

February 22, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

One of the three ancient Lenten exercises is *almsgiving* or works of mercy on behalf of the poor. It's in that spirit that I share with you some background on a woman whose name has been in our intercession for the deceased at Mass the past three weeks: Ramona Garcia. I'm grateful to a parishioner who has passed this tribute on to me to share with you.

How do you describe such a vibrant, caring woman? We at Holy Family and previously through Our Lady's knew her as the co-founder of the *Family Life Center* in Roxbury. She was also a caring daughter to her mother who died just a year ago and a devoted sister to her two brothers and their families. Ramona's children (Gaianne, Benny, Felicia and Ricky) were the light and inspiration of her life along with her five grandchildren.

(Ra)Mona, Anne and Dolores were three women who met in a drug rehab over twenty-five years ago and they have been support for one another ever since. They started the *Family Life AIDS Center* in the basement of St. John/St. Hugh Rectory (now St. Katherine Drexel Parish) when they saw the devastation AIDS was causing families, especially children. Mona courageously shared her challenges with AIDS. She and Anne led support groups for women, set up support and activities for children, organized marches for awareness of the issues and coordinated many events to meet the needs of individuals and families living with AIDS. Through their efforts many families in the greater Boston area received emotional, medical and spiritual support.

Our parish has been involved almost from the beginning when a Concord parishioner's daughter worked with Anne at Catholic Charities. One day Anne explained what they were doing and the parish connection developed from that conversation. In the early days, about 20 years ago, when the mothers and the youngest child in the family had AIDS, we were often helping to dress children for their funerals. It was very important to the *grandmother* to have the little ones properly dressed. We have also dressed all the children in these families in "Sunday Best Clothes" through our Christmas and Easter Giving Trees. Unlike many children, these youngsters in Roxbury dress up every Sunday to go to church. The "Grandmother Cheer Up Bags" from the Giving Trees are for the grandmothers who often are in the position of raising children orphaned by AIDS. The other "Cheer Up Bags" on the Giving Trees are for AIDS infected mothers who are now surviving but frequently ill.

With medical advances and new medications, these children are all living. Fortunately, we have not had to help with a funeral in at least five years. Instead, these children are attending Catholic schools – again, thanks to Mona and the Family Life Center – where their special health needs are attended to with discretion.

Mona's funeral Mass was celebrated by Fr. Oscar Pratt and concelebrated by a number of priests who had worked with Mona in the Roxbury parish when they were seminarians. In his homily, Fr. Pratt said that the priests who knew and worked with Mona were "taken hostage by her – but they didn't want to be rescued!" Mona will be missed, deeply, by many in her Boston community and those here in Concord who grew to know and love her as a sister over all these years.

In addition to prayer, the best way to remember Mona would be to participate in the Giving Tree for Easter. This brief view of Mona's life and work gives you an idea of the impact of the gifts you buy and wrap at

Christmas and Easter. As we pray during Lent, “For fasting that leads us to prayer, and for prayer that leads us to serve the poor, let us pray to the Lord...”

Please keep Ramona Garcia and all those who have been served by her ministry in your prayer...

Sincerely,  
Fr. Fleming

### **Lenten Penance Service**

As noted on our Parish Lenten Schedule, we will have a Penance Service on **Tuesday** evening, **February 26** at **7:00 p.m.** The service will include a scripture reading, a brief homily, a time to reflect on our need for God’s mercy and the opportunity for individual confessions. I am having some difficulty in finding other priests to join us as confessors but I’m still working on that – and I will be there for sure!