

Avon woman continues fight against suffering in Mexico

By Teresa A. Parsons

If Dan Whalen was still alive, he and his wife, Margaret, would celebrate 43 years of marriage this year.

Instead, Margaret is celebrating the 25th anniversary of a different bond — one that ties her more deeply than ever to the poor and sick of Mexico.

Last week, Whalen headed for the Mexican border for the 26th time, her car packed with supplies. From now until April, she will feed the hungry, tend the sick and clothe the naked who come to the St. Martin De Porres dispensaries she and her late husband founded.

"Once we started something, we never deserted it," she said. "It's like a marriage — till death do us part."

Dan, an embalmer at the University of Rochester Medical Center, and Margaret, who worked at Strong Memorial Hospital, quit their respective jobs in 1951 to operate a gift shop. During buying trips to Mexico, they were appalled at the poverty and sickness they saw there.

The East Avon residents established a routine. Each summer they sold Mexican handicrafts throughout New England. During the winters, they founded and operated clinics. "We did everything together," Margaret recalled.

By the time death actually did part the Whalens in March, 1985, they had founded five dispensaries in Monterrey and areas around Guadalajara. Staffed by a part-time doctor and a nurse, each site offers medicine, food, clothing, and referrals for hospital testing and surgery. Patients are only charged what they can afford for services.

Local residents now operate two of the clinics. But when she left last December to continue overseeing the remaining three, Margaret was full of trepidation at making the trip alone for the first time.

"Despite all my doubts and fears and lack of security, I knew I had to go back," she recalled. "I told myself 'You survived the worst shock of all when he (Dan) died. This is nothing.'"

In the people she went to serve, Margaret said, she found new respect and new reasons to live. "I need them more than they need me — especially without Dan," she said. "I think the people loved Dan and me more to think that I would come all that way alone. We became like blood brothers."

Not long after she arrived last winter, a priest from a tiny mountain chapel visited her and asked that she open a new dispensary in a dusty village south of Guadalajara.

"That costs money," she countered.

Then he made an offer she couldn't refuse — to name the dispensary for her late husband. Last February, she opened the Daniel Whalen dispensary two days a week. Located in a desolate area the government recently opened for settlement, the village is populated mostly by Indians, who have built small cement-block huts.

Because the area is isolated, it has become a refuge for prostitutes, drug addicts and alcoholics, Margaret said. Women in particular have few options. They marry, but often their husbands abandon them after several years and many children. Prostitution is then virtually the only way they can feed their children.

Because of inflation, prices for corn, beans and rice continue to rise steadily. The cost of some medicines, on the other hand, has tripled since Margaret left. In May, the price for eight ampules of ampicillin, which the clinics prescribe for everything from flu to infections, was 400 pesos. Now, one nurse reported, the price is up to 1,200 pesos.

Despite a cloud of financial woes always hanging over her head, Margaret exuded new confidence as she prepared to leave this year.

"I don't have a lot of wisdom. I just have a heart that loves," she said. "When you accept your brother, there is a sacrifice. You forget what you want in hearing the joys and tragedies of another person. It's unconditional love and with love, you don't worry about the budget."

Letters of support and donations may be sent to Margaret Whalen at 1549 Rochester Road, East Avon, N.Y. 14414. Mail will be forwarded to her in Mexico.

Gov. Cuomo to receive honorary degree at inauguration of new Fisher president

Governor Mario M. Cuomo will deliver the principal address at the inauguration of William L. Pickett, Ph.D., as the fourth president of St. John Fisher College on Friday, November 7. The inauguration will be held at 3:30 p.m. in the Fisher Student Life Center. Gov. Cuomo will receive an honorary doctor of laws degree from the college.

Presiding at the inauguration will be Donald E. Lennox, chairman of the board and chief executive officer of Navistar International, a member of Fisher's Board of

Trustees and chairman of the planning committee for the inauguration.

James D. Ryan, chairman of Fisher's Board of Trustees, will officially install the new president. Dr. Pickett will speak, followed by brief remarks by Father Ulysses Pare, CSB, superior general of the Congregation of St. Basil.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark will give the benediction.

A Mass will be offered in St. John Fisher's varsity gym at 11 a.m. the morning of the inauguration.



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

Below you will find six statements. They are observations I make as a result of some recent reflection on my personal experience, my observations of others and on what friends and colleagues have shared with me. They do not fully describe our life together, but I believe they express a concern — perhaps, an opportunity? — we share. Let me ask you to read the statements and decide for yourself whether or not you can identify with them out of your experience.

1. Our lives are so busy that we are often more tired or tense than is good for us or those around us.

2. Together with this, is the sense that for all the motion and activity, we are not as happy or as put together as we can reasonably expect to be. Something is missing.

3. Much of our experience of this leaves us feeling somewhat victimized and not just a little angry because we are aware of having demands placed on us by a variety of people. The sum of the demands exceeds our capacity to meet them all — even before we think about what we'd like to do.

4. If we are not careful, a first fruit of all this can be a sense of discontent, the source of which we can all too easily locate in the deficiencies — even the imagined malice — of others, rather than in an inadequate exercise of our own freedom.

5. When this discontent is not articulated or somehow shared with others who care about us, it can become the stuff of loneliness and alienation. Then we are prisoners of this discontent rather than free, loving agents challenged to profit even from the harder aspects of human life.

6. This kind of discontent, as it multiplies among us, makes it increasingly difficult to come together as a people to celebrate in a life-giving way the deep streams of our common life. We are much more likely to carp than to encourage, to compete than to cooperate, to judge than to show compassion, to justify standing apart rather than

committing ourselves to participation.

If you identify with any of this, I hope you don't feel alone or that I have called you to some kind of guilt trip. It seems to me that we live in pressured, demanding times. My hope in writing is to stimulate the kind of prayer, thought, and conversation that will allow us to battle the pressures that can lead us to isolation and resentment.

I am deeply convinced that the Lord wants that for us and that God's grace will lead us to it. But it won't happen without hard work, and it won't happen unless we together create a climate in which unimportant things can be left undone so that we can deal with essential things.

If I knew the answers to all of these issues I would have shared them long ago. Perhaps the best I can do is to offer some questions you may find helpful in your family, committee, council, parish, department, car pool or whatever!

Do we have a sense that the net result of our collective activity is greater peace, or a deeper sense of purpose or a greater capacity for love?

Are we able to weigh and measure the relative importance of our many activities so that we can make free and loving judgments about how we will better focus our energies?

Are we able to help one another say no when that response will best serve the values most important in our lives?

Do we spend at least five times as much time and energy encouraging, complimenting and supporting others as we do in discovering and publicizing their faults?

Do we regard poetry, music, laughter, reading, silence, recreation, fun, prayer and visiting as activities to be squeezed in only when everything else is done, or as sources of energy necessary for our well being and loving attention to others?

You probably have 1,000 questions better than these. I hope you'll ask them and then listen carefully to what you hear.

Peace to all.

Resource directory available

A directory of services and resources on adolescent sexuality is now available to parish personnel throughout the diocese.

Compiled by the Task Force on Adolescent Sexuality and the Youth Ministry Office, the directory contains only listings

for agencies sponsored by or connected to the Diocese. The resources it describes are thus compatible with Catholic traditions and values.

Each parish has already been sent three copies of the directory. For information, or to request additional copies, contact the Office of Youth Ministry at (716)328-3210.

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