

To Look Through Each Other's Eyes

"COULD A GREATER MIRACLE TAKE PLACE THAN FOR US TO LOOK THROUGH EACH OTHER'S EYES FOR AN INSTANT" — HENRY DAVID THOREAU



Logo by Sr. Maureen Servas RSM

'Enabling Others to Enable'



Several grassroots health groups have been started in Nuestra Senora del Carmen Parish in Santiago, Chile. The groups are connected with the zonal Health Clinic, formally opened in the parish in May 1984, and were initiated so that participants could get answers to questions related to health and also to learn first aid. "It was an outreach venture. Our goal was simply to help the people help themselves," said Sister Kay Schwenzer RSM, center, who helped set up the group that meets in the Santa Ana sector of the parish. Head nurse at the zonal clinic, Carmen Gloria, front, meets with each health group on a weekly basis.



Sister Margaret Mungovan RSM, second from right, meets with a group of women to help prepare them to evangelize in their own neighborhoods in Santiago, Chile.

"The Church is no longer seen as a movement turning in away from the world, but rather as a movement spiraling out into the world. Lay missionaries, coming from a variety of backgrounds and going out in mission to a wide spectrum of situations, are ideally suited to participate in this outward movement of the Church." — Maryknoll magazine, Mar. 1983

The Beautician School in Santiago, Chile, provides an alternative source of income for urban women. Under the sponsorship and with the encouragement of the Sisters of Mercy in Chile, it was started by Angelina Calderon, a trained Chilean beautician who wanted to share her skills with her neighbors.

In a November letter home, Sister Margaret Mungovan RSM, wrote: "The Beauty School continues to function, and now with the money we have so gratefully received from Operation Breadbox 1984, we can begin to look for a place to rent instead of having to use our chapel building which lacks practically everything to conduct such a school. It's a tribute to the Chilean initiative that so much has been accomplished with such limitations... We can get a good start with what we have already received, but we need at least as much again, and more, if possible, to make it independent of outside help. This project aims at training women in all the skills necessary to run a beauty salon, as well as setting up a cooperative for those graduates who wish to use their talents there instead of in their own homes or as employees in other beauty salons."

A laundry cooperative in the parish of San Luis de Huechuraba in Santiago, Chile, is ten years old. Founded in 1974 by Sister Jane Kenrick, a Rochester Sister of Mercy, it has provided employment for poor families in the district.

The cooperative was set up between a group of women from the "barrio alto" (the wealthy section of Santiago) and women from the "poblacion" (the very poor area) to wash the laundry of the well-to-do.

The women from the "barrio alto" collect the laundry and take it to the "poblacion" for cleaning. This endeavor has resulted in a modest income for the less fortunate, the meeting of two distinct social classes and the creation of a Christian community.

All involved meet weekly to label the laundry, discuss problems and business and reflect on a Gospel reading.

"We knew this could not be just another business," Sister Jane said. "It had to have Christ as its center. We believed further we had to do more than form our little group into a Christian community: community had to be the base of our cooperative. That's why prayer, friendship and commitment became and are the top priorities for all of us."



Returning the laundry to the "barrio alto".



Sister Jane Kenrick oversees the sorting of the laundry.

BRAZIL: A Ministry of Enablement

In March of 1983, Sisters of St. Joseph Jean Bellini and Suzanne Wills began working in the Prelature of Sao Felix, a region located on the southern border of the greater Amazon region. Since the early 1970s, under the leadership of Dom Pedro Casaldaliga, the church in the region has embarked upon a ministry in solidarity with the Indians, the "Posseiros" (squatters), and the "Peos" (itinerant workers) of the region.

Sao Felix is a previously undeveloped area which had long been occupied by squatters and Indians. But, recently, the government has inaugurated a program of rapid economic development, providing tax incentives to corporations which would open up large ranches called "latifundios."

From the point of view of the natives, this "opening up" was merely another term for the destruction of their way of life. Surveyors, accompanied by gunmen, were sent to "clean out" the "Posseiros" and Indians. They would either drive them from the land or kill them. Itinerant workers were brought in to clear the land, make fences, and plant pasture grass. These "Peos" worked under an unjust and humiliating system similar to indentured slavery. Many died through lack of proper medical care. Others were killed by the gunmen or in drunken fights with other "Peos."

Into this situation, the pastoral agents together with their bishop have attempted to bring a ministry grounded in the gospel. Denouncing the mechanisms of injustice and oppression that deny human dignity is essential to their concept of ministry.

Through a yearly church-sponsored forum called the "Assembly of the People" the people have engaged in a process of critical analysis of these land conflicts, the police repression, and the political maneuvering and persecution. And they have taken action together in order to improve their situation.

Health cooperatives, education associations, and political organizations have been formed. The squatters have received some land rights, the Indian nations have had their lands clearly delineated, and some mayors with a true concern for the people have been elected.

There have also been reprisals. Lay pastoral agents have been jailed and tortured. Priests have been imprisoned, expelled, or murdered. And those with vested interests in the existing oppressive structures have raised the question, "Should the church be involved in politics?"

This question was addressed at a recent Assembly of the People in Sao Felix. They determined that wherever groups of people interact, there is "political action." Even those who opt for silence and inaction are making a choice and thus acting. The people of the assembly concluded that the church's stance alongside of the poor is a political one -- but, they said, so too would a lack of response be political.

"The mission of our Church is: to announce Jesus Christ and His Good News, the Gospel, to all persons; to strive so that all follow Him in community; to denounce untruth, injustice, and all sin; to work for the building of the Kingdom of God. This kingdom is to be a world of justice... where everyone is recognized as brothers and sisters, remaining always on the side of the poor; where we can celebrate in faith the love of God our Father and the death and resurrection of Jesus; where we can rejoice in our life, our struggle and our hope in the power of the Holy Spirit." — consensus statement of the Assembly of the People in Sao Felix.