

The Canticle

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Voice of
The Community
of St. Francis,
Province of
The Americas

Easing the Suffering

*I can ease the suffering of this world....
With my head, my heart and my hands.*
("Of This World" sung by Peter, Paul and Mary)

In the Social Ministry class that I teach at the School for Deacons in Berkeley, I am always challenging the students to go beyond compassionate service into advocacy. Often compassionate service is deprecatingly referred to as "band-aid" ministry. However, my contention (after Harry Fagan) is that Social Ministry stands firmly on two feet: One foot is compassionate service and the other foot is advocacy for social justice. Without both feet firmly planted on the ground, social ministry will be off balance.

There is a well known Chinese proverb: "Give a man a fish and you will feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you will feed him for a lifetime." The advocacy piece comes in with: "and make sure he has equal access to the fishing hole."

As Franciscans we certainly do advocacy work. As well as involvement with organizations such as Amnesty International (www.amnesty.org) and the Episcopal Public Policy Network (www.episcopalchurch.org/eppn.htm), we are part of the work of Franciscans International (FI) at the United Nations (www.franciscansinternational.org). FI is one of the non-governmental organizations at the UN which does research and advocacy for international policy, focusing on the needs of the earth, the poor and marginalized populations around the world. More recently we have become part of the Franciscan Action Network (www.franciscanaction.org). This is an organization of Franciscans in the United States which works on behalf of the needy. The Society of St. Francis First Order Sisters and Brothers and the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis are active in both of these organizations.

That said, back to band-aids.....

Our work, no matter how modest, on behalf of changing the structures that oppress and marginalize people, is certainly

important. However, on a day to day basis we are faced with individual people who are in need of our love, our prayers, our resources, our care. And in the words of the Peter, Paul and Mary song quoted at the beginning of this reflection: "I can ease the suffering of this world with my head, my heart and my hands."

This issue of *The Canticle* focuses on two ministries that we do which try to ease the suffering of the world, one person, one family at a time.

Sr. Ruth reports on the ministry of The Family Link, and I share some of the work of the Care Through Touch Institute. Both of these ministries are "band-aid" ministries, or as I prefer to think of them, "starfish" ministries. You know the Loren Easley story: the child on the beach picking up stranded starfish one by one and throwing them back into the sea. An adult comes along and points out the insignificance of his labors in comparison to the great need in the grand scheme of things. The boy's reply is that it matters to the starfish that gets thrown back into the water!

Pamela Clare, CSF



Care Through Touch ↑
The Family Link house →





THE FAMILY LINK GETS A MAKE OVER

Sr. Ruth, CSF

The Family Link began in response to a terminal illness which later became known as AIDS. The convent guest apartment housed families who rushed to San Francisco to be with a dying son or brother. They were short stays while a mysterious illness took away a precious life and left families with many unanswered questions. We offered accommodation for three years, at which point more was known of the disease and the population most affected. A stigma became attached to the diagnosis and we began to hear families saying they could not tell anyone why their son died. A deep silence of shame descended which meant that many grieving parents could not share all of their sorrow with those who might help them. The need to give voice to the anticipatory grief and confusion grew, as did the number of people being diagnosed and dying. Overwhelmed with requests to use our guest apartment we needed to find a way to continue the hospitality and provide a place where families could be with others walking the same path. And so The Family Link came into being to be an affordable hospitality house, a common ground for families affected by AIDS and a safe place to voice shock, anxiety, hurt and bewilderment. And I became the resident manager. That was over twenty-five years ago, incorporation being established on August 6, 1984.

This work of hospital hospitality continues, although the illnesses we see these days are much more varied. We still have families visiting people with AIDS but research has helped with life-saving drugs. Many of the families who stay with us now are supporting a loved one with such a serious condition that the patient has been brought to San Francisco because their local medical center is not equipped to help. Our guests have loved ones who might be receiving one, and often two, organs from a donor, or have a loved one who is very young, pregnant and now has cancer. They may have a family member who has been run over by a bus or suffered a terrible accident that involved limb amputation and then infection by flesh-eating bacteria.

The last couple of years the Recession boldly walked through our front door. It came into a house that was already in need of repair – leaking showers, unsafe flooring – those kinds of repairs. We seemed to be in a downward spiral with the future looking rather bleak. The same recession that was affecting us was affecting our guests and donors and the money was running out. Our local Junior League gave us an emergency grant for plumbing help and a couple gave us a generous donation in honor of their wedding anniversary. Two supporters gave us loans at low interest/no interest. The spiral began to move upward. Then an amazing organization called Rebuilding Together

came to the rescue. Their volunteers have sorted out and organized every nook and cranny in the house. They painted the bedrooms, kitchen, office and bathrooms, provided new (matching) living room furniture, new carpets, dishwasher, TVs, office furniture – the list goes on and on. The volunteers who are assigned as our team captains meet with us regularly and there aren't words to thank them. They have reached into that lowest point of the spiral and, through their kindness and hard work, have lifted us up. We can continue to use this lovely old house to offer safe and comfortable hospitality to our guest families.

The presence of a family member or friend can make a huge difference to a person journeying through the despair and fear of grave illness. Among our recent guests has been a couple who have a profoundly handicapped son, Jason. Jason has never been able to speak; he has never used words to express his needs; his parents have never heard the sound of his voice. His parents know what he is communicating. They can tell the doctors and nurses if there is a problem. When Jason became critically ill his parents and his uncle took turns to be at his bedside, never leaving him without a "voice". The hospital staff would have found their work more difficult without the family's communication. It is a privilege to be able to offer hospitality to this family, and so many others, who could not have afforded a motel room. Over and over they say the same words we use to our Rebuilding Together volunteers, "There are no words to tell you how much we appreciate this help."

Psalm 19 says, "Although they have no words or language, and their voices are not heard, their sound has gone out into all lands." It doesn't always take speech when the Spirit is present to interpret our "sighs too deep for words." God knows our gratitude for this place, our needs and our hope for the future.

For more information, check out the Family Link website: www.thefamilylink.com



Sr. Maggie with "the girls" (Morag and Noreen) in the newly renovated living room of The Family Link.

WORKING WITH SICK HOMELESS PEOPLE

Pamela Clare CSF



Since 2004 I have worked as a massage therapist for the Care Through Touch Institute (CTI). We do chair and foot massage with homeless people (www.carethroughtouch.org).

One day recently I was doing massage at Martins de Porres House of Hospitality, a soup

kitchen which welcomes people to come sit in their garden area while waiting on showers and lunch. A young woman in a wheelchair with her cast-enveloped leg elevated in front of her wheeled herself awkwardly into the garden. She had just been discharged from San Francisco General Hospital where she had been treated for a broken leg. After leaving the hospital she had nowhere to go since she was homeless so she wheeled herself seven long blocks down to Martins where she could find a safe place to rest and then have lunch.

I broke my foot a couple of years ago and I can't imagine being left on my own out on the street in such a situation. At the hospital, after being placed in a cast, I made my way precariously balanced on my new crutches down to the taxi. I was exhausted by then and when I finally reached home, there were people there to help me into bed, provide food and water, and other forms of support.

What is it like for homeless people to be sick or injured--not sick enough to be hospitalized, but too sick to be out on the streets? Like everyone who is ill, homeless people who are sick or injured need a safe place to recuperate, including a bed for rest, appropriate hygiene, clean water, and nutritious food in order for the body to heal itself.

In this time of budget cuts and health system downsizing, there is great pressure to decrease the length of hospital stays. As hospital stays have become shorter, hospitals have come to rely more heavily on the ability of the patient to return home for recuperation where family members can provide support and basic care.

But what happens when the sick person has no home and no one to provide the needed support? What about homeless people discharged with prescription medications which they cannot afford to get filled and instructions for self-care which are unreasonable given their lack of resources? What about people with chronic conditions such as diabetes and AIDS or those with cancer who are on chemotherapy, people with broken bones or surgery incisions?

Many homeless people who are sick or injured resort to wandering the streets during the day or sitting in crowded drop-in centers. There they are exposed to more illnesses or may expose others to communicable diseases such as Hepatitis and Tuberculosis which are so common on the streets.

Homeless people are even more vulnerable to illness and traumatic injury than the average person. Homelessness has a detrimental impact on health. Poor nutrition, lack of adequate

hygiene, exposure to violence and to the elements, contact with communicable diseases, and fatigue lead to almost half of the homeless adults having some form of physical illness. Recently I noticed that in the two blocks between the CTI Office and the drop-in center where I was working that day, there were 5 people in wheelchairs and 7 people with canes.

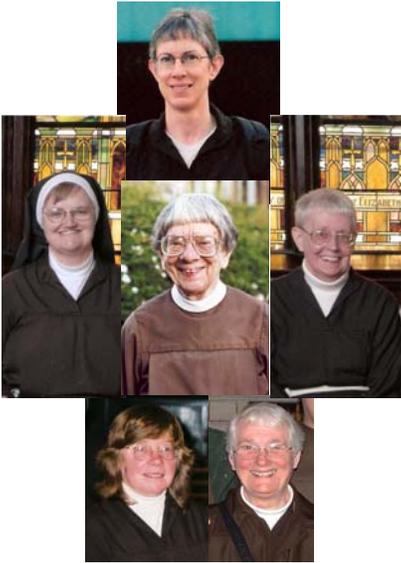
For seven years I have worked with sick homeless people, particularly patients at the Tom Waddell Health Center Women's Clinic. Recently, I have begun volunteering in the Acute Care for Elderly Unit at General Hospital. On my first visit there I worked with two older men who were unable to talk and seemed out of it. The first man, after receiving a massage on one foot, inched his foot over toward my nearby leg and while I was massaging the second foot, he gently brushed his toes up and down against my leg. I was deeply touched by his need to communicate and relate without words. That set me up for the second man. He seemed to be almost asleep while I worked on the one foot available to me. Then I worked on one clenched hand. Part way through the massage he began moving his hand and he raised his head and tried to look at me (he couldn't turn his head very far). I thought he was agitated and stopped my work without withdrawing my hands). He began massaging my hand in imitation of what I had been doing with him. It was truly an awesome experience. I had always read that touch was so important, and I even teach it to new massage interns who train with CTI, but this was a powerful experience of the truth of that old idea. Truly touch is a mutual experience - you can't touch someone without being touched yourself!

I was lured into the work of CTI by an essay in a pamphlet advertizing the CTI training. Mary Ann Finch, Director of CTI, wrote: "Today more than ever we recognize our responsibility to embody the actions and spirit of Jesus who placed himself at the side of the least in society and broke the rules as he chose to live and work among the 'untouchables.' His healing touch was an act of love, an act of justice. His presence was a renewal of hope that extended beyond the individual, to the community and to the world."

A couple of months ago, I was massaging a woman at the St. Vincent de Paul Wellness Center South of Market. I had worked with her before, and as I finished and removed my hands from her shoulders, I expected her to say something like, "Thanks, that feels a lot better." However, instead, she sat quietly for a few moments and then looked up at me with a bemused look in her eyes and said somewhat tentatively: "You know, this will sound strange, but there toward the end, I felt for a moment that it was Jesus' hands on me."



Pamela Clare at Project Homeless Connect, a city-sponsored quarterly service fair for poor and homeless people in San Francisco.



Out and About with CSF

At our last Diocesan Convention, Lynne was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Henry Ohlhoff Recovery Program, which has provided quality, affordable programs for adults and adolescents in recovery for fifty years.

At the same convention, Pamela Clare was appointed for a second term on the Diocesan Commission on Ministry. She has been very much involved in the diocesan redesign of the ordination process.

Lynne was a chaplain at the annual diocesan youth gathering “Happening” (a Cursillo-like event) for 50 teenagers and young adults in February. She also helped with the Grace Cathedral Family Camp (90 people) at the Bishop’s Ranch in May, including being house mother for a group of boys 11-14 years old.

During Lent Lynne coordinated a 5-week Anti-racism program at Grace Cathedral.

Pamela Clare and Lynne attended the annual Conference of Anglican Religious Orders of the Americas in Racine, Wisconsin, this May.

Meanwhile, on the home front...

- Cecilia kept us on track in the office, in the chapel and in our recycling.
- Jean was busily making jams and scones.
- Ruth and Maggie were keeping The Family Link going during the renovations.
- As well as the chaos at Family Link, we have been doing necessary painting and other renovations at St. Francis House—a task involving everybody, but especially Maggie, and also help from some good friends. Thank you David, Darien, Robert, Chris, Clay and Steve!
- And in the midst of it all, within the space of a single week, three separate swarms of bees took up residence in our back yard. Although we had discussed the possibility of keeping bees, we weren’t ready for this quite yet!

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