International Assembly representatives from around the world gathered at Saint Mary’s November 14-20 to process the Area calls to Chapter and articulate recommendations for the Congregation’s Twenty-third General Chapter next July.

The Assembly theme, “Reverencing the flame, rekindling the fire,” captured the drama, spirit and energy that was kindled as the Assembly unfolded.

Facilitator Janet Roesener, CSJ, had explained to participants at the outset that all activities in and surrounding the seven-day agenda were crucial to the process. Formal dialogue, informal exchanges, prayer, reflection, immersion experiences, social activities—all would be a part of the emergent interconnectedness that would bring unity to the outcomes of their work together out of the diversity brought to the international gathering.

*Life Signs* is pleased to offer readers a glimpse of some of the activities that helped to rekindle the flame over the course of the Assembly. (A more complete photo gallery of International Assembly can be viewed at www.cscsisters.org)
Once again the Holy Spirit in her infinite Wisdom has moved, shaping *Life Signs* with the “signs of the time”—the time being that of International Assembly, and Christmas.

A number of articles in this issue “just happen” to be about diversity, internationality and the various cultures that flavor the Holy Cross charism. The coincidence underscores the call to unity achieved by the International Assembly last month. From the groundbreaking of the new convent in Ghana (page 5) to the delight of Area V sisters over the international experience (this page), this Christmas issue of *Life Signs* provides a fitting setting for the photo coverage on International Assembly you see on the front and back pages.

To this observer, the Calls that arose out of the Area assemblies immediately revealed the presence of a remarkable unity of thought and feeling across the diversity of ages, and the cultures out of which they sprang. As a communicator, I venture to say that the Congregation is reaching toward a more unified self-image, one that is being honed through concerns held, and now voiced, in common chorus along the lines of internationality, right relationships and the religious life.

“Reverencing the flame, rekindling the fire.” Revering the essence and renewing the passion. What a statement this is!—not only for the desire of a community to renew itself, but the unvoiced hope that lies in every heart this season, to experience the rebirth of passionate vision in each of our lives.

Merry Christmas from the staff of Congregation Communications,
efforts of Karen Roeder, activity director for Saint Mary’s Convent, the Lillie O’Grady Center was decked out in grand style with numerous display stations illustrating the culture and crafts of the3 various countries in which the Congregation serves. Sister Madeline Therese (Wilhoit), in the International Services office, kindly opened her treasure chest of artifacts to contribute to the authenticity of the ambiance.

Sister Jane Chantal (Method) talked about the Congregation in Ghana and Uganda. She spoke of the vastness of the land and the difficulties of traveling the width of the African continent to visit the two missionary areas that are a day’s journey apart. Sister Mary Louise Wahler shared the story of the construction of the school in Jinga, Uganda, where the students themselves were involved in digging the foundation and laying the bricks. Sister praised the students as she described how they entered into the preparation of the bricks and mortar that would become their classrooms. It gave these young men a feeling of accomplishment, ownership and personal pride.

Sister Edward Ann (Wetzel) brought a rich assortment of beautiful handmade articles from the Holy Cross Family Centre in Kirinda, Uganda. The ekitambara (embroidered tablecloths), floor mats and wall decorations are produced by the women and men Sister Edward Ann has trained. Most of these unique items are sold in Mary’s Craft and Card Shop in Fort Portal. A few have been brought to the United States where they became prized purchases for some lucky people. The proceeds from these sales are used to pay the proud artisans and to buy supplies to expand the offerings of saleable goods.

On her recent trip to Saint Mary’s, Sister Edward Ann brought small photo albums showing the processes required to obtain the beautiful finished products that were displayed. Each album illustrated the skills that are developed and the painstaking step-by-step procedures used. The sisters pored over the display, examining the fine workmanship of every item. More than one sister remarked on the “sewing sampler” because they remembered making just such a sampler in the novitiate when they learned the basic sewing skills needed to make their own “holy habit” for reception.

Sister Mary Elizabeth Loughran from São Paulo presented some insights into life in Brazil. She wrote, “I spoke of the geography of Brazil and pointed out on a map I had made where the sisters were located and explained their various ministries. I also shared the difficulties sisters faced in their work, as well as the advantage of being so close to the people.” Sister Mary Elizabeth commented on the obvious interest of the sisters as reflected by the many questions they asked. Her presentation was followed by what she described as a “Brazilian repast.”

Emphasizing the work of the sisters in the United States, the Holy Cross Ministry Net-Work was showcased with the presentation of eight different ministries representing Utah, Texas, Indiana and North Carolina. Individuals from each ministry got to “tell their story” to the sisters and share their enthusiasm for their unique programs.
Holy Cross celebrates 150-year presence in Bangladesh

by Marian Teresa (Gomes), CSC

In June and July, Holy Cross sisters, brothers and priests celebrated the 150-year presence locally with the churches in Savar, Jessore and Srimongal. On September 13, we Holy Cross sisters in Dhaka had a double celebration: the feast of Our Sorrowful Mother and a 150-year anniversary commemoration. These events began with Holy Eucharist in our parish church on Saturday evening since we wanted to celebrate with our parishioners and with Holy Cross School and College students and their families. Archbishop Michael Rozario and Bishop Theotonious Gomes, CSC, and another 15 Holy Cross and diocesan priests celebrated the Eucharist. The church was full and we were very happy to see that.

Before the Mass I welcomed the parishioners; Sister Taposi (Gomes) gave a brief history of Holy Cross sisters’ apostolic work over the 150 years; and Sister Philomena Quiah was mistress of ceremonies. Our sisters sang beautifully under the direction of Sister Bashona Rebeiro. The church was beautifully decorated. We felt very privileged to have the archbishop with us as he had just returned the day before after extensive treatment in Bangkok. He expressed his deep gratitude to the Holy Cross congregations for building the church in Bengal, which now stands on a firm foundation.

After Mass the parishioners were given some sweets and a picture of Father Moreau. All Holy Cross members came to Holy Cross Convent to have their feast day dinner as it was our turn to celebrate the Congregational Feast for all Holy Cross. We were about 200 Holy Cross members present. So you can imagine the lively evening with songs, food and laughter.

We truly are fortunate to have a great Holy Cross family. Of course, we are uniquely happy that Father Moreau has been declared Venerable this year when we are celebrating our 150-year presence in Bengal. Bengal was his big challenge, a source of deep sorrow and of great expectation. For 150 years his sons and daughters have toiled in Bengal to fulfill his dream of a mission, sending the first young missionary group in 1853.

The sisters in Kulaura House celebrated their local 150-year jubilee on September 15 in Lokhipur Church. All the Holy Cross in the Sylet area gathered there, as well as the OMI priests and four other religious congregations. Some non-Christian visitors also attended. There seems to be a good relationship among people of different religions there. This is the fruit of the 40-year apostolic presence of Father Joseph Lehane, CSC, and the late.

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Five years ago, a new group of sisters moved to Kasoa, the first group of religious women to make a permanent residence there. The five sisters included two from North America, Sisters Dolores Jean Bray and Helene Sharp; two from Bangladesh, Sisters Dipali Helena D’Costa and Angela Golapi Palma; and Sister Margaret Mary Nimo from Ghana. They were given the mandate to start a Congregational project and to find land on which to build. The search for both began.

On October 18, 2003—20 years and 19 days after the first sisters, Sisters Marian Therese (Slattery) and Mary Therese Coursey, arrived in Ghana, and three years and three weeks after the purchase of 15 acres of land from Ebusuapanyin Timothy Kwame Botchwey—the ground blessing and groundbreaking ceremony of the new

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Father Joseph Voorde, CSC. The Holy Eucharist was celebrated in joy and prayerful reflection with Bengali and tribal songs and prayers. After Mass again some sweets were distributed among the people. A beautiful cultural program and a drama representing the arrival of Holy Cross priests, brothers and sisters in Bengal 150 years ago and their work here delighted all.

A noon meal was served to the religious and special guests. I felt very proud of our sisters, who were hospitable as well as efficient in organizing the celebration. I visited the sisters and their ministries on the following day and returned to Dhaka by the evening train.

We look forward to the celebration of our three sisters’ perpetual vows on October 4 (see article, page 11). We also enjoyed the presence of Sisters Aline Marie (Steuer), Joan Marie Steadman and Janet Roesener, CSJ, among us. Their guidance and inspirations made our Pre-International Assembly fruitful for all of us.
convent took place at Nyame N’Adom (God’s Grace) in the Gomoa Fetteh District near Kasoa. The Sisters of the Holy Cross are sending down roots in West Africa, and we praise and thank God for bringing us this far. Joining us were members of the Holy Cross Congregation, second-year candidate Theresa Araba Fameyeh, and pre-candidate Scholastica Ampedu.

Thirty-five people representing the Archdiocese of Cape Coast, the CSC Ghana family, Nana Botchwey and his family, the Buduburam chief, the Kasoa sisters’ co-workers, the contractor, and other invited guests braved the rough road to join in the blessing prayers. Sister Maggie, mistress of ceremonies, welcomed everyone and gave a short explanation of why we are here. She introduced the guests and Sister Jane Chantal (Method), Area VII Coordinator, who spoke on behalf of the sisters. Father Robert Gilmour, CSC, led the prayers, and Ebusuapanyin Botchwey poured libation. All prayed a prayer of the four directions and Sister Jane led in the sod-cutting. Brother Michael Amakyi, CSC, Father Amonoo, Father Bob, Nana Botchwey and the contractors each took a turn.

It was a day of much gratitude and thanks to God for having brought us to this point in the journey here in Ghana. Work will begin by November 1, and is expected to take about 18 months to complete.

The second mandate, to begin a ministry, has also come about in the Holy Cross Family Centre in Kasoa. The sisters have rented a house in which they are tutoring junior high students in math and English, working with adult literacy, and creating a library of donated books from individuals, schools and a school district in the United States. They look forward to hosting various seminars and workshops in the coming months. The focus is on women, children and youth in the outstations, with a particular interest in personhood development and empowering the whole person. Theresa Fameyeh joins Sisters Maggie and Helene in the teaching and various sessions that are planned. We have several members of our church community who are willing to teach or help with presentations and discussion.

We will have new candidates joining us in November, and have one second-year novice in Jinja, Uganda. Our numbers continue to grow, as we become known in Ghana.

Holy Cross Family Centre in Kasoa, Ghana
Different Peoples, Same Emotion
by Maria Cecilia Braga Seabra, music teacher, basic education

Are we the same and also different? Can a culture of peace be learned in school? These and many other questions, which have been and are being presented in the day-to-day life at Colégio Santa Maria, took form in a third-grade project: Immigrants—Brothers and Sisters Building Peace Together.

When we speak of peace, we think immediately of the peace that is most urgent: military clashes that make peace impossible. But it is also necessary to pursue peace with the environment and peace within ourselves and with others—becoming conscious of the role of each person in society. Above all, it is necessary to resolve interior conflicts—to delay is to provoke violence.

To go, to see, to leave, to arrive, to begin again a journey under a new sky: this is the movement of migration that has happened and keeps happening in the world. In this way, different ethnic groups arrived in Brazil. To give a voice to this past history, which becomes present in various cultural expressions, and in the same space to call forth music, games, costumes: this was the keynote of the cultural event promoted by third-graders during the entire morning of May 17, 2003.

Information about immigrants came from students whose great-grandfathers, grandfathers, uncles and fathers arrived in our land carrying in their hearts dreams of a better future, while longing for their native land. The students shared written reports, photographs and true stories told to them by their relatives.

During the war in Iraq, debates, murals and exhibits brought into clearer focus the question of tolerance, of learning to live together in harmony. The students perceived that peace needs to be built in day-to-day relationships, by cultivating solidarity and responsibility for the common good.

In the songs that were chosen for the project, we looked for words and phrases that mentioned human dignity and the capacity to know how to live and to give thanks for life. There was a search for characteristic

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Colégio Santa Maria students celebrate Brazil’s diversity by dressing in an array of national costumes for their third-grade project, Immigrants—Brothers and Sisters Building Peace Together.
melodies expressed in the idiom of the different ethnic groups, and in typical dances of each people, as they celebrated life.

On May 17, smiling students dressed in Japanese, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, German, Chinese and African costumes, gave flashes of bright color to the stage and to the spaces in the school. When they sang the song, “Soldier of Peace” by Herbert Vianna, all were overcome by emotion: During the words, “weapons on the ground, flowers in our hands,” dozens of sunflowers and flags from different countries were lifted up by the children.

Knowledge of other cultural realities different from ours promotes learning and respect. In this way it becomes difficult to admit that these values will be destroyed, or that people like us will be attacked. Education, on one hand, transmits knowledge about human diversity and, on the other hand, the need for interdependence between all peoples. You, too, can be an agent of peace!

Almost all are immigrants

Parents also participated actively in the May event at Colégio Santa Maria that paid tribute to immigrants, and they were enthusiastic about the program presented by their children:

“To speak about immigrants—all immigrants, one word would be ‘hope.’ All of them came with hope to change their way of life for the better, to build something in a place that would offer opportunities their native land could not provide,” said José Alberto and Eliana, parents of Victoria, Grade 3B.

The grandson of immigrants, José Alberto observed, “I think that almost all residents of São Paulo are descendants of immigrants, and that influence is present in the lives of all of us. An event like this one today shows the children that there are cultures different from theirs and it helps them to think about that.”

Roberto Dias and Gloria, also parents of a third-grader, added, “It was great for the children to participate in this tribute, since they acquired a different vision of their country when they learned from where the immigrants came, what they did, and the way in which they contributed to the cultural formation of Brazil. All of this helps to broaden the horizons of the students.”

Lofty painter refurbishes bell tower

Hoisted some 125 feet in the air, a worker begins repainting the bell tower and dormers of Center Building at Saint Mary’s. Begun on Tuesday, October 21, the project used 20 gallons of primer and paint, and took approximately two weeks to complete.
Mount Carmel, a century of nursing education
by Margaret Mary Lavonis, CSC

On October 4-5, 2003, Mount Carmel College of Nursing celebrated 100 years of nursing education. Former and present faculty and staff, trustees and alumni came together to mark this momentous event, including eight Holy Cross sisters. The celebration began on Saturday afternoon with an alumni luncheon, attended by more than 260 people—the largest group ever—followed by a reception for alumni, faculty and staff. Many friendships were renewed and people had time to catch up with one another. It was truly a special event.

Saturday concluded with a beautiful banquet at which there were many tributes to the great courage and vision of the Sisters of the Holy Cross. Throughout the entire weekend there was no doubt about who initiated and sustained nursing education and health care at Mount Carmel. Gratitude for Holy Cross was expressed in many ways.

The festivities concluded with a Sunday Mass celebrated by Bishop James Griffin at Saint Joseph’s Cathedral in downtown Columbus. Father Mark Hammond, a graduate of Mount Carmel, delivered the homily.

As Sister Agnes Anne (Roberts) and I began the long trek back to South Bend, I could not help thinking that although we may have only one sister left in Columbus, the spirit of the Sisters of the Holy Cross is alive and well. We have left a legacy that is in very capable hands.

Besides nursing education, Mount Carmel College of Nursing offers a dietetic internship and surgical technology programs. It also has begun to offer a master’s degree in nursing and a refresher course for nurses who have been inactive.

Area IV sisters have fun, stay fit

In a “burst of house cleaning frenzy,” Sister Dorothy Anne (Cahill) came across this photo of Area IV sisters “taking care of their health” in a water aerobics class this past summer.

“We had a class a week,” says Sister Dorothy Anne, “and there were a few who conscientiously practiced the lessons on a daily basis.”

Area IV fitness practitioners are currently engaged in a 10-week course in t’ai chi, reports Sister Dorothy Anne. “Just thought you’d like to know that Area IV is on a real fitness kick,” she adds.
Sister Mary Elizabeth Bednarek was recently reelected president of the Regional Conference of Brazilian Religious (CRB), whose assembly took place in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, September 19-21, 2003. Approximately 120 delegates from religious communities in the region and an additional 600 religious attended the annual conference.

“We had a marvelous assembly,” Sister Mary Elizabeth reported. “On the opening evening we had our customary noite cultural, for which the theme this year was “Terceira Idade a melhor idade”—the third age is the best age. Dancing, poetry and choral groups entertained all present.

“An excellent presentation on the prophetic stance of religious life and 23 workshops opened new horizons for ‘prophetic mission,’ which included ministries of nonviolence, sexual trafficking, ethics, biblical topics around psalms of resistance, how to impact public policies, and ecology.

“It was a lot of work but it was well worth it, and very well received, animating and encouraging all present.”

Sister Mary Louise Wahler, the dedicated headmistress of the school, who can tell the whole story of the humble beginning, had much to say. And yet the students, staff, parents and members of Holy Cross cannot refrain from saying a great THANK YOU to this wonderful person.

In conversing with Sister Mary Louise, you are reminded of the challenge of educating the youth in Uganda: “You need to be near them, and they need to be near you if you are to give them the best.”

She mentions this to imply the urgent need for the dormitories at the school. In order to save students the walk from distant areas (even neighboring countries), the school has rented houses in the area as hostels for accommodating students. Otherwise, most students might not have adequate conditions to do school assignments or might be engaged in a lot of home chores. The hostels enable them to study well and have contributed to the continued success of the school. It is easy to ask the teachers to attend to needy students when they are nearby.

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“It was a lot of work but it was well worth it, and very well received, animating and encouraging all present.”

- Sister Mary Elizabeth

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Sister Mary leaves the school with a plan for two of the girls’ dormitories valued each at $300,000. These dormitories will accommodate each about 100 students. And she says, “We do not ask any one person to solve the puzzle.”

Lake View will surely rely on the generosity of friends, conferees and benefactors. Brother John Flood, CSC, who is taking responsibility for the administration of the school, will face this challenge. To Sister Mary and Brother John we say, THANK YOU VERY MUCH and WELCOME. ☺

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The sisters of Area VIII gathered joyfully in the Holy Rosary Church, Tejgaon, Dhaka, on October 3, 2003, for the final profession ceremony of Sisters Jamuna Magdeline Gomes, Sheshanti Margaret Nokrek and Linda Veronica Gomes. A week before the happy event, sisters from all the local communities began to come to Holy Cross Convent, Dhaka, for the preparation. All worked to make the day meaningful and joyful. The evening before the profession ceremony, the three sisters prepared a prayerful and symbolic holy hour.

The sisters created a special symbol to signify the theme of their profession. Their description explained the reality of the occasion for them:

“Our God, the Creator of the universe, has given us life and has filled our hearts with light and joy. We have been molded and placed in this beautiful world, marred by brokenness and disappointment, and have been called by God in our unworthiness to share our giftedness. The Cross reminds us of the universal reality of dying and rising which happens throughout all of creation. The seed dies and bursts into new life, perhaps as a tree, a flower or a fruit. In the gift of ourselves, we would like to be a source of life and light to all whom we serve. With the whole creation, we praise and thank God. We hope that the commitment, which we profess today, may give birth to zeal and enthusiasm in our efforts to bring ‘good news’ as we journey through our time.”

The following day the Eucharistic liturgy began at 10:30 a.m. Reverend Archbishop Michael Rozario, DD, was the main celebrant. Relatives, friends, priests, brothers and sisters from different congregations took part in the ceremony. We thank God for the lives of these three sisters in Holy Cross and congratulate them.

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( L to r.) Sisters Jamuna Magdeline Gomes, Sheshanti Margaret Nokrek and Linda Veronica Gomes sit in front of the altar.
Feelings of the day

“My final profession day was the most joyful and glorious day of my life. I felt that I am a most blessed child of our God, who chose me to share in the love of the Holy Trinity forever. I sensed the Spirit of God upon me, and full of his strength I was able to say, ‘Yes,’ with all that I am. I felt full of praise and gratitude to our God and felt deeply the support of the members of the Congregation, my family, teachers and friends. They have shared their lives and gifts to form me in religious life for God. I also thank all those who were not able to be present on that day, especially my dear father who is in heaven. I felt a deep peace, joy and happiness, and realized how blessed I am, to be called to give my entire life to God, by being a member of Holy Cross. I thank you and ask God’s special blessings on each one.”

~Sister Jamuna Magdeline Gomes

“My soul glorifies the Lord, for the wonders and the blessings bestowed on me. On the day of my perpetual profession, I experienced the deep love of God for me. Because I made my retreat just before my final profession, I had the special opportunity to prepare myself to offer my whole being to God.

“The day itself was full of blessings. Early in the morning when I woke up, I experienced a special feeling of joy. I spent time with Jesus before saying, ‘Yes,’ to him. I asked for the strength to be faithful in my religious life. In the morning I saw the sisters working with joy and happiness to make the day meaningful and beautiful for us. I know that I am not worthy, yet by God’s great love, I was chosen to serve others in a special way. With grateful heart and mind, I praise my God. The love and concern of my sisters, their prayerful support and generosity, have helped me to commit myself forever to God. I thank my sisters, my dear family, my relatives and my friends and all those who prayed for me during the years and, especially, on this holy day. I know that my dearest parents celebrated with God in heaven this precious moment in my life.”

~Sister Sheshanti Margaret Nokrek

“My final profession day was full of blessings. Early in the morning when I woke from sleep, I saw dark clouds in the sky. It seemed that rain would come and I was a little bit sad seeing the rain clouds. I went to the chapel and prayed. I said to my Lord, ‘Receive me as you wish.’ When I came out of the chapel, I saw a beautiful sunrise. The sun was smiling at me and welcoming me. At the moment, I could not fully express my feelings. I just stood still for a moment and received God’s blessing, though unworthy to be chosen as God’s own. I believed and understood that the Lord called me and loved me so much. I felt that I was very precious in the eyes of God.

“I am very grateful to all: to the members of my family, to my relatives, to my friends and to the Sisters of the Holy Cross, for their love, acceptance, guidance, trust and prayerful support. All have helped me to say, ‘Yes,’ to God. I thank each one and all those who helped me. May the Lord bless all of us as we continue our journey in the love of Christ.”

~Sister Linda Veronica Gomes
Kasoa welcomes two aspirants to discernment

**by Helene Sharp, CSC**

Two aspirants, Martina Dery and Scholastica Ampadu, attended a Youth Leadership Formation workshop at Brafüyaw, Cape Coast, facilitated by Brother Nee Wayoe, CSC. About 25 youth leaders from parishes all over the country participated.

From this workshop, **Sisters Jane Chantal (Method) and Margaret Mary Nimo** traveled with the two aspirants to Kasoa, Ghana, to begin the discernment, which was held September 5-7. **Sister Helene Sharp** created a beautiful ribbon welcome sign with everyone’s name on it.

On the evening of the opening, the sisters had a nice evening prayer. The aspirants were given a discernment pamphlet with scriptural quotations for the following day’s reflection. The next morning, each of the sisters gave a reflection on these topics: Call to Holiness, the Vows, and Call to Community.

On September 6, Martina, Scholastica and the sisters attended a final profession ceremony of the Sisters of Infant Jesus in one of the outstations. The ceremony had a positive impact on the aspirants since they witnessed firsthand what had been talked about the previous day.

The last day of the discernment, Martina and Scholastica shared their insights on where they were in their discernment. Scholastica indicated that she could identify with the name “Holy Cross” because, in the recent past, she had had her share in carrying the cross of Christ. She stated that she would continue in the process at this time. Martina said she was afraid to leave her family up north and come down south. However, she also realized that by coming to Holy Cross, she would gain a new family.

The discernment ended with a prayer of blessing for each of us. The sisters found Martina and Scholastica to be faith-filled women who are open to God’s will in their lives. Both are open to begin the process of initial formation in Holy Cross. The women left for their homes on Monday, September 8.

**PHOTO ABOVE: Enjoying a discernment weekend held September 5-7 in Kasoa, Ghana, are (seated, l to r): Martina Dery, Sister Jane Chantal (Method) and Scholastica Ampadu; (standing) Sisters Margaret Mary Nimo and Helene Sharp.**

Reflections

Fear fuels discrimination against Muslims

**by Marianne Farina, CSC**

The Associated Press reports that two years after the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, the American people’s suspicion of Islam has grown sharply. An ABC News poll conducted in September 2003 found that one-third of U.S. citizens believe that Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims.

These heightened suspicions are the result of natural and manufactured causes. In this time of war and increasing terror attacks, it’s natural for people to be concerned about public safety and their welfare.

However, the media and U.S. government policies have contributed to a set of conditions that transform natural caution and concern into unprecedented fear and alarm. Newspapers, talk radio and television often amplify accounts of terrorist acts in order to build support for the “war on terrorism.” In actuality, these stories expose to the world a new type of discrimination: people in the United States are learning to mistrust Arab peoples, Muslims and the religion of Islam.

Fear has also been manufactured as a result of the U.S. government’s enforcement of the USA Patriot Act and the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security. With these two measures, the United States extensively documents and arrests Arab-American and Muslim citizens and immigrants. Government officials have broken into people’s homes, arrested them without any charges, detained them indefinitely and deported them.

The statistics are alarming. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) alone has raided and interrogated at least 27,000 American Muslims; arrested or detained 6,483;...continued on page 14
Fear fuels discriminations against Muslims, continued from page 13

deported 3,208; are currently processing 13,434 for deportation; searched 18,000 and have “specially registered” 144,513 Muslims by interviewing, fingerprinting and photographing them. Every mosque in the United States has been forced to “officially” register with the U.S. government. Programs connected to enforcing the Patriot Act and the work of the Department of Homeland Security have set into motion a system of documentation that can be likened to a virtual internment for all Arab-speaking people and Muslims in the United States.

Indiana resident Mazin Alsaed experienced these government actions firsthand. He was arrested last spring and charged with operating an unlicensed money-transfer business, which the government suspected was financing terrorism. The South Bend Tribune reported that in court testimony, Alsaed explained that he, like many other Iraqis, had an obligation to support his relatives in Iraq. He operated a service for these families. He collected the money from U.S. families and then through contacts in Denver, transferred the money to their relatives in Iraq. The entire operation was completely innocent. Two months after his arrest and incarceration, the Joint Terrorism Task Force revealed in preliminary court hearings that it found no evidence that Alsaed’s business was linked to terrorism. Alsaed pleaded guilty to the charges of conducting an “unlicensed” money-exchange service, but his arrest was not “a great victory for the war on terrorism,” as U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft declared in March 2003.

Since the beginning of 2003, there have been physical assaults against American Muslims and institutions. Incidents such as the one in Yorba Linda, California, where a Muslim teenager was badly beaten by an angry mob, are occurring throughout the United States. In Burbank, Illinois, an explosive device was launched into a Muslim family’s van while they were traveling. On August 24, after repeated threats, the Islamic Society in Savannah, Georgia, was set on fire. The Muslims were told by the “24-7” watchdog group, that “if they valued their lives” they should leave Savannah now.

Fundamentalist Christian groups are also waging a campaign against Islam. They claim to be offering information on the “unveiled” Islam using books, media, and English and Arabic Web sites. These resources misquote the Qur’an and distribute mean-spirited “biographies” of the Prophet Muhammad, false information about the practice of Islam and slanderous reports on the activities of the Muslim community. The Council on American-Islamic Relations Web site offers accurate information to counter these campaigns (www.cair-net.org).

On the positive side, Amnesty International, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Human Rights Watch and American Lawyers for Human Rights all have vigorous campaigns against these crimes and government programs that violate peoples’ civil liberties.

Positive things are happening at the regional and local levels. Charities and immigration services are receiving foundation grants to provide expanded social services for Muslim communities. These include legal services for immigrants, creating emergency phone lines for groups threatened by violence, and educating Muslims and Arab-Americans about their civil rights. These are hopeful signs, but these actions alone are not adequate to address the religious discrimination that Islamic people are enduring in the United States.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, adopted on December 10, 1948, states:

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status (Article 2).

Article 7 further states that, “All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.” As a signatory country, the United States has pledged to promote these rights nationally and internationally. In its enforcement of the USA Patriot Act, it is violating its treaty obligations. It is time that citizens in the United States and around the world begin to demand that the United States abide by its pledge!

Sister Marianne Farina, a member of the Human Solidarity Working Group of the Congregation Justice Committee, is director of scholarship for the Saint Mary’s College Center for Women’s InterCultural Leadership (CWIL). At an interfaith dinner of the Islamic Society of North America held in Chicago last August, Sister Marianne was interviewed for a documentary on interfaith dialogue filmed by the Muslim Society of America.
Good tidings from Florida
by Jeanette Fettig, CSC

Good things are happening in Florida! With two CSC Fund/Ministry With the Poor Projects in the works this year, the future looks bright.

Sister Maureen Minihane is just getting started with a new project: the Holy Cross Preschool and Center. Located in a very poor area of West Palm Beach, the center will provide services for migrants and refugees from Haiti, Guatemala, Cuba, Mexico, Colombia and Peru. The preschool will work with 3- and 4-year-olds to prepare them for full integration into the local school system. Also involved with the program are Sisters Yvonne Arcand and Barbara Gress. Keep them all in your prayers as they move forward with this vital project.

In nearby Boynton Beach, Sister Joan Carusillo is the co-coordinator of the Women’s Circle, which has been in operation since 1999. After asking the women of this low-income neighborhood what services and programs they would find useful, she and Sister Lorraine Ryan, MMS, developed a plan. They are now able to provide classes in literacy, English as a Second Language, basic and advanced computer training, a community garden, a wellness center and job training, including a dress-for-success closet, grooming tips and interview skills. Overcoming the language barrier was one of the first steps to their success. Many of the women are from Haiti and speak only Creole, so with Ministry With the Poor funds they were able to hire a bilingual assistant. Spanish translators also work with the sisters.

Sister Joan tells this story of how they helped one woman:

“Vicky, who is 43 and has a ninth-grade education, came to us in January. She had done housekeeping, dishwashing and construction cleaning on and off for seven years, always to be laid off when business was slow.

“When she arrived she wanted a job—any job. She had no transportation, so we offered her bus passes. Though a hotel housekeeping position to which we referred her was filled when she arrived, she kept looking and found a job at another hotel as a Saturday housekeeper.

“In April, she came for her two final bus passes. She was beaming as she told us what happened. She said that she had been asked to help out in the laundry because the regular person was not completing her work on time and was frequently absent. Vicky handled all aspects of the job with such speed and thoroughness that she was soon asked to take over—by herself—full time. In front of all the employees, the manager recently singled her out, bowed and greeted her as the Laundry Goddess!

“Vicky expressed her deep appreciation for the 18 bus passes we gave her and for our help with job preparation, especially role-playing the interview. We are happy that together with our donors, who enabled us to provide the bus passes, we were able to help a talented woman find security and success in a job that she loves.”

Your support of our Ministry With the Poor has helped to provide Vicky and many others with the skills they need for success. You are making a difference in these lives.

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The Bangladeshi contingency gather in a breakout session to process the calls with translation assistance.

November 17: After morning prayer the Brazilians lead the assembly in the Brazilian national anthem to celebrate the nation's independence day.

Prayer of the Four Directions

(l to r) Sisters Rose Cecilia (McCully), Eliza Esméria de Oliveira and Joann Havelka enjoy a lively exchange of ideas during a table talk session.

Sister Angelica and Sister Rose Cecilia take a moment to catch up with each other during a coffee break.

The “Boxing” event at Sunday evening’s “Not-So-Special Olympics.” (L to r:) Sisters Patricia Anne Clousey, Salome, Bruno and Kevin make a marathon attempt to move pieces of cotton from bowl to box.