

NO VOCATION IS A VACATION

by Mara Russo

I remember years ago heading to the cry room just before Mass with my first-born son, Robbie.

At the time, he was unrelentingly testing my skills as a greased-crocodile wrangler. He was not yet three, but at a solid 40 pounds, he proved a worthy adversary.

As I tried to retain my last shred of dignity that my sweet baby boy was determined to destroy (not to mention my left earlobe, which was reluctant to release the earring being pulled from it), a lovely woman approached me and glowingly looked at the child writhing in my arms.

"He's so cuuute!" she cooed.

Sure, lady, cute like an octopus on meth. Was she joking?

Her manner of speaking began to calm Robbie, however. I determined there and then I was going to stick near this woman if I had to pin her down by forcing her into a pew and sitting on her lap.

She continued to engage him quietly and just before Mass began, she whispered, "Robbie, I am going to pray that you become a priest!"

I remember letting the hope and joy of her prayer wash over me. To have a son as a priest! What greater honor is there?

From that moment I prayed even more for his vocation, whether priest, religious, married, or single. I have also come to more fully understand what is meant by "vocation."

A vocation is the manner in which a soul is called to follow Our Lord. Many times, when people speak of "vocation," they mean the priesthood and religious life. I believe this is one of many reasons for our shortage of priests and religious.

If our vocation is the means by which we follow Jesus, and Jesus tells us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses,

and follow Him (Matt 16:24), our vocation is the manner in which we carry our cross, and anyone who is married can attest to the fact that marriage can be a cross!

In a world where sex is viewed as mere recreation, and where an unwanted pregnancy is more easily terminated than a cold, couples spend more time preparing for the wedding than they do the marriage. The priesthood and religious life are mercilessly caricatured in the media and Hollywood and are often reduced to nothing more than the vow of celibacy.

Our best chance of increasing priestly and religious vocations is to see the beauty, holiness, suffering, and sacrifice in all vocations. Holy marriages give us holy priests and religious. We are all called to carry the cross, whatever our vocation may be.

I sometimes joke that if I had been told before my wedding all that would befall my husband and me, I would have run screaming down the aisle out of the church and hightailed it to the nearest Dominican convent. This of course is a JOKE. I wouldn't trade this life for anything, because joy comes amidst the suffering.

Isn't that what the cross is? ❖



Mara Russo is an only slightly insane wife, mother of six, and youth retreat leader.

ST. HELENANS REACH OUT TO SICK CHILDREN IN HAITI

by Judy Barrett

Port au Prince, Haiti—Last year St. Helena Church in Napa County welcomed Fr. Rick Frechette, CP, who has spent the past 25 years as a visiting missionary priest in Haiti.

Initially sent there to establish a home for orphaned and abandoned children, he soon recognized the great need



Dr. Brad Bishop examines a tiny patient at St. Damien Pediatric Hospital in Haiti (Giles Ashford, courtesy of NPH USA)

for their medical care and started a clinic that has grown into St. Damien Pediatric Hospital, arguably the premier pediatric hospital in Haiti. Along the way he completed medical school.

Some parishioners and friends from neighboring Napa Valley parishes were so moved by Fr. Frechette's message about the plight of the "poorest of the poor" in Haiti that they organized an informal group to provide ongoing financial support for St. Damien under the guidance of Msgr. John Brenkle, St. Helena Church's retired pastor. The group meets every other month for a brief social hour, update about the hospital, and sharing of ideas and information. Through July 2014, the group has donated \$128,072 to the hospital.

Additionally, during the 2013-14 school year, seventh and eighth grade students at St. Helena School raised roughly \$250 to help sick children treated at the hospital.

A few facts that moved the group to adopt St. Damien as an ongoing project include these:

- Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Over 80 percent of the population lives on less than \$2 per day.

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(Giles Ashford, courtesy of NPH USA)

- In Haiti there is 1 doctor for every 15,000 people; in the United States there is 1 doctor for every 500 people.
- One Haitian child in four is moderately to severely malnourished. Malnutrition is the leading cause of death in children.
- 10 percent of Haitian children die before their fifth birthday, largely from *treatable diseases*.

To join the St. Helena "Friends of Haiti" group, contact Msgr. John Brenkle at 707-968-9375 or Judy Barrett at 707-942-6143. The next meeting is at 5pm on September 8. The only requirement is your concern for poor children in Haiti and a willingness to make a monthly or quarterly gift in *any* amount.

For information about St. Damien Pediatric Hospital, visit www.nphusa.org/stdamien. St. Damien is operated by *Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos* (NPH, Spanish for "Our Little Brothers and Sisters"), an organization that serves orphaned, abandoned, and disadvantaged children in Latin American and Caribbean countries. ❖