

Spreading the Charism in Bedford

BY S. MARY BODDE

While their paths do not cross daily, S. Margaret Mach and Associate Marian Ainsworth are spreading the charism of the Sisters of Charity in Bedford, Ohio, through their volunteer ministries. S. Margaret is the spiritual advisor of the Diocese of Cleveland's St. Vincent de Paul Society; Marian crochets baby sets and lap robes for the elderly. Both women discuss their volunteerism below.

When asked about her volunteering, S. Margaret Mach has to stop and think because who she is and what she does full time is all of a piece. S. Margaret has been the director of the Office of Evangelization for the Diocese of Cleveland, Ohio, since June 2000.

When Sister was asked six years ago to be the spiritual advisor of the Diocesan St. Vincent de Paul Society, her Vincentian heritage came to mind in her prayer. She had been a member of the Vincentian Sisters of Charity of Bedford, Ohio, for 46 years and in their leadership for 16 years. When she said 'yes,' Bishop Anthony Pilla appointed her.

"I would love to be working with the poor," she said, "but because I have a full-time ministry, I can't do that. So I'm here – at all the board meetings. I do training on Vincentian spirituality with modules from the national office.

"Those called to be Vincentians," she added, "are people who have that charism within themselves, the same as religious. It's kind of embarrassing when you come before all these gray-haired people who have been doing this for 25-35 years – and you are coming to tell them about spirituality? You're not. I just believe they are living it. It's just raising their consciousness or some elements that they haven't taken time to consider because they are working with the poor. We are called to see the face of Jesus in the poor, so that's the overarching general element when we look at spirituality."

At board meetings for the last five years, S. Margaret has been inviting these Vincentians to reflect in groups of two or three with questions like, 'Think about the last few months and your home visits, your encounters with the poor. Where did you see



Associate Marian Ainsworth (left) and S. Margaret Mach are spreading the charism of the Sisters of Charity in Bedford, Ohio, through their volunteer work.

Jesus in the faces of the poor?'

As their spiritual advisor, S. Margaret can say, "We have started neighborhood centers – not just Vincentians participating in volunteer work, but 14 parishes that take responsibility for taking care of those neighborhood centers. Maybe twice a week people come for food, clothing, furniture. Parish people are excited about helping others. I really believe this is a sign of the Spirit because it's created so much energy and so much life in the parishes. When the Vincentians say, 'We need volunteers,' people volunteer!"

The Vincentians have three centers in the city of Cleveland – Holy Name and Christ the King parishes, and a Vincentian center (where the offices are

located). "There is so much outreach. When people have emergencies, it's the Vincentians that help them."

Besides her Vincentian involvement, S. Margaret has been appointed to the board of Light of Hearts Villa, a senior residence for independent and assisted living retrofitted in the former Lumen Cordium High School. She is a trustee on the SC Charitable Trust Committee and a member of SC Charitable Trust Investment Committee. She serves on the Advisory Board of Mother Margaret Hall and the Formation Advisory Board. She presented a day of reflection on vocations in February. S. Margaret also is a spiritual director, certified through the Vincentian Studies Institute.

In her full-time ministry, S. Margaret said, "Basically I do training and workshops in evangelization. I believe it's important to empower the people and the parishes to be evangelizers – the everyday evangelist, the person in the pew, and structured teams in the parish. Hospitality is the hallmark of the evangelizer. A strategy is reaching out to inactive Catholics because we have been trained to be very private about our faith. We have 120 million inactive Catholics in the U.S. I help to develop outreach programs, inviting them back.

"Worship is critical," she added. "How we do that is important." S. Margaret works on developing small Christian Communities because it's in small communities that ordinary people share their faith. She trains parishes with the Vibrant Parish Life process, started in 2001 by Bishop Lennon, now in Phase II clustering, with some parishes merging and some closing.

"The American Bishops in a 1991 letter, *Go and Make Disciples*, asked people to make evangelization a priority. I provide resources to also carry out the goals of Pope Paul VI's 1975 encyclical, *Evangelization in the Modern World*. These two documents are the primary means of how and what I do – to look at these goals and the strategies to carry them out in workshops, such as *Fanning the Flame* of our baptismal call, the essential mission of the Church.

"We are told to bring this white garment unstained into the everlasting life of heaven; to receive this candle, the light of Christ; to keep this flame burning. How do we do this and share with others – through evangelization, by being disciples of Jesus."

To keep herself grounded, S. Margaret enjoys pottery. "Since 1990 I sit at the wheel at home, and I go to Orange Arts Center on Tuesdays once a week, except in the summer. I put time aside for me, sitting at that wheel. Trying to center clay is a spiritual experience for me." S. Margaret has sold pieces at

Light of Hearts craft fairs, and gives many as gifts.

"Maybe when I retire I'll seek some little shop. Now life is fun, exciting. But I am always open to where God's going to lead me."

Little did Marian Ainsworth know that learning to crochet at age 8 would provide her a volunteer activity during her later years (she is 87) as an Associate with the Sisters of Charity in Bedford.

For the last 12 years, Marian has been crocheting baby sets – sweaters, bonnets and blankets – and since 1998, lap robes and capes for women and men in nursing homes. She prefers light to dark yarn, but can work with any color in the sunlight. "I have a window by my chair so I get good light," she said.

Eight of the 11 years that Marian lived in Canfield, Ohio, she volunteered as sacristan and also crocheted altar cloths – "but they don't want those anymore." Her sacristan duties included "washing albs, and on Fridays, cleaning everything – altar, floors, sacristy."

In the mid-1950s, living just two doors from the Vincentian Sisters of Charity, the principal at St. Wenceslaus said to Marian, "I watched how you handled your boys, so I know you could teach school." So Marian began teaching.

"One teacher had a class of 56 children," Marian recalled, "so I would go in the morning and walk around the class with her, and then in the afternoon, the principal, S. Columba, would take her class down to the cafeteria and finish up the day, and I would take her half of the sixth grade upstairs to teach. Because she finished early, S. Columba would come in to sit and watch me teach.

"Once I put a word on the board and showed them how they spelled it wrong. S. Columba said, 'Don't ever do that again. Put it on spelled right.' That was the only time she ever criticized me." State regulations in the late 1960s requiring teaching degrees prevented Marian from continuing.

S. Mary Elisabeth Ann Rechka, Marian's blood sister, reminded her she had won trophies for teaching students to bowl. "I took kids to the bowling alley after school," but when questioned, she admitted not teaching any to crochet.

In Canfield Marian also made a home for her mother for 25 years and her father-in-law for two years until they died. Now at St. Martin of Tours in Maple Heights, Ohio, prayer is her volunteering – perpetual adoration from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. on Saturday and Mass on Tuesdays. Marian used to take an Irish neighbor to church; now she takes a 90-year-old blind man. She prays the rosary and the Chaplet of Mercy daily as well as listens to EWTN (Eternal Word Television Network).