

MILITARY KNIGHTS IN ACTION

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Reports from K of C units
providing aid to members
of the armed forces



Lt. Col. Kevin Holeman (center) of Arden-Carmichael (Calif.) Council 4970 is welcomed by his family after returning home from Afghanistan. Holeman, a 20-year veteran of the U.S. Army, was one of two council members returning home from active service. The other, Sgt. Miguel Sabral, was injured during an insurgent attack and received a temporary medical leave. He will return to Iraq in the future to complete his fourth tour of duty.

Out to the Ball Game

Isabella Council 15 in Southington, Conn., accompanied 20 residents of the Connecticut Veterans Home in Rocky Hill to a baseball game between the Connecticut Defenders and the New Britain Rock Cats. With additional financial assistance from the Rock Cats and from American Legion Post #72, each attendee received a box seat, food voucher and team cap.

Prayer Cards Delivered

St. Joseph the Worker Council 10921 in Orefield, Pa., shipped 3,600 prayer cards to troops stationed in Iraq. After receiving a request from council member Lt. Col. Von George, Knights designed and mailed four types of prayer cards that feature St. Michael, St. George, St. Maurice and St. Barbara.

Rice for the Needy

Bishop John J. Kaising Council 14223 at the U.S. Army Base Camp Humphreys near Osan, South Korea, coordinated the donation of rice for the homeless and needy. The food was distributed at a home for abused girls in

Seoul, at a soup kitchen in Incheon, and at migrant worker centers in Buchon and Gasan. Since 2000, the Yongsan Garrison Catholic community has given more than 100,000 pounds of rice to the needy.

Christmas in July

St. Elizabeth Bayley Seton Assembly in Sterling, Va., traveled to the Martinsburg VA Medical Center in Martinsburg, W.V., July 25, to treat patients there to a "Christmas in July" party. Knights hosted several games of bingo and distributed gifts to all veterans in attendance.

Riding 4 Hope

Father John Francis "Jake" Laboon Council 13395 at Naval Base Kitsap in Silverdale, Wash., donated \$150 to Riding 4 Hope, a coast-to-coast bicycling trip undertaken by Knight David Mackovjak and his sons, John and James. The three men departed Silverdale June 28, and arrived in Virginia Beach Aug. 9. The charity ride raised more than \$10,000 for the Wounded Warrior Project and for the Boys and Girls Club.



(From left) Tom Sheehan, Steve Sisolak and Sean Zukowski of Our Lady of the Hills Council 5959 in Martinsville, N.J., stand with some of the crutches they collected for people in Afghanistan. Knights, along with members of Boy Scout Troop #46, collected more than 1,100 crutches and 100 walkers that will be distributed by a U.S. Army medical team deployed to Afghanistan.



Jesse Garay of Oak Cliff Council 3593 in Dallas and Michelle Cummins, gift coordinator for the Brooke Army Medical Center, unload care packages for wounded veterans. Knights and Catholic Daughters undertook a project called "Operation Boxer Shorts" to collect underwear, workout clothes and bathing suits for soldiers recovering at the facility.

Know a Catholic man who is interested in joining the Order? Visit www.kofc.org and click on the link that reads, "I Want to Join" for more information about becoming a Knight of Columbus.



Lone Priest Shepherds Tiny Flock in Afghanistan

by Jessica Weinstein, CNS

In the midst of the escalating war in Afghanistan, there is a place of peace for Kabul's tiny Catholic population.

Inside the Italian Embassy compound, visitors will find a small white building marked simply with a cross. Its guardian is the shepherd of Kabul, Barnabite Father Giuseppe Moretti.

A warm, 70-year-old Italian with graying hair and a sharp sense of humor, Father Moretti is the only priest ministering to Catholics in Afghanistan, considered a mission territory by the Church.

"Our presence is the presence of the master's seed," he said in an interview with Catholic News Service.

Father Moretti first arrived in Afghanistan in 1977, two years before an invasion by the former Soviet Union touched off a generation of fighting. When the war between the Soviets and the Afghan Muslim fighters known as mujahedeen ended in 1982, it was quickly followed by a civil war that raged throughout the 1990s. In 1994, the embassy was attacked and Father Moretti was shot. He survived, but decided to leave the country.

After American forces drove the Taliban from Kabul in 2001, Pope John Paul II asked Father Moretti to return.

"It was my duty as shepherd to stay with my flock," Father Moretti said.

According to the Vatican, there are just 250 Catholics in Afghanistan — a number that does not include those serving in the military. Father Moretti said about 150 people regularly attend Mass inside the embassy. All are members of the international community, including religious sisters from several orders that serve the region.

Sister Chantal de Jesus, a member of the Sisters of Jesus in France, came to Afghanistan in 1955 and brought with her a team of nurses to the hospital in Kabul.



Father Mirek Jordanek, a Czech army chaplain, celebrates Mass for soldiers of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division at Forward Operating Base Shank in Afghanistan. There are six priests for 17,000 U.S. soldiers in eastern Afghanistan and just one local priest to serve the country's diminutive Catholic population.

"They treat us quite well here," she said.

Meanwhile, the Missionaries of Charity, the order founded by Blessed Mother Teresa, was the most recent group to arrive when they began their ministry in Afghanistan in 2007.

"They know us as Christians," said Missionary of Charity Sister Martina of the mostly Islamic population. "We're well accepted, even wearing the cross."

The need in Kabul is great. According to the United Nations World Food Program, more than two-thirds of the population lives in poverty.

"Many are widows," added Sister Martina. "They live in terrible conditions, and the landlords throw them out during the winter. Many have five to eight children. We help with rent and food distribution."

The Catholic presence in Afghanistan is limited to aid workers since the country is explicitly Muslim. Preaching Christianity is strictly forbidden.

"We can communicate the main principles of living a good life, but we can't talk about Jesus," Sister Martina said.

Sister Fortunata, a member of the Missionaries of Charity and a native of Rwanda, teaches a literacy class for teenage girls. She had begun translating the Quran, the sacred book of Islam, from Arabic into the local languages to help the women with their studies. But after learning that three people had been executed for doing the same thing, she stopped.

For Father Moretti, much of his work centers on stoking the spiritual fervor of the faithful. He also laments the fact that many Catholics among the international community in Kabul do not attend Mass. Even the Muslims notice, he said.

"The Afghan people are believers, and they respect people who profess another religion, not only in word, but in action," he said.

Father Moretti recalled how much it spoke to the Afghan workers at the embassy when Catholics started trickling into Mass after the Taliban fell.

"For two years, the Mass on Sunday was empty," he said, "and I remember our Afghan workers said to me, 'Father, they are unbelievers.' Now, when they see the church full of people, they say, 'Father, there are so many people and they are happy.'"

Still, Father Moretti is very cautious when he speaks about Afghanistan's future, especially in light of the upheaval he has seen during his time there.

"We hope. Our dream is peace, real peace, and if there is peace, there is democracy. Democracy in Afghanistan is a hard journey," he said. ♦

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