

EXILE: REFUGEES & INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS WHO ARE MY NEIGHBOURS?

Diane Curley

National Sub-committee Chairperson for Refugees, Immigration and Citizenship

“Seek always to do some good, somewhere. Every man has to seek in his own way to realize his true worth. You must give some time to your fellow man. Even if it’s a little thing, do something for those who need help, something for which you get no pay but the privilege of doing it. For remember, you don’t live in a world all your own. Your brothers are here, too.” (Albert Schweitzer)

According to the United Nations, a refugee is a person who flees their home country due to a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”

In addition to refugees, there is a category of displaced people known as internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are not officially refugees, because they have not left their own country, but are refugee-like inasmuch as they have been displaced by persecution, armed conflict, or natural disaster.

The awareness that many newcomers to Canada, and the Catholic school system, have lived in exile as refugees and IDPs prompted the chaplains of the Ottawa Catholic School Board to develop the Exile program.

The framework for living in exile was obtained through discussions with the staff and students who have lived this reality. The feedback from discussions raised questions about the personal and communal responsibilities of people committed to the Good News of Jesus Christ. The chaplains



believed that staff and students in Catholic schools are called to live their faith in community while deepening their relationship with God. They further stated that the question “Who Is My Neighbour?” is paramount to understanding how and where Catholics see the face of God in community, especially when in crisis.

Three hundred and fifty students got the opportunity last fall to experience this unique program. The chaplains in partnership with The Salvation Army, the Canadian Forces, the Ottawa Police Service and the Ottawa Fire Department simulated an emergency within the national capital region. A reported natural disaster caused all movement and traffic in the region to halt and students were assembled in a temporary emergency facility, administered by The Salvation Army.

The students were registered as IDPs at “Camp Exile”. The leaders of the emergency response team and the decontamination unit boarded each bus. Students and staff were then processed as refugees and escorted to the tents that would house them for the day.

Exile is a twelve-hour exposure program that is designed to raise awareness about the lived reality of approximately 33 million refugees around the world.

While at Camp Exile the participants listened to presenters from Engineers Without Borders, Doctors Without Borders and The Salvation Army.



THE EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES:

Exile as an exposure program challenges students to see the face of God in their neighbour, particularly in a crisis situation. The participants identify through a real experience, the intrinsic connection between the content of the Grade 10 religious education curriculum “Christ in Culture” and the real experience that millions of people live each day. It also challenges them to become aware of political, social, environmental and religious connections between differing faith communities.

According to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. The experience of being an IDP along with citizens from all walks of life presented opportunities for all to treat others and to be treated with dignity and respect.

Martha Dougherty, chaplain of St. Matthew High School stated, “The Exile program has taken over four years to put into action and I am excited about the possibilities for its future use”. She is available to speak on this program and share a power point presentation. †

ERRATUM

In the last issue, Holy Redeemer Parish Council of Sydney, Nova Scotia was credited with keeping the Mass for Shut Ins operating. While Holy Redeemer council did submit the article, credit should have been extended to all councils in the Diocese of Antigonish. We apologize for the error.

ST. ANTHONY DANIEL PARISH COUNCIL SYDNEY, NOVA SCOTIA

Major Don MacGillivray, a Roman Catholic priest at St. Anthony Daniel parish in Sydney and St. Ann’s in Membertou, is the chaplain of the 2nd battalion Nova Scotia Highlanders reserve unit.

He left on May 11, 2007 for a brief tour of duty in Afghanistan, replacing a chaplain who went on leave.

“There is an expression we sometimes use in chaplaincy that I have to loiter with intent - just hang around with the intention of having people chat with you about issues that concern them.

“They might be fearful about their own mortality and all that kind of stuff or even issues at home that can get a little out of control because they are not home.” MacGillivray has been an army reserve chaplain for over 21 years. He did a full six-month tour of duty with the Canadian Forces on the Golan Heights in 2004-2005 but isn’t able to do a full tour in Afghanistan now.

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ST. PATRICK PARISH COUNCIL HANEY (MAPLE RIDGE), BRITISH COLUMBIA



Pictured are (l-r), back row: Nancy Volpe, Laurette Fortier, Anna Pacella, Susan McGlone, Ramona Charters, Lorraine Spindor, Clare Devlin, Susan Morel, Eva Demeter, Mary Dobie, Margaret Holmes, Nancy Gerry. Front Row: Elizabeth Bregger, Maria Damiani, Mary McLeod, Bernadette Smith-Gander, Suzanne Eng, Paulette Bonneau.

Members of St. Patrick Parish Council are wearing red on Fridays to show support for the military and to support the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP). Inspired by the “Red Friday” movement, St. Patrick Parish Chairperson of Community Life Maria Damiani sewed red silk scarves for members to wear on Fridays. The scarves were sold to members, with the proceeds going to CCODP. Over \$300.00 had been donated by January 2008.