

# Her Greatest Joys



BY CAROL GRUBER

As a young child, Bernice Thompson would go with her maternal grandmother to visit the elderly and care for the sick. On one occasion, when Bernice objected to an especially unpleasant cleaning task, her grandmother assured her that God smiles down on those who help others.

Bernice also was inspired by her mother, who went to a teachers' college in the south and then set up a school in an old barn. She trekked around the area, gathering children who had no schooling opportunities. Some adults who didn't know how to read or write attended as well.

## Building on the Foundation

These experiences taught Bernice to give to others, using the talents God gave her. She chose a career in social work because of this desire to help others. Despite having two children to raise on her own after her husband died in 1986, she never moved into the corporate sector or another industry because of her loyalty to social work and obligation to give to others.

Bernice has worked in mental health for 40 years, and currently counsels chemically dependent persons. She sees her role as "helping other people come to identify their God-given gifts." She says, "My greatest joy is to provide mentoring



**On a recent trip to Belize, Bernice Thompson assisted in the support of families in San Miguel—a small Kekchi-Maya village in southern Belize with a population of approximately 500 people.**

to help people clarify their own goals and skills."

After receiving a Master's degree in social work from Washington University in St. Louis, Bernice became active in a social workers' group called Healing Racism. Better communication with people of other ethnic backgrounds is their goal, and as social workers, their aim is to serve people with integrity and respect.

## Fostering Dialogue

Bernice was chosen to be part of the Giddings Lovejoy Presbytery committee to initiate dialogue with

people in the Jewish community. "The group came together to meet with selected Jewish leaders for the purpose of dialoguing about the importance of bridge building," says Bernice. "We met over an extended period of time and forged a friendship and greater understanding. As a result, some of the concerns of the Jewish community got voiced. The recognition was that God created one human race. Humans have attempted to construct differences on the basis of how people look. We have created race distinctions."

In all the details of her life, Bernice works to build up and recognize others, whether it's through singing in her church's choir or her role as vice-moderator of Presbyterian Women in Giddings Lovejoy Presbytery. "My parents instilled in us the belief that our lives are supposed to surrender to God's will and to [God's] way," Bernice says in her soft-spoken voice. "The greatest joys come from being in service to others."

Carol Gruber, a lifelong Presbyterian, is author of the book, *Cleft in Two: A Story of Miraculous Healing* (Nashville: ACW Press, 2000). She has a degree in English from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and has worked as a newspaper reporter and as managing editor of a realtor newsletter.

Do you know a Presbyterian woman who is building community every day? Contact Leah Bradley, PW senior associate editor, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, Kentucky 40202; [Lbradley@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:Lbradley@ctr.pcusa.org).