



Gateley's missionary movement marks 25th year

by G. Stewart Mathison

The Volunteer Missionary Movement (VMM), one of the first lay missionary organizations founded after Vatican II, celebrated its 25th anniversary at its annual assembly May 27-29 at Beset Lake, Wisconsin. A highlight of the event was a keynote address by VMM founder Edwina Gateley, the prominent speaker and author who will also keynote the 1994 CTA National Conference Nov. 4 in Chicago.

Although reported in mission circles in the U.S. and abroad for its work and spirit, VMM is still not widely known. This despite the fact that, since its founding in 1966, more than 1,300 women and men from the U.S., England, Ireland and Sweden have served the People of God in 26 countries on five continents.

VMM is an independent, lay, membership-controlled organization which today serves people in the U.S., Central America, and Africa. And, while rooted in

the Roman Catholic tradition, VMM is open to persons of all Christian denominations. Milwaukee Archbishop Robert Wenzlauer, O.S.B., is VMM-USA's episcopal adviser, testifying to the both the nature and credibility of the movement.

Gateley's talk recalled the trials of being a laywoman called to mission service during the mid to late 1960s. Those difficulties were compounded when she realized the need to start an organization for others like herself who wanted to respond to their baptismal call to mission apart from the religious model of the time.

Gateley also presented the view of mission in today's world. "The world is very different from what it was 25 years ago," she noted. "A helping hand is no longer enough; a couple of years of sharing lifestyles is no longer enough. We are being propelled into a far more embracing and radical experience of mission. We must move from a microcosmic sense and vision of mission to a macrocosmic one," Gateley noted.

Gateley challenged the members of VMM to develop a global view and



JOY IS CONTAGIOUS as Edwina Gateley and her adopted son Neil share in the 25th anniversary of the Volunteer Missionary Movement.

response. "In order to be in touch with our call today, we must be aware of our planet's pain and its struggle for survival," Gateley said. She also cautioned that "we must be aware of the heresies of ancient religions which have re-emerged in our generation."

Mission today, according to Gateley, "is

Worshiping
in a room with
God
Chicago, IL
June 1991

church decisions

progressive Catholics divert their contribu-
 -tional church as a creative protest
 -tive church leadership? (See box of letters,
 -confers considered how CTA might
 -national financial protest targeted to specific
 -liturgical dates. Becky Drury, a
 -missionary with women's religious communi-
 -ty alternative at the local level. A parabolic
 -the contributions. The article has been in



Gateley's Missionary Movement, cont. from p. 1

no longer a roiling call to preach and proclaim the light, but a stirring from deep within to whisper God's presence in our great darkness." She added that as missionaries, "we are not now, as once we were, about the Father's Business of building a house and preaching the Word. We are about the Mother's Business of painfully, compassionately, comforting God's people and sitting in the darkness waiting for the new birth." VMM missionaries, Gateley said, must be persons of hope in and for today's world. "My dream for VMM is still that it might die," she said. "For when that happens the Kingdom of God will truly be amongst us and our mission will be complete."

VMM members from around the U.S. attended the Assembly. They shared their mission experiences with each other, commissioned new members, prayed, and looked toward VMM in the year 2000.

One way of coming to understand the movement is through reflections by its members. Hilarie Rath, a VMM-USA Board member and missionary to Kenya now living in Green Bay, WI, offered the following comments:



"I joined VMM because of the loving people I met. There was something about Edwina, Marston (Dessally), Maria (Gabricic), and Su (Hood) that intrigued me. I liked them, I respected them, I could be honest with them. I loved being around people whose focus of being was not having the biggest car, the fanciest house nor the most dashing partner. The "Spirit & Lifestyle" (VMM's primary statement of purpose and style of living) made sense to me. I continue to remain involved with VMM because it feeds my soul. We support each other in looking beyond ourselves."

According to Mary Jo Runnes, VMM-USA Executive Director, Rath's comments typify members' feelings for VMM. "While our missionaries usually serve for two years in their particular site, most stay involved with the movement after they return," says Runnes. She says that there are several reasons for that continued interest. "We're a very unique organization," stated Runnes. "Our members often have difficulty in finding people and organizations other than VMM that share their spirituality and sense of Gospel values," she added. "We let people know that once they are a member of VMM they are always a member of VMM, and that one's mission continues once they come home." Opportunities for that involvement, according to Runnes, come through VMM regional gatherings, general assemblies, personal relationships, participation in national mission groups, and outreach in and through one's own faith community.

For further information, contact: VMM-USA, 5980 W. Loomis, Greendale, WI 53129, (414) 423-8660.

VMM member Stewart Mathison, also a member of CTA, lives in Lake Geneva, WI.

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Editors: William H. Thompson

Associate Editors: Robert and Margaret McCleary

Call to Action, 4419 N. Kedzie, Chicago IL 60625
 (312) 684-6800. FAX: (312) 684-4719.