

North American presentation

given by Loretta Kitch and Sr Barbara Nelson IBVM

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Coloring our national scene recently in the United States is the reaction to the attacks of 11 September 2001. This has affected politics, national security and economics beyond our borders.

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Arising out of paranoia over weapons of mass destruction, which proved non-existent, is the war in Iraq - now an ever increasingly unpopular guerrilla war.

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We examined our involvement using the just war theory. We were shocked at the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison and question tactics used on detainees at US Guantanamo Base in Cuba.

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Whether voters will be sufficiently engaged in the presidential election in November remains to be seen.

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Other global issues coming to the fore in North America are the trafficking of women and children, and child labor.

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Poverty continues to grow, resulting in homelessness and programs to assist our poor.

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An interesting development is gay marriage, first allowed by the mayor in nearby San Francisco and now overturned: President Bush wants it to be unconstitutional.

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We look at the Church's teaching while striving to be sensitive to issues of discrimination.

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Stem cell research has become another election issue in the United States. While the US Bishops support stem-cell research as such, they oppose the abortion of fetuses used in stem-cell research.

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Immigration of illegal aliens, especially across the US southern borders as 'cheap' labor, sparks controversy over rights, justice issues, just wages and medical care. Immigration is also an issue in Canada, which has a much more liberal open door policy for legal immigrants and refugees.

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At schools in Sacramento, California, and the Toronto area in Canada, in Arizona and in Chicago, Illinois, we try to make students aware of these issues. At our schools we do this through four years of theology, but especially in social justice classes, through service programs and outreach through the school. Our students are required to take a service class; this is service in action to the poor. Some do this in the summer on special missions while others have released time during the year. This dedication to service is a common thread in many Catholic high schools in North America.

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At Loretto in Sacramento, we serve as tutors at Mustardseed School for homeless children and in public schools, tutoring immigrant children arriving from as close as Mexico and as far away as Russia.

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Camp Recreation and Special Olympics are opportunities to assist mentally and physically challenged students.

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Vacation Bible Schools give our students a chance to interact with those children and provide more in-depth opportunities for religious education in the summer.

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Senior service takes our students to nursing homes, developing one-on-one relationships with those with few visitors.

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Summer affords not only vacation time but also service opportunities in Tijuana, Mexico.

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And, even the Philippines.

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Loretto schools in Canada support our IBVM twin city of La Bermuda in El Salvador. Sr Evanne Hunter IBVM and Rosa, an associate, act as observers in the elections in El Salvador. Julie and Jue Grando visit La Bermuda.

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We try to open the eyes of our students in the US and Canada to the reality of life for those who are homeless by offering program in conjunction with local homeless shelters. In these immersion programs students at Loretto High School in Sacramento and Mary Ward Secondary School in Canada actually experience 'homelessness'. In Sacramento two options exist: an overnight program, 'Taking the plunge', and a walk around the downtown area, 'Take a walk in my shoes'.

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Students at Loretto schools engage in direct action through works of charity. Here students from Phoenix and Sacramento are shown with all the diapers they collected.

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Fifth graders from Phoenix help sort clothes at a homeless shelter. At Loretto we collected shoes for children in Tijuana, Mexico.

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Outreach occurs locally. Some examples are: children at Saints Simon and Jude raised money to support families of police officers who have died; in Toronto, Mary Ward students cooked and served a Christmas meal and gave presents to 900 people on low incomes; Loretto Abbey students in Toronto collected toys for 850 needy families; in Brampton, Canada, Mary Ward Elementary School students raised money to assist a chemotherapy clinic attended by a mother of three of their students.

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Students from Sacred Heart elementary school in Prescott, Arizona, help support St Joseph's Nursery in Kenya and a sister Loretto School in Jicamarca, Peru.

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At Mary Ward Center in Chicago our sisters work with Hispanic and Afro-American adult immigrants in literacy, English and computer classes.

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Across the borders high school students at our schools work with organizations like Amnesty International, Free the Children and model UN assemblies to discuss worldwide issues and take action.

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One of our schools, Loretto High School in Sacramento, is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary with the theme 'Celebrate jubilee and justice'. Our work for justice continues in the Americas.