

The Joan Times

Newsletter #2
from Joan Huguenard
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The M.N.A.M. Story...

MNAM is a still young organization for mission work right here in America. It was founded by and for lay persons, Christians, of all denominations. Persons who share the vision that the gospels call all of us to mission of some kind.

Six of us took part in this year's intensive five week orientation process. We found it demanding, s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g and exhausting. Also illuminating, motivating and energizing.

I consider highly recommendable our four textbooks: Jesus Before Christianity by Albert Nolan; Christianity Rediscovered by Vincent J. Donovan; The Prophetic Imagination by Walter Brueggemann and The Promise of Paradox by Parker J. Palmer. In addition, we worked, prayed and played together, studied Scripture, broadened our global view, mastered (?) new techniques, focused on our individual theologies of mission, analyzed social needs of the orientation community (Gloucester, Massachusetts), shared in the unique community life of Wellspring House and finally were commissioned in a beautiful ceremony at the end of October. Now we are ready for a two year field assignment for further training.

My Story...

I'm finding I can no longer resist the nudges of the Spirit and will almost certainly choose to spend the next two years in Appalachia. This comes as a great surprise to me as I have believed my talents more suited to inner city work. To check things out, I decided to drive out to visit two MNAMers in Williamson, West Virginia.

It was quite an adventure for me - never before have I driven alone such a great distance. But in spite of assorted problems along the way (a nasty bad-news streak has been plaguing me for a couple of weeks) my car and I arrived safely back and I'm ready for more! Having basked in Autumn's glory and then watched it fade in Massachusetts, it was a genuine thrill to discover that the color had moved south and I was thrust again into its majesty.

Intriguing contrasts mark travel in the area - the breathtaking beauty and dominance of the mountains and catching one's breath another time as a giant semi suddenly looms on the mountain curve, a little too close, a little too fast. A luxurious forest overlooking an ancient barn resembling a child's drawing with crooked lines and lop-sided roof. A palatial mountaintop retreat and a well-occupied valley homestead whose clapboards have long since forgotten the slap of paint brush but who remember well the sting of sleet and wind.

The rich black veins of coal evident in the cutaway mountains lining the roadsides and a hint that the land's rich resource is not available to its own inhabitants as an occasional local is seen furtively pirating a bucketful of fallen "rock" to warm his family. And then, the perhaps sharpest contrast of all, nature's balance and mountainous splendor seen against the stark and starving wastelands left by modern technology. For rapid removal of the invaluable coal resources from the land, from the community and from the community's residents, the corporate powers have developed Strip Mining.

And the lot of the poor in Appalachia only worsens. Unemployment is rampant, scarce housing escalates in cost, entrapped become embittered, relationships deteriorate, social problems abound. Missionaries bring hope. Hope for change - real, tangible, tastable, livable change.

Mary Kay, an MNAM volunteer, has from its opening been a part of the Tug Valley Recovery Shelter in Williamson. Some 125 battered women have been sheltered here in the nine months of operation. And a couple of hundred of their children were along. They all received safety and sustenance, of course, but they also got acceptance, guidance, advocacy, empowerment and love - the kinds of things that enabled them to begin to make significant changes in their own lives. In my brief stay there, I was gifted with dramatic testimony of this phenomenon. And I hope to become a part of it.

The position of Resident Manager of the shelter will open soon and I plan to apply for it. My duty hours would be 5 p.m. to 9 a.m. and week-ends. I would then seek a part time day job to cover expenses. And, if I can make my dreams all come true, I will launch my writing career.

Your Story...

Why don't I let you tell it yourself - with excerpts from your responses: "You and MNAM will be in my prayers." "I'm happy to make a donation to MNAM, and even happier to know how fulfilled your life has become. Such joy, such enthusiasm!" "I'm sure you are being stretched in your training, but knowing you, that should just delight you!" "You're a very 'gutsy' lady and I admire your spunk for getting out and doing something so worthwhile. We both are involved in Catholic Social Services here so we know first-hand some of the problems that the general public does not know exist." "The enclosed check [\$100!!] is being sent to you on behalf of friends who have just recently wed. They requested we send money to help those 'more needy' than themselves in lieu of a wedding gift," "I call my Panda puppet Chow Mein. You

know people think he's alive when they first see him. They just love to pet and talk to him." "As I re-read your letter I felt this funny feeling in the pit of my stomach. What WAS that! Envy? Yes, forgive me, Lord, envy. Would that I could join you in this great adventure!" And a thank you note from a very young man I don't even remember meeting - it must have been at one of my puppet displays. He really likes his beaver and can't wait until he can save up enough for a squirrel, too.

I know many of you have been praying for MNAM and for me - not only because you've told me so. Please do keep us in your prayers. Puppets still available - Send donations to me at 20350 Opal Street, South Bend, Indiana 46614. THANKS!!!