

Walking into the unknown

SCARBORO'S MISSION PREPARATION PROGRAM...

HELPING YOU TO ANSWER GOD'S CALL TO "COME, FOLLOW ME"

By Sharon Willan

What makes a person leave family, friends, home, and all things familiar to walk with God into the unknown? Each January, new candidates take part in Scarboro Missions' four month lay preparation program in the hope of going overseas for a three-year term. Before being accepted into the program, the candidates have completed the application process, including writing an autobiography, consenting to psychological screening, and being interviewed by members of the admissions team.

The candidates live in community at Scarboro Missions' central house in Toronto. They journey together, people of various ages, from different walks of life, and with a multitude of gifts. They prepare to travel to another country, to walk gently with people of another culture. These four months of preparation are a time of learning and of letting go, of discovering that the mission experience will be a challenge as well as a time of great joy, peace, and blessing.

Scarboro's mission preparation program is designed to assist candidates in discerning God's call and confirming their vocation to overseas mission. Program workshops run throughout the day, Monday to Friday. The sound of laughter resounds from the classroom, hallways and dining room. Classes in Social Justice, Social Analysis, Adult Education, and Theological Reflection provide skills for candidates to "read the

signs of the times" when they walk as missionaries with people in another land. Workshops on such topics as Emotional Wellness, Trauma in Mission, and Cultural Sensitivity provide candidates with tools for staying healthy in their overseas environment. They learn to be aware of potential dangers and of ways to help themselves and others in crisis.

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They study the Scriptures and the life of Christ, and learn how to pray with Scripture. They explore a variety of images of God as seen in creation, described in Scripture, and learned throughout their lives. Benedictine, Dominican, Ignatian, and Franciscan spiritual traditions provide options for different types of prayer. Three one-day retreats prepare the way for an eight-day retreat of prayer, spiritual direction, silence, and celebration.

One afternoon a week, candidates volunteer at St. Francis Table, Birchmount Residence, or Our Place—centres that minister to the homeless poor and those living on the margins in Toronto. The experience of accompanying the poor and forming friendships with them is an important preparation for mission overseas. After completing their three-year contract with Scarboro Missions, missionaries return to Canada with a renewed sense of commitment towards marginalized people in their own communities.

In April of this year, four people completed Scarboro's lay mission preparation program and have begun their three-year term overseas. Barbara White and Maxine Bell are now in mission in Guyana; Barbara Heshedahl is studying Spanish in Bolivia before joining Scarboro's mission team in Riobamba, Ecuador; and Beverly Trach is studying Portuguese in Brazil before joining Fr. Ron MacDonnell in that country's northern regions.

As a member of Scarboro's Lay Mission Team, I accompany the candidates throughout their four months of preparation. This has been a life-giving mission for me. It is both a blessing and a gift to meet and walk with these individuals during such a time of discernment and change. May God bless them on their mission journey.∞



The Lay Mission Team (John and Jean MacInnis and Sharon Willan) with the candidates of the 2003 Lay Mission Preparation Program. L-R: Beverly Trach, John MacInnis, Sharon Willan, Jean MacInnis, Maxine Bell, Barbara Heshedahl, and Barbara White.

In April 2003, after completing Scarboro's lay preparation program, four new missionaries made their formal commitments to serve with Scarboro Missions.

The following are excerpts from their missioning statements.

"I stand before you today with a deep sense of gratitude for the love and support of family, friends, my parish community of Sacred Heart in Edson, Alberta, and the Scarboro family both here and overseas."

Barbara Heshedahl, ECUADOR

"May the Holy Spirit guide my paths and provide me with the gifts I need to do the work intended for me and allow me to be an instrument of God's great peace in Guyana and elsewhere."

Maxine Bell, GUYANA

"I am grateful to God for the gift of love, experienced through the people who have accompanied me on the journey: my family and friends, the Ursuline community, the people of St. Francis de Sales parish in Burnaby, BC, and the Scarboro community, especially those who have walked with me these past four months.

Trusting in Jesus as my faithful companion, I go forth with courage, hope, and joy to share life with the people of Brazil."

Beverly Trach, BRAZIL

"As I embark on this new path, I have heartfelt thanks for all who have nurtured and supported me along the way:

- To the Scarboro community for having confidence in me to fill this mission, and for providing the necessary training, preparation, and guidance.

- To St. Patrick's parish in Victoria, BC, for giving me the opportunity to live and grow in my faith through many years of joy, sorrow, and change.

- To my friends and family who have touched my life in many ways. Thank you for loving me enough to let me go and for affirming me in my life choice at this time.

- For my husband, Glenn, who shared my life for 35 years and whose spirit continues to be my inspiration, guide and companion on this journey."

Barbara White, GUYANA