

WORLD & NATION

Nun's touch reached to the Rochester Diocese

Alvaro Carmona didn't expect to actually meet Mother Teresa when the nun was opening her Gift of Peace home for the dying in Washington, D.C., in November 1986.

And his wife Laura, who had worked at Mother Teresa's missions in India for 40 days in 1984, reminded him on the drive there that he probably wouldn't have the chance.

"I said, 'Oh that's fine.' Leave it to God, that's what I learned from Laura. She learned that in turn from Mother Teresa," Alvaro said.

However, when they arrived at the house, he recalled, "The person at the door receiving all the guests was Mother Teresa herself. It was unbelievable. ... That's the kind of person Mother Teresa was."

The Carmonas, who later moved from Spencerport to Victor, were among members of the Diocese of Rochester fortunate enough to have had contact with Mother Teresa in some way during her lifetime. All of them report having come away impressed and inspired by her.

The Carmonas, for example, discovered that personal contacts with her involved more than mere politeness.

Recalling her brief time in Calcutta, Laura, at the Gift of Peace house opening, said to Mother Teresa, "I know you don't remember me."

"Oh yes, I remember you. How is your son?" Mother Teresa responded.

"Every hair in my body stood up," Alvaro recalled. The nun remembered that Laura had left India to be home with their oldest son, who had been injured at work.

"That was the lesson that she always taught. When you're talking to one person, that person becomes the most important person in life. And if you're talking to a sick person, that sick person becomes your Christ," Alvaro said.

The Carmonas continued to see Mother Teresa off and on while working at the Washington site as well as her houses in New York, mostly from 1986 to 1989.

Alvaro also recalled driving Mother Teresa around Washington and praying with her in the car.

Although he did not meet Mother Teresa, Thomas Heffernan, a parishioner at St. John the Evangelist Church on Humboldt Street, Rochester, still keeps on display the prayer card and note she sent his wife 18 years ago.

Bernice Heffernan had written Mother Teresa, telling her that their daughter Monica was adopting her name for her confirmation name. Bernice later died in 1987. Neither Thomas nor his daughter, now in Falls Church, Va., expected a response to the letter.

Lo and behold, a prayer card and handwritten note on the back came back each for Bernice and Monica within two weeks, Thomas recalled.



Laura and Alvaro Carmona of the Rochester Diocese meet with Mother Teresa Nov. 8, 1986, at Gift of Peace house, Washington, D.C. Also present are Sisters Frederick (left) and Dolores (right).

"My dear Bernice," the one note read. "Thank you for your kind letter and the poem, a great gift of God to you. I am sorry to hear you have cancer. But remember it is a kiss of Jesus, a sign that we have come so close to him on the cross ... So give him the joy of your love. God bless you." It was signed "Sister Teresa, MC."

"It was remarkable ground she covered," Heffernan said. "She inspired all of us, didn't she?"

One of Paul Manzella's lingering memories of meeting Mother Teresa in Calcutta in 1990 was of her cupping his hand between hers and looking into his face.

"You get the feeling right away that at that point, at that moment, you are the most important person to her," said Manzella, a parishioner at Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Church.

Manzella, a speech pathologist, spent a month and a half volunteering with Mother Teresa's congregation at their Kalighat home for the dying. A volunteer at Rochester's Mt. Carmel House, a home for the dying here, he had gone to India wanting to do more, and to meet Mother Teresa.

"When you met her, it's not like meeting anyone else," Manzella said. "Something surrounds her. It's a concrete feeling of humility and holiness that radiates from her being."

"I just knew I was in the presence of a saint," he added.

Manzella's first encounter with her came when he presented her with several hundred rosaries made for her by people at Mt. Carmel House.

"Her face lit up," he recalled. "She was really excited that the poor and sick in

Rochester made them."

He also met her during a retreat for volunteers, and during a gathering for volunteers as their time with her was ending.

At the retreat, Manzella said, she told them when they got back home to continue to give to others.

"She said it is very important for each person to become a carrier of God's love," he said.

Father Mitchell Zygodlo, administrator of St. Stanislaus Parish, Rochester, met Mother Teresa on June 7, 1995. Father Zygodlo had traveled to Newark, N.J., to concelebrate a Mass at Newark's Sacred Heart Cathedral during which several women were professing their vows as Missionaries of Charity.

He wanted to see Mother Teresa.

"I wanted to see her because I thought she was already a saint," he said, noting he met her after the Mass. He added that he kissed her hands.

"Believe me, when I touched her, I was in heaven — it was like an electrical shock," he said. "She was such a great person."

Father Zygodlo, a native of Poland, said he saw Mother Teresa as a personal model, because he felt like a missionary himself in the United States. He added that she inspired him to take on more work with groups in need of direct ministry such as patients at Veterans' Administration hospitals.

Father Anthony Mugavero, pastor at St. Bridget's Church in Rochester, had the opportunity to meet Mother Teresa on two occasions.

In 1988, he traveled to New York City for a court hearing after being arrested

for protesting on a Rochester abortion clinic's property. When he learned that Mother Teresa was also in New York at the time, he said he "just sort of got bold" and traveled to the Missionaries of Charity house where she was staying.

Although Mother Teresa wasn't in at the time, he recalled, he left a message and she called him later that evening.

"It was great. She said, 'I'm so sorry I missed you.' She immediately made you feel important," Father Mugavero said.

Father Mugavero met Mother Teresa face-to-face the next day after he celebrated a Mass. She presented him with two religious medals.

Two years later, Father Mugavero spent his sabbatical in Calcutta where he stayed with the Missionaries of Charity brothers while working with the poor. During this trip, he was the sole celebrant at a special Mass that honored Mother Teresa's reelection as her order's superior. And, once again, he enjoyed a brief chat with her.

"She was a little late getting to the Mass. She came to me and said, 'Father, I'm so sorry you had to wait for me,'" Father Mugavero recalled.

Not to worry — the priest was anything but miffed.

"I felt like I was in heaven," he remarked.

Father Mugavero added that his work in Calcutta gave him a full appreciation of the special ministry Mother Teresa and her order performed for India's impoverished.

"The poorest of the poor — they went into places no one else wants to go," Father Mugavero remarked.

Three years ago students and faculty of St. Helen's School, Gates, felt Mother Teresa's influence through a service project. The school staged a toy drive and turned its proceeds over to a Missionaries of Charity orphanage in Gawhati Assam, India.

"It was a joy to see the children and their families all working together to help those who had much less than they did," said Carol Robinson, school principal. "Although we at St. Helen's School never met Mother Teresa, we felt that we helped her in her ministry in our own small way. She has always been in our prayers."

Heather Maciejewski and Cathryn Kitzelberger, who were both St. Helen's fourth-graders at the time and now attend All Saints Catholic Junior High School, Gates, said they learned a great deal about Mother Teresa by participating in the project.

"She liked to help a lot of people, like those with leprosy and AIDS," Heather said. "When she was helping them, she saw God in every single one of them and appreciated them."

"She showed us that even if you're walking down the street and you're thinking 'I don't want to be near that person,' you shouldn't ignore them," Cathryn added.

(The above report was compiled by Courier staff writers.)

Women Needed for Hormone Therapy Research

As they search for the combinations of hormone replacement therapy that are both safe and effective, the Reproductive Endocrinology Unit and Menopause Center at the University of Rochester Medical Center seek women to participate in a study.

Volunteers must be healthy, post-menopausal women between the ages of 40 and 65. After a physical examination, women will be randomized to one of 8 treatment groups and receive various combinations of an FDA-approved estrogen and/or progestin, or placebo.

During this one-year study, volunteers are seen every three months. Benefits to volunteers include free Pap smears and lab tests, free mammogram, and possible relief of menopausal symptoms based on the medication(s) they receive. Compensation of \$450 is available. Women who have had a hysterectomy are not eligible.

Women interested in participating can call Wanda Rivers at 275-7891.



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