

Reflection on the 10th Anniversary of the Death of Sister Barbara Ford

The prophet Amos startles us with the words we find on the cover of our prayer booklet, doesn't he.

Justice and integrity — doing good — are awesome as a mighty flood, he says, as powerful as a torrent cascading down a mountain.

Water, like justice and integrity, changes everything.

Bobbie Ford lived parts of her life where magnificent bodies of water speak of the majesty and power of nature. The turquoise blue of the waters surrounding Harbour Island in the Bahamas; Lake Titicaca on the shores of the barren Altiplano in Peru, highest lake in the world; Lake Atitlan, serene and peaceful, in the shadow of the volcanoes of Sololá.

We here in this (Assembly) room have only to look out the window to see our own Hudson, glorious in all seasons of the year. Many of us are drawn by it into a place of contemplation and deep peace and praise of our Creator God.

But for Bobbie, it was not the power and majesty of water that called to her, but its *utility*. Justice for the people of Quiché compelled her to see the necessity of a constant water supply for the villages where indigenous Mayan people had lived with little access to clean potable water, to water for proper sanitation, cooking, bathing, for health and life itself, all things we take so much for granted.

And so she, being Bobbie, set about to change things. She became adept in the arts of well digging, latrine construction, irrigation, working alongside indigenous Mayans to bring the most basic element for life to the villages of Quiché.

This was her first great gift to the people.

A well is not a splendid thing; a latrine has little about it of beauty. But having access to both a well *and* a latrine meant the possibility of creating a longer, healthier, more productive life span for the people and their children. And hundreds of families, thousands of men, women and children, have benefitted over the years from the water projects, more than 30 of them, created by Bobbie and her team.

Water, like justice and integrity, changes everything.

The gospel of John has Jesus speaking about water, about springs of flowing water. Remember, his people had been formed in the desert, and knew how essential water is to life.

So when Jesus says “**if any are thirsty let them come to me,**” he is using water — as — metaphor to speak to the hearts of his listeners about a deeper reality. If water is necessary for life, he wants them to understand, the fountain of living water is even more so.

He knows that beyond the physical thirst are thirsts that only Spirit can quench. He knows that the living water he will give *is* Spirit.

In a moment of great insight and clarity, Bobbie too came to understand the need for Spirit in the hearts of the Mayan people. Water for the physical needs, yes, but Spirit for the souls of those brought down low by the aftermath of the unrelenting 36 year genocide of the Mayan.

Though perhaps they could not have named this need, Bobbie knew that their thirst was for closure, healing, reconciliation, peace.

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And so her second great gift to the people she loved was participation in the project called the *Reclaiming of Memories*. She and her team, including our Ginny and Mary (Sr. Virginia Searing & Sr. Mary Meyler), were able to help quench the deeper thirst.

They spent years going to different villages, meeting with people whose lives had been forever impacted by the atrocities committed in their homes, to their families, helping them to deal with it in a way that was respectful of their Mayan culture and heritage.

I was privileged to be with the team once when they went to a remote village where the few remaining people had requested their help. I saw how gently, calmly, but with great conviction, Bobbie led the villagers in the process of touching into their wounds, hidden for years in

a place deep within. I watched with a full heart at how they were able to name and claim their anger at what had been done to their loved ones, and to they themselves.

More than the anger, though, I saw how the process allowed them to let go and forgive the unforgivable. At the end of the day there was a peace I could only describe as Spirit's gift.

So on this 10th anniversary of her death, let us say that a mighty flood of justice, a torrent of doing good, has come to the people of the Quiché through Bobbie's ministry, and **we** are all blessed because of it.

Sr. Mary E. Mc Cormick, SC
May 5, 2011



Sr. Mary E. Mc Cormick, SC, who gave a reflection at the prayer service, looks over the symbols that formed the center of the circle of prayer.

For the Mayan people, whom Sr. Bobbie served in Guatemala, the circle represents the interconnection of all life. Flowers adorn the brightly colored, intricately designed cloths woven by Guatemalan women; the black & white photos were taken by Bobbie herself.

Flowing water reminded all of God's precious gift of water and the 30 water projects that Bobbie helped develop to bring clean water to remote Guatemalan villages.

In Bobbie's spirit, participants drew slips of paper with action steps, committing themselves to use water responsibly and to be advocates for clean water for all.