



Dialogue

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Sr. Brenda Walsh, OP

Truth & Justice in Word & Deed

by Lisa Strong

...We need a global vision as well as imagination, courage, conviction and hope. We also need to be aware that when we help to lift up the most alienated in our communities we are contributing to local and global peace. ...The future must be based on truth.... – Brenda Walsh, OP, “Futurist Magazine,” *The Truth and the Future*.

These powerful words also describe Sr. Brenda and a philosophy that has guided her through many extraordinary accomplishments. Add to that, exceptional leadership, writing talent and an endlessly caring nature.

A Woman of Action

Like her namesake, St. Brendan, she wandered far from her home in Dangenmore, County Mayo, Ireland. Born in 1932, she made her way to the Dominicans in Racine, Wisconsin, in 1958. She was inspired by St. Dominic as stated in her poem, *Dominic, Preacher of Grace*, which starts with, “Dominic dreamed a world freed from war and violence, winnowed of greed and falsehood, mirroring truth and goodness in every sphere of life....” (read entire poem at racinedominicans.org/st-dominic.cfm)

After final vows in 1967, a bachelor’s degree from Dominican College,

Racine, and master’s from Manhattan College, New York, in 1972, Sr. Brenda began her career teaching in Detroit, Michigan, and then various schools in Wisconsin. Her leadership ability was quickly recognized, and in 1974, she was elected vice-president on the Racine Dominican executive team.

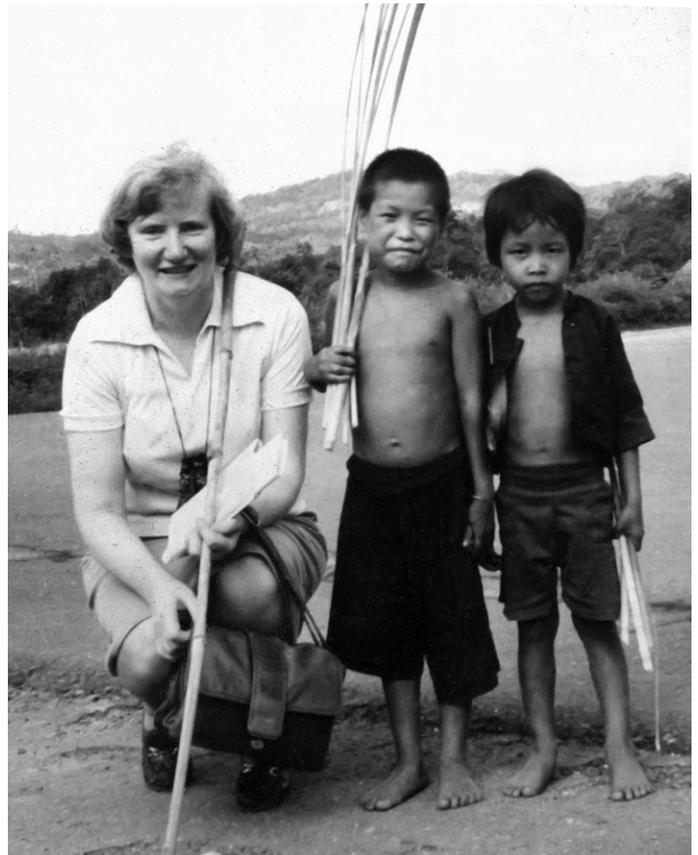
Throughout the ‘80s, Sr. Brenda was involved in an amazing array of organizations, task forces, events, ministries and causes, all relating to social justice issues. In 1982, she joined the Board of Wisconsin Indo-China Refugee Relief Inc., an interfaith organization with whom she visited Thailand to provide assistance during the refugees crisis. She cofounded and became director of the Senior Companion Program (SCP), a Racine Dominican sponsored ministry that she continued to nurture in various ways over the years.

Concurrently, she cofounded *Racine in the ‘80s*, which started as a conference with an expected attendance of 120 city and county leaders

Photo at right shows Sr. Brenda in Thailand during refugee crisis (circa 1980)

gathering to discuss issues resulting from the poor economy of the time. It exceeded expectations, attracting over 200 participants, who began five task forces focused on: community development, economic development and employment issues, local government, media, and leadership development.

The conference evolved into an organization, with Sr. Brenda as executive director, promoting, nourishing, initiating and funding other task forces, groups and organizations well beyond the eighties. In fact, *Racine in the 80s* continued through the 90s, becoming *Racine 2000 and Beyond*,



addressing the farm crisis and the healthcare crisis, among other social justice issues.

Some organizations that came about from *Racine in the 80s* include: Conflict Resolution Center, Resources for Families, Racine Mutual Housing and Neighborhood Watch of Racine. The Healthcare Network, Inc. reached its 25-year milestone in 2012, having provided well over 170,000 appointments for medical services, plus financial aid for prescriptions for low-income patients.

For much of the past decade, as her health allowed, Sr. Brenda continued community outreach projects to raise funding for various ministries and unite faith communities. Among other projects, she continued to volunteer with Senior Companion Program, Racine 2000, and continued to share her wisdom through writing.

Her Power with Words

Sr. Brenda's wisdom and talent are evident in the eloquence and timeless relevance of her words. Through all endeavors, she engaged, motivated and challenged people with her writing, always guiding readers to truth and to a just and socially responsible conclusion. She wrote prolifically in newsletters, newspapers, magazines and blogs in the form of editorials, articles, prayers and poetry. Her wide-ranging topics aligned with her expansive activities and interests.

Morality, hope, peace and social justice were topics or foundational themes of her writings, covering issues such as use of government resources, care of Earth, faith and issues related to seniors.

She focused on seniors and aging in a column called, "Seniors" for the *Racine Reporter* (1994-1999), covering Alzheimer's disease, reverse

mortgages, and the White House Conference on Aging. She shared advice and information for caregivers and seniors infused with spirituality, faith and hope.

In the 2000s, Sr. Brenda regularly contributed to a column called "Parson to Person" in the *Racine Journal Times*, challenging readers with a moral perspective on poverty, homelessness and war. In an editorial after 9/11, she wrote: *By going the way of revenge, we will only guarantee future generations of terrorism and terrorists.... Can we examine the false boundaries we have created between faith and religion, ethics and everyday decisions in business, government, schools and other arenas? We cannot have faith and worship on Sunday or Saturday and then business as usual on Monday....*

She ended this article with a prayer for peace and unity. As Racine Dominican Promotor of Preaching, she was often asked to share her prayers with an international audience as resources and inspiration for other Dominican preachers.

Over the years, Sr. Brenda has been honored 23 times for her community service and writing achievements by local, state and national government entities and private organizations. With courageous truth-telling, conviction for justice, hope rooted in deep faith, and the imagination to see the paths to a more just world, Sr. Brenda has served and bettered the community in profound ways.

Before she left Ireland, her mother told her to always leave a place better than she found it. And so she has with a life and legacy that inspire those blessed to know her and, through the service organizations she helped to initiate, she will continue to have a positive impact for many years to come.

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