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interchange

Volume 26 No. 4 | Winter 2021-22

Cultural Immersion...

Embracing Life Through the Eyes of Others

Sister Margaret Kiefer in Barrio Polo in Bogotá, Colombia c. 2000

Sister Marguerite Gaasch at Cabrini-Green, Chicago, Summer 1965

Sister Joseen Vogt with graduates of Battambang Teacher Training Center in Cambodia, March 2004

Dear Friends,

Over the past decade-plus working at Assisi Heights, I've found it fascinating to learn of the wide range of ministries served by the Sisters. As with Sister Therese Jilk, Cojourner Mary Huettl has diligently captured stories of the Sisters (and Cojourners) to share within the Community, in hopes of getting to know each other a little better. As I perused through her past interviews, I found it interesting to hear how the Sisters immersed themselves into different cultures and what they learned from those experiences.

Here are a few excerpts from one of Mary Huettl's interviews:

"It was a sabbatical that changed the life of Sister Marlys Jax forever. She went with the Church of the Savior in Washington, DC, for a program called 'Reverse Mission.' The objective was to work beside persons of other cultures; not so much to teach others, but absorb how they might be able to teach us. She worked side-by-side with the poor people of Kenya, Ethiopia, India, and Thailand with the Missionaries of Charity. In Calcutta, she worked for Mother Teresa of India in the home for the dying. Marlys' two areas of ministry were working with unadoptable teens and having the responsibility for the feeding and "entertainment" of the 2-3 ½-year-olds. Many were abandoned and found on the front doorstep when she arrived at work in the morning. In the afternoons, she worked with the Children's Home Society, a Minnesota-based Adoption agency. While in India, Sister Marlys had the opportunity to visit the residents of Mother Teresa's leprosarium. All were great cultural learning experiences. Her world expanded. She learned the meaning of compassion and saw "the beauty of simple people who were happy, but had nothing and considered it everything." She realized that she was shaped, or reshaped, by this experience. She learned to pay attention to new and different realities. When the program ended, she went to Cambodia to teach at Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR) with Sister Joseen Vogt. Prior to this sabbatical, she thought there were plenty of needs in Minnesota that needed attention. Her worldview was turned inside out and the needs of others expanded exponentially and pushed her to put extra effort into social justice issues.

"When Sister Marlys returned to Rochester, she took time to acclimate back into the Rochester area and the Rochester Franciscan Community, and eventually she returned to work at Assisi Heights as program coordinator for the Spirituality Center. Her creativity has expanded the interrelatedness of spirituality through justice and peace issues, interfaith, earth, and environmental causes among others."

Sister Marlys' mantra is: "We are not for *ourselves*, we are for *others.*"

As I looked back on prior issues of *Interchange,* I found several articles that reflected on the **cultural immersion** of the Sisters. Here are a few examples, with links to view the publication on our website:

- ***Fall 2021***: **Cultural Resources: A Trip to the Amazon**, by Sister M. Carolina Pardo Jaramillo. Sister Carolina shares how she became acclimated to the ways of those living in the Amazon region… having visited more than once, establishing enduring friendships.
- ***Winter 2018-19***: **Go Rebuild My Church *and* The Spirituality of Marching for Justice**, in which Sisters Bernadine Jax, and Colleen Waterman reflected on their years of serving in the African American community in the Charleston, South Carolina region.
- ***Fall 2018***: **Bogotá Mission: A Legacy of Love**, by Sister Val Usher, explains how several of the Sisters immersed themselves into the Colombian culture to create two schools, a dispensary, and a clinic!
- ***Spring 2017***: **Journey to Nicaragua,** by Sister Wanda Mettes, reveals how the impact made by performing missionary work in another culture.
- ***Spring 2016:*** **Building Bridges with the Native American Community,** is a story about the work of Sister Cecily Schroepfer, written by Sister Therese Jilk.
- ***Fall 2015:*** **A Woman of Faith: Sister Joseen Vogt,** written by Sister Marlys Jax, illustrates the impact Sister Joseen Vogt had, particularly in Cambodia.
- ***Fall 2012:*** **Going Out Into the World:** ***Peru Sisters in touch with the world... and the beautiful country and culture of Peru*****,** by Sisters Ruth Snyder and Patricia Himmer and ***Going Out into the World: Bogotá, Colombia Vatican II - Then and Now.*** by Sister Tierney Trueman, describes the struggles and triumphs of life in a different country and culture.
- And the list goes on!

It is heartwarming to hear how the Sisters were impacted by their experiences, as they became immersed in another culture. We can also imagine how those whom the Sisters ministered were positively impacted by the outpouring of love and acceptance of their culture.

Perhaps, in today's world filled with divisiveness—with people focusing on cancel culture, critical race theory, and stories of cultural appropriation—some lessons could be learned from those who willingly embraced these experiences?

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