

The Southern Cross

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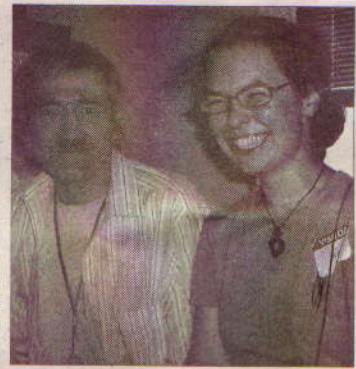
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Left: Volunteer Severin DuBois with a young girl in front of the home of the Heart's Home.



Right: Agnes Bureau, also a volunteer, with a patient at a hospice.

The rosary on the streets of the Bronx

FOR New York's Bronx, or for any neighbourhood in the United States for that matter, the sight of French missionaries walking through the streets every day praying the rosary is definitely unusual.

Since opening their mission in 2003, the community of Heart's Home USA (www.heartshomeusa.org) has served a poor area in the South Bronx, in conjunction with the parish of St Francis of Assisi.

The Bronx mission is part of the worldwide Heart's Home network, an international Catholic volunteer program with 35 apostolate communities in 20 countries. Founded in 1990 by Fr Thierry de Roucy, a French priest, Heart's Home has trained over a thousand volunteers, mostly from France, but also from Latin America, Asia and Europe.

Fr de Roucy created Heart's Home to help the most suffering people in the world. The 20 countries with Heart's Home missions include Thailand, Italy, Argentina, Peru, El Salvador, Philippines, France, Ukraine and Honduras.

The Heart's Home USA community consists of three nuns, two candidates for the priesthood, and six lay volunteers who have committed at least 14 months of their lives to serving the poor in a spirit of compassion.

The presence of French missionaries in the South Bronx, an area known for crime and urban decay, has certainly been noticed. St Francis of Assisi parish was once an Irish stronghold and now serves Hispanic parishioners from a multitude of countries, mainly Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

Laura McDonough, who left the neighbourhood in the late 1960s, said of the French missionaries of Heart's Home, said she was heartened "that my old parish is unique in that the Spanish-speaking immigrants there are now being served by immigrant missionaries from France. What a heart-warming twist. After all, many decades ago the Irish of the parish were immigrants, too."

Lourdes Renero Alvarez, a local resident who is not affiliated with the parish, said: "Everybody in the neighbourhood knows they are there. I mean we see them walking the streets doing the rosary all the time. We know they are there to help, whether

Paul Sanchez

Letter from New York



people are Catholic or not."

The ministries performed by the Heart's Home community are diverse. Community members help the parish in many ways. For example, Sr Regine and Sr Albane teach catechism to parish children and are leading the class that is preparing for First Communion. The community also helps in the organising of special dinners in the parish hall for parishioners in need. Heart's Home assists Spanish-speaking parishioners in applying for food stamps and disability benefits. Members visit both people in the parish and neighbourhood, such as the elderly and disabled, many of whom have little contact with the outside world.

They also regularly visit Aids and cancer patients. Regla Garcia, a senior citizen who came to the Bronx from the Dominican Republic more than 20 years ago, enjoys her regular visits from members of the Heart's Home USA community.

"For me, I think it is marvellous that the Heart's Home people are helping those in need. They are helping people like me who don't speak English and establishing caring friendships. I wish more of these French people would come to the Bronx."

Laetitia Palluat, a community member who has a degree in marketing and worked for a food company in France before making the commitment to Heart's Home, has found the experience has drastically changed her life, "because I am sure that through the community life, the prayer life and the life with the poor, you will discover Christ, and learn a lot about yourself."

All community members agree that their daily Mass, holy hour and the prayer of the Church prepare them to serve the poorest and most suffering.

Their daily recitation of the rosary in the streets of the Bronx is in synch with the other 35 Heart's Home volunteer communities serving the poor throughout the world that also walk their respective neighbourhood streets saying the rosary.