four more Mission Chapels before returning to the Missionaries of Jesus complex where Vacek and Jalowy were introduced to the medical doctor who volunteers his time and services 10:00 a.m. -1:00 p.m. Monday -Friday.



### Scraps and Craft Items Changed Lives!

(L)Terrie Vacek and Sr. Ninfa hold up a small quilt made by a woman from the community (R) Patrons reaping the benefits of the Mission Sewing Room

From the July 2006 trip until now, every craft item and each piece of fabric was utilized by the ladies that come daily to sew for their families as well as making items to sell. They make clothing, curtains, aprons, blankets, throw pillows, purses, tablecloths and various seasonal items like angels, fabric covered baskets and dolls. The items are sold in America with the revenue returned as income to meet the needs of their families.

One Catholic Daughter Court has provided five sewing machines, another Court recently made covers for each of the computers that Fr. Kelly of Houston donated, and just a few weeks ago yet another Court came to clean and organize the library.

The Texas Catholic Daughters of the Americas State Board planted a seed that has flourished and provided, has gone through a season and has now come back with another harvest. By the simple act of having Sister Ninfa serve as retreat master for the State Retreat in January of 2006, four attendees from Saint Bernadette 1108 brought back to their court the love Sr. Ninfa has for others, and the sincere need of her order. Members of Saint Bernadette Court 1108 voted to include Missionaries of Jesus as another of their local service projects. Soon the storage room at Doctor Jalowy's office was taken over by piles and piles of new fabric scraps and craft items. By July of 2006 the room was full and the first trip to the mission soon followed. The second trip was July 23, 2007 and plans are underway for another trip August of 2007 providing florescent lights and ceiling fans for the school before it opens later in August.

So, sow a seed of service and prayer in your court and if you sew, send your scraps and craft items to the Missionaries of Jesus, 1501 W. Adams Street, Brownsville, TX 78520.