

To live is to love

BEING OPEN TO WHATEVER IS ASKED IN MISSION OPENS MANY DOORS FOR A NEW MISSIONER IN A NEW LAND

By Dorothy Novak

When I arrived to do mission work in Bangkok in 2001, I was overwhelmed by the size of the city and how much of our Western culture was available. It became like a little Toronto to me. Of course, Bangkok has nearly eight million more people, more pollution, more poverty, more slum areas, and more traffic. Yet, you hardly ever hear horns blowing or people getting upset when they are sitting in traffic for hours trying to get from one place to another.

Most foreigners love Bangkok and of course it is because of the Thai people and their culture. Bangkok means City of Angels and that is what it has become to me. I live in the Din Daeng area, a poorer area of the city, on a street called *Soi Boot Mae Prae Fatima* (Mother of God, Fatima Church Lane). At the beginning of the *soi* (street) is a statue of our Lady of Fatima.

Further down the lane is the Good Shepherd Self-Help Centre for Women where I work. A statue of the Good Shepherd stands at the entrance. Most of the people I live and work with are Buddhist, yet each person who enters the centre bows before this statue. I am continually overwhelmed at the respect the people in Thailand have for our Christian beliefs.

My mission work began here with the Good Shepherd Sisters, helping the poor to help themselves. When I first saw the work these few Irish Sisters had accomplished, and listened to the sto-



Little Bin, daughter of a friend who teaches at the Centre where Dorothy Novak volunteers, welcomes Dorothy to her home with friendship and joy.

ries of their 36 years in Bangkok, I wondered what I could contribute. However, being open to whatever is asked of me has opened many doors. For sure, to live is to love.

The Sisters have overwhelmed me with their love and support as they do for all who come to them. People at the Centre often mistake me for one of the Sisters, and I tell them, "No, I am a mother of three children, and I have a grandson!"

I am now in my third year as a Scarboro lay missionary. Being part of the Scarboro community has given me many reasons to be thankful. In August 2002 I returned to Canada to take part in Scarboro Missions' General Assembly and XIth General Chapter. Priest and lay missionaries met together to share the past and plan for the future.

This gathering of missionaries certainly was a blessing for me as we shared the gift of each other in song, laughter, and love, and shared our stories of mission. Some of us had never met each other before.

Since joining Scarboro Missions I have found each day to be like a new day, a new beginning. I continue to be open to the surprises that God has in store, to love what I am doing, to love all whom I meet on my journey, and to share that love with my neighbours on the other side of the world. What a blessing. Yes, to live is to love.∞

Waiting for Jesus

CELEBRATING THE EUCHARIST IS A TIME OF GREAT JOY AND ANTICIPATION FOR PEOPLE LIVING IN THE REMOTE VILLAGES OF MALAWI

By Mary Olenick

My first visit to an Out Station turned out to be quite an experience. Out Stations are small churches in remote areas where the people cannot attend mass regularly due to a lack of priests. Each week the people gather for a prayer service, but only once every two or three months does a priest come to celebrate the Eucharist.

The Sunday of my visit, the priests were attending a funeral elsewhere, so Sr. Cecilia and I were asked to take communion to this Out Station. Sr. Cecilia is a member of the Rosarian Sisters, a community of African Sisters founded for the diocese of Mzuzu, the area of Malawi where I live and work.

On our arrival, we were welcomed by a large group of people anxiously waiting for "Jesus." The church was crudely made of bricks. There were very few chairs or benches. On the cement floor were several mats made from reeds for people to sit on. The altar was made of stones and mortar with boards laid across them. We covered the boards with an altar cloth that we brought with us.

Many people come from far distances for mass, so they had arrived the night before and slept outdoors. The people in these remote areas are very poor, yet their faces all carried a look of such joy and excitement in anticipation of this great event.

Approximately 200 people were present for mass. They asked Sr. Cecilia and I to take



Villagers joyfully welcome Scarboro lay missionary Mary Olenick who often accompanies the Rosarian Sisters on their travels. Mzuzu, Malawi.

part in the entrance procession, singing and dancing to the beat of the drums. The little girls leading the procession were dressed in their Sunday best with a crown of flowers on their heads.

The dancing and singing continued on and on. Then they seated us on the altar as "special guests bringing Jesus." During the offertory, the people brought up gifts of food items.

Seeing the reaction of these people at being able to attend mass, I could not help but think that we who are able to celebrate the Eucharist daily or weekly take this great gift for granted. I will never forget the look of joy on the people's faces as they came up to receive Jesus.

After mass, Sr. Cecilia and I drove to a nearby home to take communion to an elderly sick man who had not been able to attend the service. The man lived in a very cramped, humble clay house. Most of the people who were there to pray sat outside.

When we returned to the Out Station, we were invited for lunch prepared especially for us. We sat

in the building next door to the church, which had been the original church building built in the 1950s. Our table consisted of two benches pushed together and covered with a tablecloth. We had a meal of chicken, rice, *nsima* (corn meal), and relish. It was quite a sacrifice for this community to serve us a meal that they themselves could not afford to eat and I found it very humbling to sit down and eat it.

After our meal, Sr. Cecilia and I were presented with the food items that were brought up to the altar during the offertory. Then a woman came up to us with a basket of money. "We have taken a collection," she said, "and this is our gift to you for bringing Jesus to us." We could not refuse this gift because it is the way of their culture and they would be offended. The amount was equivalent to \$3.00 Canadian. I was so very touched and humbled by this gesture, by their generosity, and by the attitude of the people throughout this most extraordinary day.∞