

Volunteering is way of life in Lyons

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Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

Only a handful of people in the world are easily identifiable by one name — Diana, Elvis and Madonna, to name a few. Deborah Housel, pastoral administrator at St. Michael's Parish in Lyons, believes Aquila Zacharilla should be added to that list.

Zacharilla — more commonly known as "Ackie" — is a Lyons resident and St. Michael's parishioner who is well-known for her involvement in various church and community ministries, Housel said.

"If you enter the area, you meet her. There are people that you know by one name, some by two names. They're people that become very popular because of their following of the other one name that we know — Jesus," Housel said.

Zacharilla was recently honored for her commitment to others when the Inter-Church Council of Lyons presented her with the 2003 Volunteer of the Year award. The award is given annually to a volunteer in the community who demonstrates commitment, caring and compassion and who serves through one of the programs or missions supported by the council.

Zacharilla was nominated for the award by every pastor in Lyons



when the religious leaders on the Inter-Church Council gathered for a nomination meeting, Housel said. Zacharilla brings Communion to the sick, is the head of her parish's decorating committee and a member of the finance council and women's group, among other things. She began "Operation Tidy Bottom," an ecumenical ministry that provides diapers to needy families in Lyons, and has been involved with the Inter-Church Council — which consists of six religious communities in Lyons — since its inception more than five years ago.

"I'm very interested in the Inter-Church Council because it's brought all our churches in Lyons together. (The council) has been the greatest thing, really. We've reached out to so many people," Zacharilla said.

A food pantry, thrift shop and soup kitchen have been created through the work of the council, and many more events and outreach opportunities are in the works, Zacharilla said.

"She's a person who gets to know everyone, especially people who work for the church. She's involved

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up to her ears in about a million things," said Sister of St. Joseph Catherine Gibbons, religious-education coordinator for St. Michael's Parish.

Church involvement has always been an important part of her life, Zacharilla said. As a young girl growing up in Messina, N.Y., she watched her mother, who was very active in their parish, so it was only natural for her to become involved with the church when she was older, she said.

"On and on, you name it, I'm on it. It's no big deal. You just do it automatically. You do what you do because you love it," Zacharilla said of her involvement.

When she's not volunteering, Zacharilla works three hours a day at Caring Friends of Wayne County, a nonprofit service for the elderly and the homebound. She creates cards, which are sent out to the elderly community four times a year. She has several groups of people

who help her color the 1,700 cards before they are sent out.

"A lot of these people never get mail, so they are really appreciative of this. I especially like elderly people. I love visiting these people. They're so appreciative of your going to see them," Zacharilla said.

Without the help of other volunteers, Zacharilla said she wouldn't be able to accomplish nearly as much, and insisted that what she does is not that unusual, especially in her community.

"Everyone really does help anything I do. (At St. Michael's) we have a real group of people who help out," she said.

"The people of St. Michael's in Lyons do take their Eucharist out into the community in action, and an example of that is Ackie," Housel added.

Zacharilla said she was honored to receive the Volunteer of the Year award, but said when she helps others, she's not looking for recognition or attention.

"I do it all for the love of God. It's been fun; it's been rewarding," she said.

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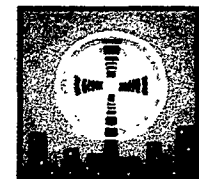
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