
Solidarity with the poor? Yes!

by Madeleine Desloge, RSCJ

Our perspective is shaped by the needs of the parish of Our Lady Queen of Heaven. Four RSCJ — Madeleine Desloge, Rosa Orjuela, Mercedes Posada, Bienvenida Velez — work in La Belle, a rural area of southwest Florida, half Hispanic, half Anglo.



Sisters Rosa Orjuela (center) and Mercedes Posada with A Migrant Family

Saturdays are taken up with Spanish classes, followed by sacramental preparation, choir practice, baptism, and liturgies — jam-packed with 12 in a bench for 6 and babies everywhere since Mexican families go nowhere without the whole family.

Sundays are for English classes for those who know English better than their parents. During Sunday liturgy the little ones leave for their own celebration. Monthly, this becomes a true children's Mass when the children take over as lectors, cantors, ushers, altar servers — even to counting the collection with one of the catechists. We almost have a teen-age organist; we already have a drum, sax and other instruments on hand for this big occasion.

A most important activity is visiting the migrant camps — some 20 of them — plus the individual trailers spread over Hendry and Glades Counties of Florida. Men who come here to earn money for their families in Mexico are squeezed together. The Sisters become the counselors, translators, food distributors, etc. for the 8-10 men who may live in a single trailer.

Solidarity with the poor? Yes! “Today, more than ever, the poor, the vulnerable and the dispossessed have a claim on our resources and our energies.” A case in point: One day Bienvenida was in the carport with a group of First Communicants; Rosa was in the living room with two families, one asking for transportation to the hospital for the mother, the other asking for money for a brother's funeral; Madeleine was attending to some parishioners about nursing home visitation; Mercedes was in the kitchen preparing food for all. Often added to this are migrants who come to telephone to Mexico, to have us send a money order, or to collect their mail from our P.O. Box. Our convent living has very little privacy!

Hendry County has become the citrus center for Florida. That means an influx of migrant workers adding to our present population of about 10,000. We need advocates for adequate housing, for better social services, and for justice for these minority peoples. Come join us! *

...programs such as this one end up having little connection to reality; they are unreal because we are not involved as a group any more than we were 25 years ago with the people who suffer poverty and the indignities and wounds of racism and violence.

The words used indicate a recognition of this; rarely are we urged to be beyond "educating" ourselves or "implementing" by "finding ways to probe the implications" of a designated priority, etc. These are soft and vague actions. In some cases a clear, straight-forward, good recommendation is weakened by this sort of language, *e.g.* we are urged to make it "our ordinary pattern to live in poor/working class neighborhoods" — quite a change since it is our ordinary pattern to live in upper middle class neighborhoods. But on closer examination, qualifying language precedes this direction: we are really only asked to probe the implications of changing this pattern. We are not nit-picking a choice of words, rather we are pointing out that the language is exactly right. It does indicate how unreal to most of us is the blood, sweat, complexity, cruelty of the kind of suffering described, and how likely it is to stay that way. [A substantial portion of the Response is here omitted.]

Women are mentioned in this Priority Paper only as they are a sub-set of the poor. This is a gross omission. The known history of

about patterns of powerlessness among ourselves, especially the powerlessness of those in their 30's and 40's who are too few in number to have more than a muted, fragmented voice, although they are at their most creative? What about the lack of genuine relationships? What of patterns of passive-aggressive behavior in places where we live?

We very much want to embrace priorities that join us genuinely with the poor in the struggle for justice, but we do not want these priorities or efforts to obscure or be the excuse that turns us away from, and causes us to ignore what is going on within each of us and among us. We have to look outward AND inward. It is as full, adult women with needs for emotional and relational lives, as well as generous work lives, that we want to join our efforts with those who suffer poverty and injustice. That for us is the love of God. We strongly believe our "priorities" should reflect this integrity.

- FROM THE RESPONSE OF

MARY ANN BURKE, RSCJ

LISA FITZGERALD, RSCJ

CATHERINE MOONEY, RSCJ

BARBARA ROGERS, RSCJ

.TO THE PROVINCE WORKING PAPER, *TOWARDS PROVINCE PRIORITIES*. SECTIONS ABOVE WERE SELECTED BY THE RSCJ NEWSLETTER EDITOR FROM THE COMPLETE RESPONSE.

The last [provincial] financial report stated that we had more community houses than we need. When these are sold could there not be some simple living spaces built on one or two of our properties such as Menlo or the Farm where we could once again gather as we did when we had boarding school rooms available? These units could be used for our religious and our constituencies. They could generate some income for their upkeep as does the Green Cottage at Villa Duchesne.

We have many now who have gone into spiritual direction and/or counseling. We are asking for more "connectedness" — places where we can gather to share and inspire each other to go out and help the suffering and oppressed people in our midst.

Would not an Order that could proclaim a strong spiritual renewal as the basic thrust, inspire vocations among those who are thirsting for a deep spiritual life as the foremost means for helping those who are oppressed?

I feel strongly that some religious order will come forth with this idea if religious life is once more to flourish. Would that it could be ours!

-MARGARET ERHART, RSCJ