



Associated Press Photo

From left, Christine Weerts and Sister Ann Chaput deliver food to the home of Chlorine Shufford. Sister Ann was a teacher and principal in Chicago until several years ago when she decided to become a nun, moved to rural Lowndes County and started operating the Good Shepherd Catholic Mission.

# In rural Alabama, the war on poverty never ended

By **BOB JOHNSON**  
Associated Press

**F**or Chlorine Shufford and others in the isolated Alabama community of Mosses, Ala., life has changed little in nearly a century. Believed to be in her 90s, Shufford lives down a dirt road in a four-room house with bare wooden floors where she raised her children. She washes her clothes in a steel pot in the yard, and heats her house with an ancient potbellied stove in the middle of one room.

But thanks to Roman Catholic Sister Ann Chaput, who gave up a career as a Chicago educator to work in one of the poorest communities in America, Shufford has a bathroom with running water for the first time in her life.

Before the lavatory was built

onto the end of her home in September, the small, shy Shufford had to use a field next to the house.

"It's sort of hard to go outside when it gets to raining," Shufford said.

The nun's work with Shufford and others is part of the ministry of The Edmundite Missions in Selma, which since 1937 has been serving Alabama's Black Belt, a mostly poor region named for its rich soil.

The Edmundites operate food kitchens and health clinics and offer home repair, elder care and education to people in the region.

A member of the Sisters of Charity, BVM, religious order of Dubuque, Iowa, Chaput said she was struck by the vast need the first time she visited Mosses, only about 35 miles southwest of Montgomery but a world away

when it comes to the lifestyle.

The 2000 Census listed Lowndes County as one of the 100 poorest counties in America.

"There are hungry people here. There are people here who are cold. There are people here who don't have running water," Chaput said, on a break from supervising a program that gives food to rural Lowndes County churches with needy members. "There are warm and loving and needy people here. How can you not be touched by that?"

Shufford, who grew up in Crenshaw County, doesn't read or write, although she can sign her name. "I went to school and I used to read pretty good, but then I started raising children," she said.

Chaput was a teacher and principal in Chicago when she decided several years ago to become a nun. She moved to the

rural Alabama county and started operating the Good Shepherd Catholic Mission in the otherwise all-Protestant and almost all-black community of Mosses.

Now 55, she lives in a house in Mosses with retired 74-year-old Sister Frances Schaeffer and is known locally as Sister Ann.

"I'm for anything that helps our county," said Uralee Haynes, 87, the former Lowndes County school superintendent, who was among locals picking up groceries for their churches.

Haynes said the main reason for the county's poverty is "because people don't have the training to get good jobs."

Chaput urges people in Chicago to adopt families in Lowndes County, and her other projects include a senior citizens center, a camp for children, a thrift store—

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# Edmundite Missions continues its decades-long commitment to the poor

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and a sewing room. Women from the Mosses area use old Singer sewing machines to make colorful African-themed purses, which are sold to the public. The women receive a portion of the proceeds.

"It is giving them a great sense of worth," said Schaeffer, who helps supervise the sewing.

Chaput also hopes to get the community interested in one of its native sons - Chicago Bulls center Ben Wallace, who grew up in White Hall - and to get Wallace more interested in Lowndes County.

"These kids here need someone to look up to, so that they know they can have a future too, so they can know they can make it," Chaput said. "I think the people from Chicago are more excited about him than the people here."

To change that, she organized and arranged funding for a recent bus trip to Atlanta so that Lowndes County residents could watch Wallace and the Bulls play the Hawks. She said Wallace met with the group after the game.

"Some grandmothers went with grandchildren and had the time of their lives. They all had on his No. 3 jersey," she said. "Some of them had never been to Atlanta before."

Helping Shufford is a priority for Chaput, who said the elderly woman seems to be in good health, is still active and goes to church most Sundays.

"She mops, washes dishes, tends to her yard," Chaput said.

Shufford said she doesn't want to leave her small home and her new bathroom.

"I don't have everything good," she said, "but I've come a long way."



Associated Press photo

**Chlorine Shufford signs for the food that Sister Ann Chaput delivered to her home.**