

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF FAITH

Twice a year, we're asked to extend our faith vision beyond the borders of our own part of the world and consider the needs of those sisters, brothers, priests and laypeople who minister to our brothers and sisters throughout the world. In October we have World Mission Sunday and each summer, every parish in the Archdiocese participates in the Mission Co-Op appeal where a missionary from a religious community or from a far-flung diocese comes to describe the work they do to plant the seeds of faith in places most of us have never visited and probably never will.

The sponsoring agency for this work in the Archdiocese used to be called the *Society for the Propagation of the Faith*. I have vivid memories from my grammar school years of being asked to give a few nickels or dimes or even quarters (it was the 50's and 60's, so that was a lot to ask of a nine or ten year-old!) to support the "propagation of the faith" even if I didn't quite know what that meant. I did learn that there were people in the world who were poor or who had never heard of Jesus and that it was everyone's responsibility to do whatever we could to bring the Gospel to them, not just in words but in actions, and it was the dedicated missionaries who allowed us to do that no matter where we lived or how old we were. There were even times when a missionary would visit our classroom, tell us about their lives, and even show us photos of the people with whom they lived and worked.

But back to that expression of *propagating the faith*.... It is, in a more helpful translation, about *planting seeds* and then *helping them to grow*. My childhood understanding didn't go much farther than the importance of "converting" people who didn't believe in Jesus or even in the one God. But when *propagating* is properly understood, the true work of the missionary becomes both clearer and more challenging. Missionaries plant the seeds of faith by their care for the people they come to serve and they nurture those seeds by accompanying the poor and marginalized on life's journey. That requires patience and courage, as well as trust in the God who, as St. Paul tells the Church in Corinth, is the one who "gives the growth." All that matters is that we and those who are sent on mission do our part to make known the message of the Gospel: the love, mercy and compassion of Jesus.

So please give some thought to the stories you'll hear today about the work done throughout the world by the Daughters of Divine Love. Then do whatever you can to help them plant the seeds of the Gospel in places you and I will likely never see where they minister to children of God you and I will almost certainly never meet.

Fr. Bob