

Mission Is Like a Quilt

BY JEAN M. LAMBERT

On my bed is a patchwork quilt my grandmother made for me. She had 18 children and 63 grandchildren, and before she died she managed to make a quilt for each of her grandchildren. In a very real sense, it was her legacy.

I've thought a great deal about that quilt recently. Maybe it was because my Uncle Jim died; he was the last of my mother's siblings. It seems to me that life is a lot like a quilt and that we spend our lives trying to put the pieces together.

It occurred to me that mission is like a quilt, too. Mission brings together the fabrics of people's lives; it gathers together the pieces that eventually make a whole. A quilt's pieces come from old clothing: from remnants or bolts of fabric that have not yet taken form. And the Scriptures say we are a "remnant" people.

And not only is mission like a quilt; it is also like the act of quilting. People who are involved in mission stitch together the pieces gathered. We look for ways to make sense of things that, in themselves, don't always make sense. We gather together the pieces of a history and tradition that can be said to have endured the breaking of many "threads." We use the names of our founding congregations and their individual members, those who have gone before us, as the thread that weaves the pieces together. We proudly tell the stories of the giants of our congregations, the living and the dead. We know that if we are willing to stick with it long enough—if we are willing to see the whole emerging from the separate pieces of "fabric"—the pieces will begin to form a pattern: a pattern for our lives.

Like most quilting bees,



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mission's quilting starts with a story, the story of a religious congregation, about where and how the congregation began. The story describes the sorrows and joys of a group of consecrated religious, people who knew what they had to do to make their God known. It is in the telling of their stories, added to our own, that the whole story is told. Mission helps us recognize that together our stories are the Gospel made relevant.

PIECES OF OUR DREAMS

Mission's quilt is made whole in the meetings we attend, the compassion offered, the respect shown, the relationships formed, the way resources are stewarded and care is given to those in need. Mission is the whole quilt: It is the place where we put together the pieces of our dreams.

Like a quilter, we find remnants in all sorts of unlikely places; and we pray for openness.

Like a quilter, we gather the pieces that some would say don't belong together and we pray for the gift of hospitality.

Like the quilter, we caress the fabric, its pieces and the memories they hold, and we pray for those whom we have learned to love.

Like a quilter, we cut and trim the pieces just so, and we pray that when it is our turn to "be trimmed," we will be up to it.

Like the quilter, we begin to see a design in the separate pieces and we pray for the ability to have our eyes opened to the beauty that surrounds us.

Like the quilter, we recognize that we can sew only one stitch at a time and we pray for patience.

Like the quilter, who can see the whole quilt before

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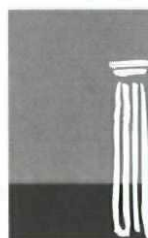


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FINAL SAY

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Mission is
pure gift, passed
on to us by
religious
congregations.

the pieces are sewn together, we pray for vision.

Like the quilter, we are in awe as each piece is sewn together and becomes a whole, and we pray for humility.

Like the quilter, we see how the fabric's colors give depth, a new dimension, and we pray for the ability to accept everyone as our sisters and brothers.

Like the quilter, we see that quantity and quality can be achieved if one is willing to work for them, and we pray for the ability to see with "new eyes."

Like the quilter, we stretch the fabric so that we can better stitch the pieces, and we pray for growth and awareness.

Like the quilter, we press and ponder the outcome of our labor and we pray for hope.

Like the quilter, we see the finished product and we pray with gratitude.

MISSION IS A GIFT

Mission is pure gift—the legacy passed on to us by religious congregations. Those great women upon whose shoulders we stand lived (and continue to live) their lives being God's healing presence to others. In the past, they rarely spoke of mission; they didn't need to: They *were* mission.

Tomorrow, it will be our turn to pass along the legacy of being God's healing presence to one another. Then we too will have our own little square of fabric, which—when sewn together with the rest—will make a beautiful warm quilt to be handed down to the next generation. □

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