



ST. DOMINIC'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

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“I believe in **social justice**, in helping people, in giving people more confidence in themselves, **in treating people with more dignity**, in having more respect for everybody no matter where they came from, who they were, what they did. Everyone is a child of God.”

Sr. Anne Bertain, O.P.



PROFILE: SR. ANNE BERTAIN, O.P.

Linger a while at St. Dominic's, perhaps for a couple of days, and you're bound to hear bandied about the name of Sr. Anne Bertain. Dig a little deeper into the person behind the name. Talk, say, to Tim Farrell of the Social Justice Committee at a Lenten Soup and Lecture, and he would say of Sr. Anne, "A living saint! Kind, never judges, living proof of the Word of God. She is Christ-like in all she does." Or approach Jimmy Salcido, head usher, at a weekend mass, and he would say of Sr. Anne, "There is a destiny that makes us brothers, no one travels this road alone. What we send into the hearts of others, comes back into our own. Our beloved Sr. Anne's heart is full."

Who precisely then is Sr. Anne? And what is her connection to St. Dominic's? This year, 2013, marks Sr. Anne's 55th anniversary as a Dominican sister. Her decision to become a woman religious was, however, not angst-free. It was in high school (St. Vincent's in Vallejo) that Sr. Anne experienced "something in my thought, something in my heart; I just felt God calling me to be a sister." Yet this vocation was incongruent with what she had imagined for herself, which was to be married and to have a family as had her three older sisters before her. Besides, apart from the impression of the Dominican sisters as joyful and kind individuals when they were teaching her from Grades 1 through 12, she knew absolutely nothing about the religious life. But it was a "nagging" that she could not ignore. Upon graduation from high school, Sr. Anne checked in with the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael, the only order she considered because of a familiarity through school. What began as a 3-month trial period during which she was convinced she would "prove God wrong" turned into a life-long commitment after 4.5 years of study. Said Sr. Anne, "There was a point during my novitiate when I was very homesick as I was very close to my family. An older nun whom I respected a great deal told me that I didn't have to be really happy; rather, I had to be content knowing that I was doing God's will. I will never forget what she said. Your prayer life develops, you grow in relationship with God, you see where God is leading you, you accept that. And everything falls into place. Sure you have your ups and downs as with everything. But I've been very happy in my religious life. I know my decision was right."

Sr. Anne is inextricably linked to St. Dominic's as 49 of her 55 years as a Dominican sister has been spent in the service of the parish. Beginning in 1965, Sr. Anne taught 1st grade at St. Dominic's School (the school building on site). She transitioned into the principal role in 1973. In 1979, her office moved across the parking lot when then pastor, Fr. Victor Cavalli, O.P., hired her to establish a community service program at St. Dominic's. Of that nascent period, Sr. Anne recalled, "I didn't know precisely how or what I was going to do. What I did know was that many families needed a large amount of help and I was going to do something about it."



Top: Longtime volunteers of the Thursday afternoon sandwich program.

Bottom: Participants at a Second Spring event.

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These days, Sr. Anne wakes up at 5 in the morning. She first prays alone for an hour and then later prays with her community of four other sisters at St. Rose Convent on Pine and Pierce. At 9, she walks over to St. Dominic’s where she oversees the parish’s wide-ranging outreach ministries, including jail and consolation ministries (headed by Deacon Chuck McNeil), the Eucharistic ministry for the homebound, the sandwich program for a rehabilitation center (longstanding team of 8 volunteers), and the Social Justice Committee. Sr. Anne also participates in Second Spring (club for seniors) but is most directly involved with Community Service, which encompasses the Lima Center.

Sr. Anne points out that, except for herself and Pablito who helps out at the Lima Center, all the outreach ministries are volunteer-driven. Many who serve were called by Sr. Anne. Said Dorothy Dickson who mans the welcome desk at the Lima Center, “I had helped Sr. Anne at the Thanksgiving program and she told me to come over to the Lima Center and I did.” Others were drawn to Sr. Anne’s work. “My wife was the first to volunteer at the Lima Center and I came to check to see that she was okay. I spoke to Sr. Anne and then I myself became hooked,” said Tim Borter. The volunteers feel a sense of commitment to Sr. Anne. Explained Elizabeth Skelton, point person for the homebound Eucharistic ministry, “Be there for her because she is there for so many others in dire need.”

“I meet and assess the situation of each and every person who comes to Community Service for help,” said Sr. Anne. “And I can be strict. Where there is irresponsibility, I advise strongly.” Elizabeth Skelton concurred, “Sr. Anne is joyful, sensitive, and kind, but she is certainly no pushover and is no nonsense.”

- Sr. Anne’s evaluations are guided by these principles:
- 1) Anyone (even those beyond the parish) who seeks help will be given help for it is everyone who donates to sustain Community Service.
 - 2) Help may not be precisely as requested but it will always attempt to be fair.
 - 3) Maintenance of a living situation is key as homelessness begins the downward spiral.

Community Service aid comes in many forms: At Thanksgiving (along with parishioner David Joy and the Thanksgiving Once A Month Group), 300 families receive turkeys and groceries. A month later, 220 families get the opportunity to pick out a new toy for each child through the Christmas Store program (organized with Saint Ignatius College Preparatory). On a day-to-day basis, visits are made to the housebound, job seekers are matched with job offerers, and funds or in-kind help are provided to



Top and bottom middle: The Lima Center volunteer crew on Thursdays. Bottom left: Elizabeth Skelton, point person for the homebound Eucharistic ministry. Bottom right: Lorena Melgarejo, Jaime Pinto, and other leaders at a vigil for immigrants, a Social Justice Committee activity.



Guests at the Lima Center, clockwise starting from top left: Roger, Michael, Ernest, Michael, LD "The Community," Joe, and Roger.

cover essentials such as rent, utilities, tuition, transportation, medical bills, funerals, food, cleaning supplies, and clothing. And there is always, always a listening ear, advice, encouragement, and support, what Deacon Dan Rosen, a volunteer at the Lima Center, termed “the ministry of presence.” For a program that is known only via word of mouth and funded wholly from donations, total aid (excluding in-kind gifts) for the fiscal year ending 30 June 2012 amounted to \$156,551.

“A parishioner recently reminisced of the time when I first started talking about the possibility of the Lima Center in 2000, and she thought I was so crazy to even consider bringing in the homeless. But now, it’s just so much a part of our parish, our Community Service program,” said Sr. Anne of the Lima Center, which took 5 years of frequent idea promotion on her part and ultimately parish funding and hours of volunteer knowhow, labor, and materials from David Joy to come into fruition.

Wander down to the Parish Hall and right beside it is where you’ll locate the Lima Center. Walk through the glass doors, as do up to 50 guests each Tuesday through Friday, to where the greeter behind the welcome desk sits. “Sign in, wash your hands, no bad language.” These are the simple requests in exchange for breakfast on four days and a hot lunch—cooked up weekly by a crew of St. Dominic’s volunteers—and laundry and showers on two. Head toward the Choir Room. Stop. Take a look about you. This space is clean and brightly lit. Two televisions play movies and computers are available for use. Portraits of visitors and volunteers past and present hang on the walls. There are seats everywhere. The Lima Center has replaced the older practice of a daily distribution of a sandwich to those who lined up each morning in front of the Parish Office. “I wanted a place where people could come to to have some food in dignity, a safe place where they could just sit and relax for a while,” said Sr. Anne. A simple idea, but one of utmost importance to those who lack these elements in their daily lives. “There are no long lines, you go to the showers and no one steals your things,” said a guest. Said another guest of 3 years, Darnell, “It’s so peaceful here. You can watch tv or fall asleep and no one bothers you.” Alex was first attracted to St. Dominic’s because “the beauty of the building caught my eye as I passed down the street” but has returned for the past 1.5 years because “there are extremely honest people here and that is hard to find.”



“... as long as we can help someone along the way in small ways, to make life a little better for people, you never know what will happen down the line.”

Sr. Anne brims with stories. She tells of Richard who, when his apartment caught fire at night, walked barefooted in only a bathrobe from Chinatown to St. Dominic’s. “It touched my heart so much that this was the first place he came to. I’ll never forget it.” She tells of Jeremy whose mother from the East Coast had come specifically to see the Lima Center, a place her son had told her time and again was where he had found peace and quiet and where he had felt safe. “Jeremy comes back to see us now and then. This makes it all



worthwhile.” Said Sr. Anne, “At the Lima Center, we give someone the opportunity to take a shower, to put on clean clothes. No matter how down and out you are, you have needs. And today you get up and try to do a little better but you fall down again. But each one of us has issues we are working on all the time. Whatever you are, you are trying, and as long as we can help someone along the way in small ways, to make life a little better for people, you never know what will happen down the line.”

“It has always struck me, the need of people,” said Sr. Anne. And her response to this observation has its roots in her parents and is, in a way, a continuation of their work. “Daddy owned a laundry and dry cleaner’s up in Napa, 2 blocks from St. John’s Church. The priest used to send people over when they needed help. Daddy would then meet with the other members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and decide what they could do for that person. If it was someone just going through town, they would maybe help with gas. My mother helped with other activities, such as visiting the sick. My parents were not wealthy people; they worked very hard. But they always helped other people and shared what they had. They said this was part of what our faith has taught us to do.” “These are my beliefs,” said Sr. Anne. “I believe in social justice, in helping people, in giving people more confidence in themselves, in treating people with more dignity, in having more respect for everybody no matter where they came from, who they were, what they did. Everyone is a child of God.”

For her outstanding service to the Church, Sr. Anne received the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice Medal from Pope Benedict XVI in 2011. “I don’t know who nominated me for that. I still don’t know!” Sr. Anne exclaimed. Recently, the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology recognized her contributions as a woman religious with the conference of the Alemany Award. Said Sr. Anne, “I wouldn’t be able to do anything without the support of my congregation, the sisters I live with, and the parish of St. Dominic’s. If you don’t have support behind you, you wouldn’t be able to do it. I wouldn’t have the funds, or the place, or the wherewithal to help people. So when I receive these award, I’m accepting it in the name of the people of St. Dominic’s. It is not for me personally.”

Sr. Anne holds up the St. Dominic’s StrengthFinders lanyard and smiles. It reads: harmony, developer, relator, adaptability, and empathy. “These are right on target. They are confirmation that I am in the right place,” she says. †

Sr. Anne is always looking for cooks to help at the Lima Center. Donations can be made using the three poor boxes situated around St. Dominic’s, via www.stdominics.org, during the Holy Thursday and Thanksgiving collections, or through the annual October mail request. Sr. Anne can be contacted at annebop@stdominics.org.

The Administration Commission especially thanks Sr. Anne for her time spent on this project. The Commission also thanks everyone who consented to being interviewed and to having their picture taken. Thanks to the newly formed Saint Dominic’s Artist Guild for newsletter layout and photography. Thanks to Michael Somera for the Lima Center photo. Feedback on the newsletter can be directed to st.d.comm.committee@gmail.com.