Mission Moment



Honoring Sister Joanne Wittenburg ~ courageous missionary and teacher

Since Sister Joanne's passing into eternity on October 4, we have had many opportunities to reflect on the breadth of her apostolic impact. From 1988-99, she taught English to seminarians in Lviv, Ukraine. Sister Joanne sent a number of emails back home, describing her experiences which reflect St. Julie's guidance to have "hearts as wide as the universe." Here are a few excerpts.

Before I left California, someone reminded me that, although I was going to Ukraine by myself, I was not going alone. Certainly your blessing during the Missioning Ceremony reinforced this. Therefore, I promise to write often and at length. *August 5, 1998*

Tuesday, September 1, is officially the first day of classes at the Theological Academy. If you were to ask me what this past week has been like and what I foresee the coming week will be, I think, at least in my American, Notre Dame trained opinion, an appropriate description would be found in the opening words of Genesis: "In the beginning was Chaos!"

... Taking up the collection on Sunday is quite an achievement. Normally there are no pews in a Ukrainian church; the people simply stand wherever there is room. The more crowded the liturgy is, the closer together you are. When it comes time for the collection, a man with the basket simply weaves his way through the congregation. He is, however, preceded by one of the altar servers carrying a lighted candle. Considering how densely packed the church can be, it is a wonder he doesn't set someone on fire. *August 29, 1998*

Coordinating the English program means doing classroom visitations, which should be interesting since I don't know enough about teaching English to tell a good lesson from a bad one. Furthermore, the English-speaking Ukrainian teachers teach part of their classes in Ukrainian! I have a feeling that I am about to repeat an experience I had many years ago when I was sent to observe Sister Mary Josanne (Furey) in a senior math class. The only sentence I understood in the entire lesson was Sister's first one: "Girls, take out your homework."

October 25, 1998

My Christmas here was very different from anything I have ever celebrated in the United States. "The Nativity According to the Flesh of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ" is a purely religious feast and the celebration extends over four days. They are filled with long elaborate liturgies as well as some fasting and much feasting.

January 8, 1999