

GOD'S LOVE KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES



Violet L. Fisher is bishop of the New York West Area.

When I was serving as a district superintendent last quadrennium, I was looking forward to a renewal leave. Time was fast approaching to submit my plans to my bishop. I would have three months off—what would I do with this much time? There was, of course, the need to catch up on some of my reading. I had plans to lead several visionary

groups on my district and there never seemed to be enough time to do all that one has to do in the superintendency. My thoughts, however, kept focusing on the little children with whom I worked in Haiti in 1984, when I began a ministry with the Christian Haitian Outreach in Marietta, Port of Prince.

The thoughts kept coming back to me. Why not spend time serving in our orphanage? And so I called headquarters and asked what I could do this time? Their answer was clear. "Just come and love our children." So, I put the plans into motion. As I prepared to leave I began to wonder if I was thinking too small. The district had been looking for ways to address the Bishops' Initiative on Children and Poverty. Why not make this a district ministry?

And so the call went out and the gifts poured in. We received more than \$12,000 for children's clothing and sneakers, medical boxes, school supplies, and eye glasses for our health clinic. We even had enough money to purchase a generator for the water system. Off to Haiti I went on behalf of our district and conference, bearing these precious gifts to boys and girls who hardly had enough food, clothing, and, in most instances, medical care. I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of love for these children, children whose lives were transformed because neighbors in Pennsylvania understood that "in as much as you have done this for the least of my little ones, you have also done it unto me." What a transforming experience it was for me to discover that love knows no boundaries. □



Daniel C. Arichea, Jr. is a retired bishop living in Baguio City in the Philippines.

The Philippines is a country of children and young people. Our churches, too, are full of children. In most church services, more than half of those attending are young. And our churches are served by deaconesses who are specialists in children's ministries. Children therefore have always been and continue to be an important part of the ministry of the church but the Initiative made us realize that our attention has been on children who are already in the church. We have neglected

the children outside the church. We have shown very little concern for children of poor families and our kindergartens cater to those who can afford to pay the required tuition. We have very few programs aimed at children and families who are in difficult situations.

In the Baguio Episcopal area the deaconesses organized a Task Force on Children's Ministries in response to the Initiative. Their goal is no less than to make every home a child-friendly home, every church a child-friendly church, and every community a child-friendly community. All the deaconesses will help empower every congregation to participate actively in achieving this goal.

In August 2001 about 200 deaconesses gathered in Baguio City for a children's workshop in partnership with UNICEF. As a result of the workshop, the deaconesses rededicated themselves to the ministry to children, to embrace children as Jesus did, to work for the rights of children, and to help enable congregations to serve children and fulfill their needs.

It is our hope that children's task forces will be formed in other areas in the Philippines, making it possible to have a national strategy for children's ministries.

The Initiative has played a vital role in helping us expand our ministry to children beyond the walls of the church. □