



Chaplain's Message

From *The Eagle's View*,

St. Mary's, Kitchener, ON

St. Mary's is a mini United Nations. Students from over 75 countries and 30 languages call the largest high school in Ontario their home. Many students come to Canada as very happy immigrants and many come due to less than ideal situations in their homeland. Islamic extremists stormed the Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad. They took parishioners hostage, left 58 people dead, two of them priests. St. Mary's students from Iraq, knew of these people who perished and they were devastated. There were over 2 million Christians living in Iraq a few years ago and now there are less than 400,000. Because of this imminent fear of being killed, many fled the country; spending a couple of years in Syria and eventually finding Waterloo Region as their new home.

Our local newspaper printed the news of the massacre and our students asked what they could do to make Canadians aware that Christians are still being persecuted. This newspaper story became real as I saw the anger, fear and frustration in their eyes. Liz Monterio of the Record came to the school and did a story on these seventeen Iraqi St. Mary's students. During their interview the students showed the black ribbons pinned to their uniform as a sign of mourning.

The Eagle Newspaper (student written) published a similar story, bringing awareness to the rest of our school. The article was a bit cathartic for these students but rather than an ending, this was only the beginning.

The chaplain of St. James High School in Guelph was so affected by what she read that she shared the article with her own school. St. James wanted to reach out to their fellow

brethren to let them know they are not alone. The day before the Christmas holidays, 14 of our 18 Iraqi students loaded a bus as guests of honour at St. James. They attended their Advent mass, visited classrooms, celebrated a special meal with many of the students and forged some new friendships. The visit was arranged as a way to spread the message of hope, peace and love that is at the heart of the Christmas spirit.

Mrs. Orlando, chaplain of St. James is convinced that prayer — what she calls a “necessary part of the spiritual life” — attracts consolation, inspiration and guidance, and is a key factor to make peace a reality in the world. This visit was an expression of solidarity between the two schools from different boards, and an expression of union in faith, letting our suffering students know that others are with them in spirit.

While St. Mary's students felt they were receiving a gift on that day before Christmas, the Guelph high school students also received a gift; they were able to experience a depth that many local students haven't.

**Annabel MacDonald,
Chaplain**