



# Friends of Mercy

Marians of the Immaculate Conception  
Association of Marian Helpers • Eden Hill • Stockbridge, MA 01263

## Mercy in the streets

by Erin Flynn

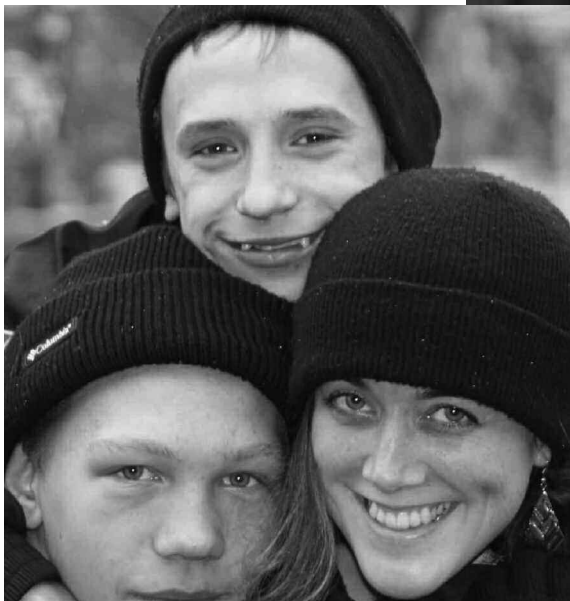
Many people ask me why I would choose to go to the Russian Far East. Some days I ask myself that very question! The answer, however, is surprisingly simple.

There are children who are living on the street, children who have no one to take care of them and who never know if they will have enough to eat or where they will find warm clothes to get them through the bitter winter. Thoughts of these children trying to survive in a harsh land haunted my sleep, and I would think again and again, "They don't even



PHOTO COURTESY OF ERIN FLYNN

**How different these street children look after even just a week of being warm and fed! "Their smiles and affection tell us how good it is for them not to have to worry about those basic things," says Erin Flynn, top right.**



***"I would think again and again, 'They don't even have anyone to care if they live or die.'"***

have anyone to care if they live or die."

### MINISTERING TO KIDS

I arrived in Vladivostok alone in September and, as planned, met up with an American volunteer from the Mary Mother of God Mission, which works to re-establish the Church in the Russian Far East and ministers to the many needs of the Russian people.

We had both come specifically to help develop a program for the street kids.

We started coming across the kids a few at a time. We got them warm clothes and boots at the Chinese market,

and provided them with food. We made announcements for clothing donations, and found a place where we can bring the kids to shower. We were also able to take some of them to the dentist and doctor.

Here in Vladivostok, there is not a single homeless shelter. Orphans are

**Continued on back page**



### Prayer Intention for the 3 o'clock Chaplet

**P**lease pray for the children of the world, that they may have the love and security they need.

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## Diary of St. Faustina

# How can a soul be saved?

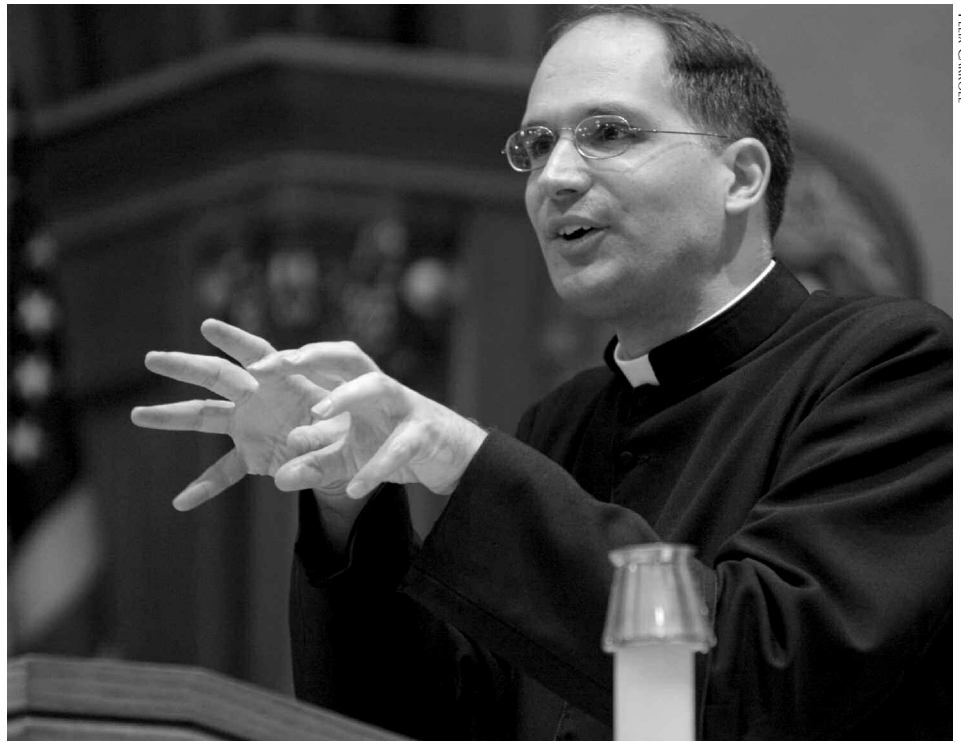
by Fr. Michael Callea, MIC

In one of my favorite verses of the *Diary of St. Faustina*, Jesus explains how a soul can be saved: “My daughter, consider the life of God which is found in the Church for the salvation and the sanctification of your soul. Consider the use that you make of these treasures of grace, of these efforts of My love” (1758).

We know that when He speaks about the sanctification of her soul, it is equally true of our soul as well. Sister Faustina was saved and sanctified through the Church — through the Sacraments of the Church — because that’s how God chooses to do it. The Church is how He accomplishes the works of His mercy in our lives.

As this *Diary* passage makes clear, Christ is trying to get to us. He is making an effort because He loves us.

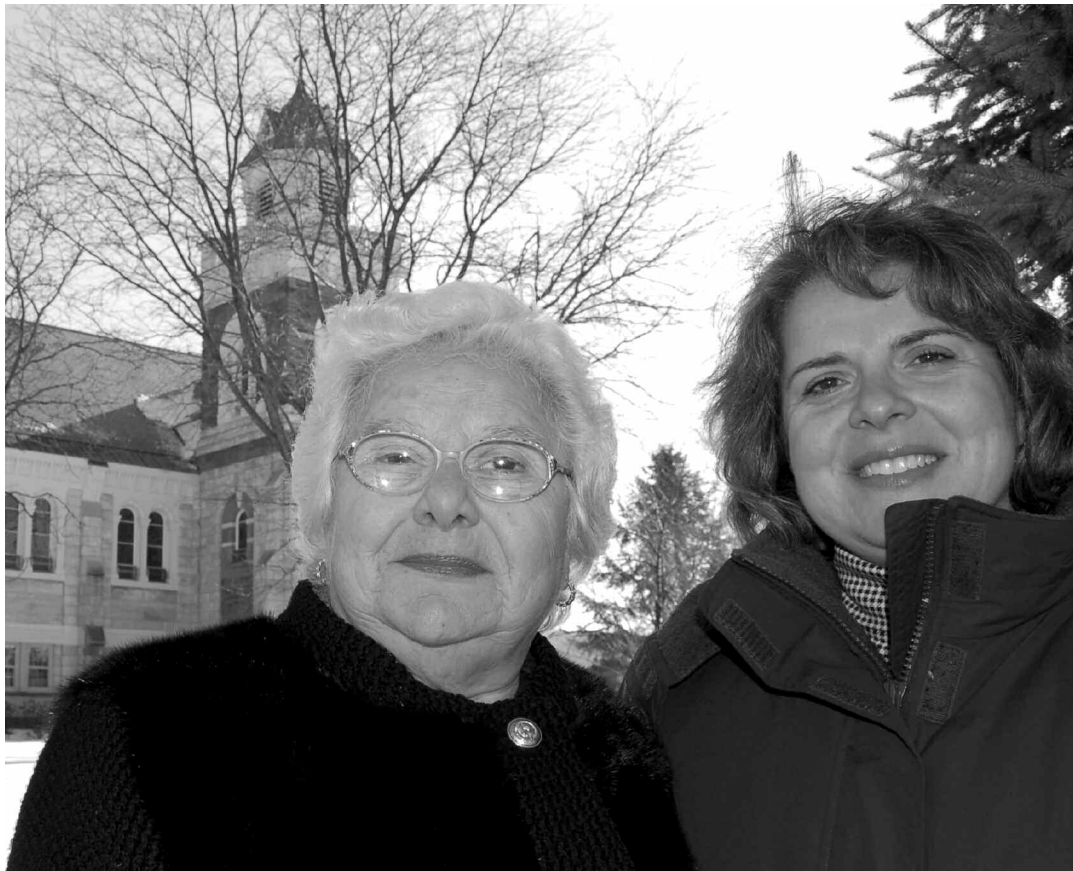
Jesus puts forth efforts of His love to be here, so can’t we put forth effort to meet Him? When we go to Mass, when we



FRANK CARROLL

Father Michael Callea, MIC, serves as Vice Rector of the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, MA.

receive Holy Communion, and the Sacrament of Penance, we don’t have to guess, “Did God grace me?” God promises that grace will be present. The seven Sacraments are the infallible sources of God’s grace. □



FRANK CARROLL

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## Deeds of Mercy winner visits Shrine

Paola D’Ascanio (left) and her daughter, Susan, of Gillette, NJ, received an all-expenses-paid trip to the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, MA, on Dec. 14-15. The trip was first prize in *Marian Helper* magazine’s 2004 “Deeds of Mercy Contest.” We received nearly 200 entries — all of them inspiring. Susan nominated Paola for her spread of God’s mercy through good deeds — including caring for the sick, hungry, old, and dying. “Since she was a little girl, she has always felt that those who are lonely and defenseless were most deserving of attention and support,” says Susan. Their weekend at the Shrine included lunch with Father Joseph, MIC, and a personal tour of the Shrine. □

# A merciful heart still beats

by Thomas P. Kasprzak

*“Dear Blessed Mother, I beg you to intercede on my behalf. If it is God’s will, please bless me with a daughter that I can spend the rest of my life with. I promise to name her in your honor.”*

That was the constant prayer my wife, Joanne, repeated for years as we raised our first two sons. Joanne lost her mom when we began dating at 17 in 1969. She never had a sister and was desperate for a daughter.

As our sons grew older, Joanne began to share her prayer with me. At first, I felt neither mentally nor financially prepared to start raising another child. But I adore my wife and could not refuse her pleas. It turns out we had twins!

Nicholas and Mary were born in 1988. Mary was born with Down Syndrome, and so began the most difficult period of our lives. During the next 15 years, we often found ourselves in despair in front of the image of The Divine Mercy, which had been honored on our living room wall since the day we were married (though it wasn’t until years later that we learned what the image was all about). We’d be in tears, begging for strength from God.

We never lost faith, even when dealing with a doctor who admonished us for not just keeping “the good one” after the amniocentesis tests. In fact, we began to see that God did, in fact, have a plan for us.

We also began to see that no matter how much we sacrificed for Mary, it paled in comparison to what she was doing for us. She taught us to slow down and value every second of life. Her blindness to labels taught us how to accept everyone as equals — as sacred, precious persons. Mary also constantly reminded us of how little we really surrendered to God in trust.

Before she was born, our lives revolved around striving for “success” — that is to say, material success. She forced us to realize that there was not enough materialism in the world that could quench our human desires; for it’s not our bodies that need nourishment, but our souls. Mary showed us that we can be happy no matter how big or small our home is, or what type of car we drive, the size of our bank account, or the titles we have in the workplace.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE KASPRZAK FAMILY

**She loved vanilla ice cream with rainbow sprinkles, Barbie dolls, and cheering up people. Mary Kasprzak, who died two years ago at the age of 15, never let her disabilities define her. She is shown here with her parents, Joanne and Tom of East Lyme, CT.**

Mary never complained about what she didn’t have. She helped show us that our arrogance, pride, conceit, greed, and failure to act are nothing more than millstones around our necks that keep us from surrendering to God. By being humble, innocent and pure, Mary gracefully accepted God’s will for her life.

Simply put, Mary helped us become a stronger, more loving family.

And, finally, she showed us that regardless of what any “expert” would predict, God’s will could easily overrule it. In 2002, after she was paralyzed on the right side of her body for three days, we asked for St. Padre Pio’s intercession, and our daughter was healed after the doctors told us it was permanent.

A year later, Joanne had a dream that Mary would soon leave this earth, but that she would return on “the 16th.” Mary passed away on Sept. 8, the birthday of the Blessed Virgin. Once she was pronounced brain dead, our 28-year-old son Tom, asked if we would consider donating her organs. Most individuals with

Down Syndrome have organ dysfunction. Mary was unique in that her organs were all normal and healthy. Mary was such a loving, happy, compassionate young lady who always wished to help others, that once the thought entered our minds, Joanne and I immediately responded in tandem: “This is what Mary would have wanted!” So we donated her organs.

Her heart, two kidneys, her liver, and her pancreas helped saved the lives of five people.

More than a year later, the young lady who received Mary’s heart called to ask if she could come to our home and personally thank us for her life — on the 16th of October, 2004!

Her name is Kerry. She was married on Sept. 8, 2001, and had been diagnosed with terminal heart disease. When Kerry received Mary’s heart, she was 34 years old and had weeks, possibly months, to live. Last Sept. 9, Kerry and her husband, Michael, officially became the parents of an adopted son. That was two years to the day that she received Mary’s heart. How’s Kerry doing? Great! She runs marathons!

His Divine Mercy has touched our family’s lives in thousands of ways through the years, but none greater than to give us a glimpse of His divine plan by allowing us to meet Kerry and her family. □



**Finally meeting heart recipient Kerry Keenan (right), a New York City advertising executive, proved a healing experience for Joanne Kasprzak (left) and her entire family.**

treated like second-class citizens. And children with physical disabilities and simple learning disabilities are lumped together in schools and treated like social outcasts.

The kids I work with have either run away from these types of schools, are orphans, or they have an alcoholic parent or parents who make life at home too miserable to bear. They are between the ages of 12 and 18, but there are even younger ones here who are harder to find. Because there are problems that the street kids inevitably cause, it has become accepted conduct for the police to beat and threaten them.

When we first met Alexei, we bought him winter clothes and boots. Within a week, the police had beaten him, hitting his head numerous times. They then burned his new coat in front of him and told him if they saw him again they would do much worse. The police are motivated by the fact that when the kids are afraid to come out of the sewers and crumbled apartment buildings during the day, or they go outside of the city, Vladivostok can say it has no street kids.

### WHEN GOD IS ABANDONED

This is not to say the government doesn't care at all, but there are many social problems, historically, that contribute to these issues and make the city's job more difficult. One is alcoholism. Another, in my opinion, is the fact that, as a matter of policy in the former Communist Party, God was so efficiently killed in the minds and hearts of the people. When God was abandoned, society collapsed.

But one of my favorite Scripture passages has always been from the beginning of the Gospel of John: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn 1:5). There are many people here who, after years of hardship and oppression, have allowed Christ to take root in their hearts and

## 'Become the image'

by Erin Flynn

One of my favorite meditations continues to be one that comes from a talk my father, Vinny Flynn, gives on The Divine Mercy Image.

He explains that, in this image, Jesus has His hand raised in blessing and is inviting us to His Heart. And no matter what we do, we cannot change how He wants to be portrayed. We cannot make the raised hand come down and slap us for being bad, nor can we make the other hand push us away. And since Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15) and said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9), this means that God the Father wants us to see Him in this way — always blessing and always inviting us to His heart. It doesn't matter who we are or what we've done. That's the great thing about mercy.

After we take in that awesome reality, there's more. We are not supposed to merely gaze on this image and reflect on who God is. We are supposed to *become* the image. We are meant to be messengers of His mercy, not only by telling the world about Divine Mercy, but also by becoming merciful.

"Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). Not a new concept to us, but this image tells us *how*. And it isn't just for those who go out every day and practice the scriptural works of mercy. It is for all of us, all the time. Moment by moment, we become merciful by always blessing and by always inviting others to our hearts.

who bear His light in the darkness. God is faithful, and His mercy reaches to the ends of the earth.

It is this mercy that reached a heart in need, and filled me to overflowing. Since I was a little girl, I have felt called to serve in foreign missions. Volunteer work, ministry within the Church, and my singing, seemed to satisfy that desire, but it was always present. Because my family's ministry has been so centered on The Divine Mercy, I feel like it was a perfect preparation for this new chapter in my life.

### A VESSEL OF MERCY

Serving here in Russia is certainly an extension of The Divine Mercy message. The babies I hold at the orphanage, the street kids who come to me when they have torn their coats or cut their feet, and the elderly at the hospice who held my hand like I was family, all bring me to a place where I *have* to say, "Jesus, I trust in You! I trust in Your love for these forgotten ones, and I trust in Your promise of mercy. Let me be Your vessel."

I don't know how long I'll be here in Vladivostok, or where I'll go after this. But I do know that we have a merciful God who is constantly transforming us if we allow Him to. We become the most powerful messengers of His mercy when we are truly molded in His image. And I believe that He wants to use each one of us, no matter where we are, to bear His mercy to a wounded world. If I can do this even a little here, then I have done what I came for, and I am a little closer to becoming who I was created to be. □

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**The Friends of Mercy Club** is a group of friends of the Marians who want to honor God's mercy in a special way. They help support the Marians' works of mercy, and receive regular news about The Divine Mercy message. Every day the intentions of members are included in our 3 o'clock prayers at the Marian Helpers Center and in the Chaplet at the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy. Members pledge a monthly gift and receive the Club newsletter published by the Association of Marian Helpers, Stockbridge, MA 01263. 1-800-462-7426. e-mail: [friendsofmercy@marian.org](mailto:friendsofmercy@marian.org)