



# Parish Heartbeats: Stories of Faith In Action

## Caring Parishioners Find Ways to Support Our Troops

Vietnam—a half-century ago, and half a world away. Young troops were sent, each far from loved ones and all that was familiar. Many did not return home; and for too many who did, homecoming was far from welcoming. Candy Rice lost her friend, Ike, to the Vietnam War.

With unforgettable memories of that time, that war, and while witnessing the departure of a new generation of troops deploying, St. Margaret Mary's Director of High School/Young Adult Ministry vowed to make a difference.

"We all know how horrible it was coming home from Vietnam," Candy said. For most, there was no welcoming, some were even spit on and endured the verbal abuse of fellow Americans.

Decades later, she watched as the kids—"her kids"—from St. Margaret Mary began enlisting and deploying to wars in the Middle East.

"I didn't want Jeff or Jason (both St.MM Peer Ministers) to go off with no support, and as a tribute to Ike, I wanted these kids to have the support of our whole parish."

Established in October, 2009, the Military Ministry provides support for veterans and military personnel in various ways: ongoing prayer and prayer services, collections and packages to deployed troops, and year-long correspondence to troops; as well as much-needed support for the families of the men and women who serve.

"People say to me, 'Thank you for doing this. I wanted to do something, but didn't know what to do'," Candy said. "The way our lives are now, with technology, everything quick and hurried, no alone time—this ministry is a way of connecting people with people."

Parish-wide involvement is encouraged through the black book of names of service men and women, deployed or not; the bulletin board of photos at the church's north entrance; letter writing; attendance at the annual prayer service; and contribution of goods for packages going overseas. Generous help has come from our parish Seniors, from participants in the parish Threads program, from our teen and children's groups and from parishioners at large.

The Ministry also interfaces with the larger community such as Operation Support Our Troops—America, headquartered in Lisle, Mayslake Ministries in Westmont, and Gary Sinese's an-

nual *Rockin' for the Troops* concert at Cantigny Park. Recently, volunteers from the Military Ministry joined a large group of grateful DuPage County residents to welcome home to Lisle, Marine Anthony Rossi. Candy is careful to point out that the troops this Ministry supports are not just those from our St. Margaret Mary Parish.

Affirmation for her came early on in the form of a letter from a serviceman in Iraq who had received a package from St. Margaret Mary through Operation Support Our Troops. He wrote to thank her "so much" for a package he had shared with others. To her astonishment, he told her that his family was from Illinois—the Lisle area!



St. Margaret Mary Parishioners pack support boxes for the troops deployed overseas.

"I had this feeling when I got that first letter from a guy from Lisle who had received a random package from us," she smiled. When the letter arrived, "I saw the 'Free' stamp and I knew it was a letter from a soldier. His letter saying 'thank you, this meant so much' was a Christ moment for me.

"If I can be Christ to someone far away from home, facing fear every day, combat, the enemy, then giving someone some peace and a little bit of happiness means everything to me."

And, who are the ministry volunteers?

"We have people on this committee who have a passion for it," Candy answered. "They are a great group to work with. This ministry brings together a very diverse, talented, fruitful group of people who are all willing to work."

For information about how you can help with the Military Ministry at St. Margaret Mary Parish, please contact the parish office at 630-369-0777.

- written by Kathleen Macko

**Parish Heartbeats is an occasional bulletin column that celebrates the ways St. Margaret Mary parishioners make a difference in the lives of others.**