

Notre Dame Tabernacle Society makes vestments for missionary priests

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Carol Dennison, a member of the Notre Dame Tabernacle Society, irons vestments made for a missionary priest. (Courtesy Photo)

By Patricia McGeever
For The Catholic Telegraph

Priests in poor parts of India, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Haiti and many other nations are able to say Mass and administer the sacraments thanks in part to the operation inside the basement of a [Hamilton](#) home.

The common thread between the two is woven into the vestments that are lovingly created by a group of women who meet each week to sew and socialize.

They are members of the Notre Dame Tabernacle Society of Hamilton. The women meet each Tuesday afternoon to work on the garments. Missionary priests get a set of vestments, one each in white, purple, green and red. In the last five years, these women have made 1,400 vestments and sent them all over the world.

“I enjoy it. It’s good company,” said Patty McCartney, a senior seamstress. “It’s worthwhile. You’re helping someone and in life that’s what my motto is, to help someone.”

It made all the difference to Father Celestine Emeka Asogwa in Nigeria who, wrote a thank you letter

after he got his vestments in the mail.

“I am highly delighted with your kind gestures. I really like them,” he wrote of the vestments. “I spent close to an hour trying each of them on with smiles on my face. I pray that our good Lord will continue to guide you all in your mission.”

For priests who minister to the poor and marginalized in impoverished areas, vestments are practically unaffordable. They can cost anywhere between a few hundred dollars to a few thousand depending on material and embroidery.

Joan and Mark Krabbe are the managing officers of the Notre Dame Tabernacle Society. The couple got involved after they retired 13 years ago.

“I went and I was hooked,” said Joan Krabbe. “I sewed and I love the Eucharist and the Mass and praying for priests has always been one of my missions. And so, it just all fit together.”

The Krabbe’s took charge of the operation in 2003, and moved it from the basement of the rectory at Queen of Peace Parish into their home. When they built a new home in 2006, they dedicated 1000 square feet in their basement to the project. One room doubles as the cutting and packing room. Another is set up with 10 sewing machines, five sergers, and an embroidery machine. A large dresser has drawers filled with ribbon and embellishments.

“To me this is the hard part, to figure out what I’m going to put on the vestment,” said Carol Dennison, a veteran seamstress and former Home Ec teacher.

The workload has gotten heavier as more requests come in via email.

“I really feel a lot of this is divinely inspired,” said Krabbe, who prayed for guidance after most of their requests had been met. “I have 200 names so I emailed them saying we were open to take requests. We got this whole barrage. So they say, ‘Joan, stop praying!’”

A bishop in Ghana has requested vestments for every priest in his diocese but he won’t tell the group how many he needs. He just tells them to keep them coming.

The Krabbe’s are working with students at Hamilton Badin to create a website to make it easier to spread their message and take orders. This is a low budget operation with very high goals.

“We run a budget of about \$10,000 a year,” said Mark Krabbe who is the group’s treasurer. He’s also the occasional model for the vestments and he makes the post office runs. “And most of that money comes through donations and we get some small grants.”

The donations are put toward supplies, postage and the occasional machine repair. The group buys material in 50-yard bolts from a New York supplier. It purchases small “Mass Kits” that includes everything a priest needs to celebrate Mass in a portable case. The Krabbe’s buy the kits from a Texas company for \$149 each in July when they don’t have to pay for shipping. They have a supply of rosaries that go out with each package. In the last five years 134 Mass Kits and 14,000 rosaries have been shipped.

This year, the society has spent \$5,200 on postage to ship their products. Each October, the Society holds a fundraiser to raise money for its work but accepts donations all year. If you ask them, the members will tell you they need money, more volunteers, and plenty of prayers. And, there is always room for another seamstress. For Jan Sunderhaus, the rewards are two-fold.

“The satisfaction of helping spread missionary message,” is one she said. “But another thing is it’s a hoot, listening to everybody yak and stuff. It’s fun.”

To learn more about the Notre Dame Tabernacle Society, make a donation or volunteer, email ndts2009@yahoo.com.

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