



# The BC Times

## A Newsletter of The Bernardine Center

A Ministry of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters

2625 West Ninth Street • Chester, PA 19013 • 610-497-3225 voice • 610-497-3659 fax  
director@bernardinecenter.org • www.bernardinecenter.org

FALL/WINTER 2008

### Mission Statement

The Bernardine Center provides a helping hand to low-income Chester area residents by distributing emergency or supplemental food and supplies.

The Bernardine Center also offers educational, spiritual and advocacy programs to help clients build better lives for themselves, their families and communities.

All the ministries of the Bernardine Center are rooted in Franciscan hospitality and the social teachings of our Catholic Christian tradition.

### L.A.T.I.N. SuperCupboard

From April 1 to May 13, 2008, BC conducted a L.A.T.I.N. SuperCupboard Program (**L**anguage and **T**echnology **I**ntegrated with **N**utrition) for Latina women. The three-fold objectives of Nutrition, Language and Technology were combined under the overriding umbrella of Nutrition. Dietary instructions were based on resources from Penn State Cooperative Extension College of Agricultural Sciences which also provided relevant materials for our clients during the seven week period. Each day of the sessions

*Below, participants of the April-May L.A.T.I.N. SuperCupboard program are perfecting English language skills.*



*Below, students, led by instructor, Lucy Ayala (L front), are preparing the noon meal together using the food pyramid and guidelines on food groups learned during nutrition classes.*



consisted of training in food choices and preparation, language development and technological skills advancement.

Based on available foods in the BC pantry, cultural preferences, as well as the food pyramid and basic food groups, lunches were prepared by the nine participants who also planned menus with the BC Director.

English as a Second Language (ESL) and computer learning were integrated in the BC Computer Lab which had just been moved to a larger room and augmented with six computers, two new and four refurbished/upgraded ones, a new printer and new wiring and web connections. Each computer had headsets and recording capability and was upgraded with a 3-CD program, *Inglés Para Latinos*. The text which accompanied the CDs was *Inglés Para Latinos Primer Nivel, Segunda Edición*, by William Harvey, M.S.

Lucy Ayala, a bilingual trainer gifted with computer skills, led the integrated ESL and computer training classes. The students were able to listen to and speak English, and then to record their progress as their learning level rose.

The participants worked as a team, preparing meals together, setting a formal table, and cleaning up the dining room and the kitchen. These sessions became events at which to socialize and laugh and smile, speeding the clean-up process!

At the end of each session, a take-home bag of food provided to each participant, consisted of the same ingredients used for that day's meal preparation, in addition to a kitchen aid which had also been utilized that day. A colander, an apple slicer, a food grater and measuring cups were all included in these bags at various times.



*Above are students using the computer lab to experience listening to, and speaking, responses to English sounds and phrases, enhancing listening and speaking skills.*

Of the nine Latina women who began the program, six fully graduated.

All the women, not just the graduates, spoke highly of their experiences in each of the areas of focus, but were especially delighted with the nutritional education, meal preparation, and socialization. They asked to return for additional programs and want to invite other friends in the future.

The computer lab is open to them for individual instruction and/or personal study of English as a Second Language and enhancement of their beginning computer skills.

## This Issue's **PROFILER COLUMN:** **Sister Rose MacDermott**



We all know Sister Rose! Our very own, ever-warm, ever-smiling Peace generator. Things we may not know about her are that Sister is a certified spiritual director as well as a former biology teacher and that she was born right here in Philadelphia! She is also the foundress of the Bernardine Center (BC) in Chester which has been in existence since 1986.

During the various circumstances of her life, Sister has applied her efforts toward supporting ministries in Michigan, Virginia and here in Pennsylvania. She also engages others (the Bernardine Associates) into the Bernardine Franciscan Charism, and works with them as they support the Bernardine Sisters' ministries, especially here at BC.

Sister supports life everywhere, particularly in Justice and Peace related activities, which may explain her particular involvement as Instructor of Parenting and Anger Management here at BC.

Her life-long vacation spot has been Cape May Point where, no doubt, she indulges in her avid avocation, reading. She currently resides at St. Margaret Mary Alocogue Parish in Essington where her many friends and family can keep in touch with her and she with them.

## **Citizenship Day Sept 17**

The U.S. Constitution was signed on September 17th, in 1787 and was chosen as Citizenship Day in the U.S. to celebrate our rights, privileges and responsibilities as citizens. BC Food Pantry clients put together a small puzzle provided by Sister Rose which revealed phrases such as Common Good, Vote, Obama and McCain. The significance of these words to the upcoming election was discussed. The candidates' positions on some issues were outlined in a chart from [www.votethecommongood.com](http://www.votethecommongood.com). Voter registration completed both sessions.



*Joan and April offer thoughts on what is meant by the "Common Good."*

## **Weed and Seed**



*Tim, a BC volunteer, and students from Strath Haven High School plant flowers along Highland Avenue.*

Throughout this past year, Bernardine Center (BC) staff members recruited neighbors, school students, and volunteers to engage them in neighborhood clean-ups. As a not-for-profit organization, BC was able to act as a conduit for approved funds to be dispersed to predetermined sites. All this activity was part of our role in the "Weed and Seed" program sponsored by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD).

The program's purpose is to "weed" out crime and other detrimental activities and behaviors in our neighborhoods, and, incidentally, to "seed" new grassroots community

leadership, to enhance available housing, and to revitalize neighborhoods, especially on the west side of Chester. BC is delighted to be a partner with the City of Chester, including the Police Department, and the Delaware County Housing Authority in implementing the directives of the Weed and Seed program. The Police also have been endeavoring to provide an increased presence of people-oriented patrols in this area.

This summer, one of the activities initiated for the program was a spruce-up of a portion of Highland



*Sister Carolyn planting flowers along Highland Avenue and 9th Street as part of BC's plan for "Weed and Seed."*



*Pictured above are Swarthmore College students cleaning up.*

Avenue, Chester's main access road from I-95. BC volunteer (Tim) and Sister Carolyn and students from Strath Haven High School planted flowers along the avenue, so that all who use this road could see evidence that Chester cares.

Funding for the "Weed and Seed" program has already been approved for this coming year and BC staff and volunteers are looking forward excitedly to new ideas and new ways of "weeding and seeding" that will enhance our neighborhood. We are already in the process of actively seeking and engendering even more neighbor-to-neighbor involvement — YOUR involvement.

## Food for Thought and Action

At the Volunteer Workshop conducted April 30, 2008, a group of eighteen Bernardine Center staff and volunteers came together to celebrate and renew their commitments to the activities that carry out the Bernardine Center Mission Statement. The meeting was also a time to contemplate past activities and review new proposals.

A unique presentation of the Mission Statement by the participants began the proceedings. Marylou Laboy provided a brief job description for volunteers that was followed by the Scheduling Commitment and Communication Expectation presented by Sister Carolyn. Sister Sandra presented updated policies for the Center.

*Below are pictured Bernardine Center staff members and volunteers enjoying the Volunteer Workshop luncheon held at the Center on April 30, 2008.*



*Pictured above are Sister Rose and Volunteer Sharon Hale having a lively discussion at the volunteer Luncheon.*

The Intake Interview paperwork and manner of food distribution as well as equal client treatment were then discussed. Sister Denise initiated the topics of the Emergency Food Distribution as well as Non-Food Donations. How clients are referred for services was considered just prior to all participants enjoying the delicious brunch prepared by Sister Carolyn.

Topics considered afterwards included the Bernardine Center's other programs: Parenting, ESL, Computer, SuperCupboard, Weed and Seed, Gardening, and Homebound Food Distribution. For the finale, Sister Rose outlined "Bread for the World's" efforts to end global hunger.

## Bernardine Center "Wish List" for this Christmas:

All at the Bernardine Center, Staff and Volunteers, are most grateful for all the generosity shown by our Benefactors, but, of course, every year new needs arise. This year, the needs' list has been growing and following are those most required:

- Tutors for the English as a Second Language classes
- Winter sweaters for chilly nights for our clients
- Blankets, any size

- Undergarments, socks
- Recycle container for lunch room
- Utility carts for facilitating food packaging for clients
- Gift cards for groceries, sundries and gifts
- Donations towards a dumbwaiter and installation to enable transport of canned food items between floors
- And, of course, monetary donations.

Any or all of the above would be most warmly appreciated.

## Are YOU Prepared?



*On March 27, 2008, volunteers and staff here at the BC study methods of disaster preparedness offered by American Red Cross staff.*

What would you do if another disaster like Hurricane Katrina, a tornado or even a terrorist attack occurred right here in your own neighborhood?

The attendees of the American Red Cross Southeastern PA Voluntary

Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) conference can help.

SEPA VOAD is a collaboration of organizations and citizens trained to meet community needs during a large-scale disaster. It began nationally in 1969 as a result of the historic Hurricane Camille.

For Southeast PA, SEPA VOAD saw its beginnings in 2001 as a result of the September 11th attacks on the Twin Towers in New York. It was followed by the creation in 2002 of the Citizen Corps sponsored by the Montgomery Department of Public Safety and the City of Philadelphia. Other organizations like the American Red Cross, the AFL-CIO and the Salvation Army as well as VOAD and the Citizen Corps direct their efforts toward providing emergency services for victims of widespread disasters.

Two of the most common disasters that affect our area are fires and floods. Pennsylvania is the most flood-prone state in the U.S. With the Delaware River just steps away from our doorsteps, this area has even greater exposure. The VOAD training workshop in March provided the basic training for the staff and volunteers at BC to become first responders in the event of disasters.

The help of ordinary citizens is greatly needed to carry out activities required for disaster preparedness. There is much more training available, CPR/AED, First Aid, WMD/Terrorism, Animals in Disasters. Thanks to the American Red Cross, our own Bernardine Center is now a registered agency for SEPA VOAD and can assist you or your family if disaster strikes.

## It's Your Choice

From July 7 until August 1, BC was host to the "It's Your Choice" program which provided boys ages 14-17 a workforce experience for which they received a "salary" and lessons in life skills. The inspiration for this program was Sally McClain who is involved with numerous public service activities. Her son was 14 at the time and on summer break. She wanted to provide for him and for others a well-spent summer that offered new learning experiences.

During the program, professional teachers introduced the enrolled young men to the basics of auto mechanics, carpentry, plumbing and computer careers.

Classes were held five days a week from 9 A.M. until noon. On one of those days every week, the boys received instruction in mathematics, reading and writing. On Fridays they attended various seminars, including an



*Pictured above are Walt McGill advising a group of students on the finer points of carpentry.*

Entrepreneur Workshop, a Dress for Success Talk, Conflict Resolution, Anger Management, Telephone Courtesy, Job Application and Resume Writing, a Banking Workshop and an Art Class. In addition, the Chester Division of the American Red Cross provided training in safety techniques, CPR and rescue techniques such as the Heimlich maneuver.

Lunches were provided daily by the Nutritional Development Department of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia along with lessons in nutrition.



*The entire group of graduates accompanied by Mayor Butler, Sally McClain and Sister Rose.*

These young men learned how basic academics are related to job skills. They learned the importance of coming to work every day, of being on time, of appropriate behavior on the job and of work ethics in general. Most importantly, they learned the basics of good decision making, particularly in regard to how they should plan their future.



*Sister Rose, Sally McClain and Mayor Butler celebrating graduation with students' parents.*

In our community, our young men face extraordinary dilemmas. Drugs are an attractive alternative to real work. We, at the Bernardine Center, are most aware of their situations. With programs like these, we hope to enable them to make good choices and to set them on the road to a successful future.



*Above, students are engrossed in delving into the intricacies of mathematics taught by John Kea and Sister Deborah Ann (pictured).*

## DC Advocates

Sister Sandra Lyons, Mamie Watkins, Georgia Bishop and Marylou Laboy arrived in Wash. D.C. on June 17, 2008 to participate in Bread for the World's Lobby Day. After a morning of briefings on nutrition related legislative issues, they joined other prominent voices urging the passage of the Global Poverty Act increasing funds for outreach programs in developing countries. The Millennium Development Goal is to cut poverty in half by 2015 A.D.



*In D.C., our group is anticipating the imminent arrival of Senator Arlen Specter.*

## Food Insecurity

More than 12% of the U.S. population lives below the poverty line. Many more are not officially 'poor' but are on the edge of the proverbial "one paycheck away" from being unable to pay rent or buy food. They are 'asset' poor, those who have less than \$5,000 in savings. If they lose their jobs or become ill, they do not have enough savings for their next twelve weeks. This is real life for more than one-fifth of all Americans – including 39 percent of all children in the country. (Excerpted from Bread for the World, April-May 2008).

The Bernardine Center Food Pantry distributed 82,425 weekly meals from July 2007 - July 2008. Weekly brunch meals increased from 3,066 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2006-2007 to 4,752 in FY 2007-2008. Already in 10 weeks of this FY we've served 1,260 brunch meals.

# NORA'S STORY

Before 1990, things were pretty much normal where Nora lived, same everyday ups and downs as most of us: People getting married, children being born, people living out their lives and passing away... just normal "stuff."

Nora was born and raised in the city of Monrovia, Liberia, in Africa. She met her husband, Robert Swen, and they married and began raising a family together. Altogether, they had five (5) children, Rosanna, the eldest girl, Sonny, Roberta, Tannesh and BJ.

Then in 1990, war broke out and around her in the city of Monrovia, Liberia, where she and her family lived in Africa. This, too, was nothing new to her world, but, for her, the war came closer and closer, making her life and the lives of her children, more and more difficult.

There were times when soldiers would pass through the streets of Monrovia and begin shooting and killing adults and children around them. Some of them, like Nora and her children, were just trying to get enough food for the day. It didn't matter. Whoever was nearby was being killed anyway. The time had come for Nora and her family to go.

In 1998, they first ran to Zediquilli, Guinea, in a nearby country in Africa. Her husband, Robert, and her eldest daughter, Rosanna, left about a year later and became refugees entering into the United States. The following year, in 2000, Nora and her other four children (ages 5-18) were evacuated by the U.N. and they also became refugees, landing in New York City's airport. They arrived with only "the shirt on their backs." They had no money of their own but what was given them to help them out by their rescuers.

Nora knew there were other refugees from her country in this area so she brought her family here, in hopes of making contact with some of them. It was October, when temperatures are somewhat colder here than in her native Liberia. It would soon become much colder. She needed to get food, housing and warm clothing for herself and her children. She had heard about the Salvation Army and was searching for its location when she met a kindly woman who told her about the Bernardine Center (BC), as well as the River of Life Church. For the next six months, she frequented both locations on a regular basis, with an occasional foray to the Salvation Army. Those first six months were very difficult times for Nora and her family.

At BC, Nora met Sister Carolyn, who is also from Liberia, though she arrived here under different circumstances. They immediately became good

friends. BC became a source of sustenance for her and her family, not only with food and clothing, but also with references and leads on obtaining work and locating the other necessities for life.

It was a good beginning. BC continued to be a dependable source for her as this refugee built life back up for her and her family. She found out about a program at Fair Acres Nursing Home in nearby Lima, Pennsylvania, in which she could enroll to become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). Encouraged by her friends at BC (especially Sister Carolyn) she completed the required courses and passed the test for the State Board, becoming a CNA. She was immediately employed by Fair Acres and has been working there since then. In fact, her daughter Roberta, later also enrolled in the program, and now she, too, is a Fair Acres CNA.

Sonny, her eldest son, after completing his degree at Temple University, is now studying for his Master's at Strayer University and is living in Delaware. Her daughter, Tannesh is also studying. She wants to get a degree in Nursing and is in her last year of study to become a Registered Nurse. BJ, her youngest son, is in school, too, and is in the seventh grade at Christian Academy.

Somehow, during all the learning and raising a family, Nora managed to purchase her own home.

Nora continues to visit BC these days, and is still picking up food. But she is now bringing the food to others as she has discovered other refugees

who have nothing, the way she had been at one time. Nora seeks out others in her area who are in need. She helps them to find places to live, to get food and clothing, to find work, and any other thing that a person arriving in a new country might need. She brings them to BC.

Mami is one of her friends. She has been abandoned and left alone to raise three small children. Nora helps. She provides for Mami and others in need whom she can find, what BC has provided for her, help — material and otherwise. In all these efforts, Nora is continuing the mission of the Bernardines.



*Today, Nora is a smiling, happy, productive woman who exemplifies the Bernardine Charism.*



*Above are Nora and her friend, Sister Carolyn.*

## United Way "Days of Caring"

Employees of AT&T from King of Prussia, PA, spent an exceptional morning on September 11th at the Bernardine Center, generously treating BC clients with personal care items, including soaps, shampoos, toothpaste and brushes, socks and underwear. Clients were given their choice of needed items that had been collected during their workplace project as participants in the United Way "Days of Caring" partnership building

AT&T staff enjoyed socializing with clients during the West Side Brunch while serving them a BC-prepared meal of delicious beef stew.

Afterwards, AT&T and BC staff enjoyed getting to know each other over the same meal of stew, both recognizing that a new relationship had evolved.



*Pictured above are AT&T employees joining BC staff and volunteers for a United Way "Day of Caring."*

## Things to Come

Distribution of **Thanksgiving** dinner components: Nov. 5th thru 25th  
**Thanksgiving Brunch:** Nov. 24  
Distribution of **Christmas** Dinner components: Nov. 26 thru New Year's  
**Christmas Brunch:** Dec. 22

*The contents and layout of this issue are due largely to efforts by the BC Director, Sister Sandra Lyons, and volunteer, Linn Bramble.*

Yes, I want to help the Bernardine Center. Enclosed is my contribution in the amount of

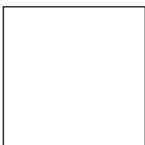
\$10     \$25     \$50     \$100     \$Other

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Business/Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to: **Bernardine Center** 2625 W. Ninth St. Chester, PA 19013  
610-497-3225 (v) 610-497-3659 (f) • [Director@bernardinecenter.org](mailto:Director@bernardinecenter.org) • [www.bernardinecenter.org](http://www.bernardinecenter.org)



The Bernardine Center  
2625 West Ninth Street  
Chester, PA 19013

