

TOWARDS TOMORROW

reflect on their traditions. They become aware of the serious consequences of premature marriage and of the harmful effects of female circumcision, which so seriously undermines their dignity as women. When they first arrive they are awkward and inept, but after the six-year programme each one grows in stature as a child of God.

Work for Justice in the United States

Joan Kirby rscj described her work for justice in New York.

We are good friends. We have coffee together once a week. Tamara seems to trust me. She writes amazing short stories; her attention to detail makes for powerful writing. All my teaching instincts want to ensure she gets a good education, but Tamara is homeless; she lives in the Queens Interfaith Family Inn. Her mother is hopelessly addicted to drugs, so when she disappears to the streets, so does Tamara. We search for her, we ask at the Inn and one day Tamara calls me at home to say 'Thanks for what you have done for me. I have to make it on my own now.' I have never seen her again.

In 1980 we came to live and work in the midst of people deprived of housing, decent education or job security, and this has changed us. We were four rscj in a small apartment in an old-law tenement in midtown Manhattan, near the docks but also near Times Square and the theatre district. Our goal was not just to live poorly, but to learn what it means to be condemned to poverty in New York City. Mr McNulty lives alone, in 1998 he suffered a heart attack. Rosa is a mother on welfare in an apartment no bigger than ours; she stayed at home to raise seven children, who have all become self-sufficient and have good jobs. Jimmy at the gas station, Paul in the lumber yard and Dave in the auto repair shop, are among the many whose homes are threatened, because New York City is offering developers an Urban Renewal Area for luxury housing on

WOMEN FOR JUSTICE

Tenth Avenue. Poor people have no resources and for them subsistence is not a given. When housing, job or income are threatened, we have to find others in a similar situation and organise ourselves in order to gain strength in numbers. In times of need, we learn something else: 'What I have is yours.'

We four rscj have learned something precious in the eighteen years we have lived here together. Patience, when the building is overrun with mice and the landlord stalls, promising an exterminator who never shows up. Forbearance, when for days there is neither heat nor hot water because the landlord has not paid the oil bill; tolerance of each other in our cramped quarters. With shared values comes a deeper understanding and love for each other. We are humbled by our good fortune: we have the security the poor do not have.

At first we came to do no more than share the life of our neighbours. Very soon the unjust political and economic structures made us realise that to struggle for justice was our mission. We organised, petitioned, demonstrated, and we attended meetings with our neighbours. In the late nineties, we see that the cutbacks in social subsidies and education funding, the repression of labour unions, the migrations of the poor looking for work and the environmental degradation have global implications and are universal causes of the suffering of the poor. We are challenged to develop new forms of mission. Solidarity with the poor now requires a new vision of 'who is my neighbour?' How are we to become global citizens in solidarity for the poor of the world? This will be our challenge in the decades to come.

In Defence of Human Rights in Colombia

The long Colombian armed conflict has been characterised by the violation of human rights. Year by year thousands of non-combatants die, disappear, or are taken hostage for ransoms of