

TAKE A BREAK WITH...

Phil Aaron, S.M.

Campus minister, retired (briefly)

When you retired from campus ministry in 2005, you planned to spend the winter in New Zealand working on an organic farm, preferably a sheep farm, in exchange for room and board. How did that work out?

It didn't meet my fantasy expectation. It was more like living as a migrant worker rather than a cultural exchange. At the first place, "farm" should have been in quotations. It was just a hodgepodge of a few pigs and a little garden. The Web site promised a developing school to teach kids about organic farming and English as a second language, but it wasn't a school, just a half-completed building with no electricity or running water where I stayed with four Japanese men, two Germans, a Swede and a Belgian. The next place was a cattle farm where I worked to redo a fence line.

You also traveled to Argentina, Chile and Vietnam to visit with Marianist laypeople and UD alumni. What was that like?

Vietnam was a highlight. I traveled with Robin Means (husband of UD alumna Ann Hudock), who works for the World Bank, to visit poverty-reduction projects. It was refreshing to see the World Bank building small-scale projects — roads, irrigation and water delivery systems, school buildings — not dams or highways.

So now that you've tried your hand at retirement, you're back on campus working part time for the School of Engineering. What's your title?

It's coordinator of service learning. In addition to sending UD engineering students to work with technical partners in developing countries where there's a Marianist presence, we'll be inviting people from all over to take advantage of technical education at UD.

What has the response been?

This year 25 engineering students (up from 15 in previous years) have applied for international service learning opportunities that range from developing village water systems in Cameroon to expanding solar cooker technology in Bolivia.

What can engineering students learn from international service-learning projects?

They don't really understand appropriate technology until they experience a developing country. They find out what they assumed to be universal is not.

What are you doing in your spare time?

I play trombone in the concert and the jazz band sections of the UD-sponsored New Horizons Band for people over 55 who once played a musical instrument or want to learn to play one. I am also promoting an attempt to get the members of the Society of Mary to talk on the Internet about the future of religious life in the U.S.A. As in all of life, halfway through the dialogue is not too successful, as yet.

