



# Silent Children's Mission

ISSUE

52

WINTER  
2026

**"Christian love breaks down every barrier, brings close those who were distant, unites strangers, and reconciles enemies...Through your work, your efforts to change unjust social structures or your simple, heartfelt gesture of closeness and support, the poor will come to realize that Jesus' words are addressed personally to each of them: "I have loved you (Rev 3:9)"**

**Pope Leo XIV - Dilexi Te**



Sr. Lubingu and Frankie in Zambia, 2025

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we reflect on our recent visit to Malawi and Zambia, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to witness the resilience and joy of the people we serve during the rainy season—a first for me. While rain often brings to mind challenges such as mud and insects, it was incredible to see the genuine happiness radiate from the faces of our friends as the torrential rains fell. For them, each drop is a blessing, nurturing the crops that sustain their families. In the midst of my own comfort, it became abundantly clear just how spoiled I am, and how distanced I have grown from the profound beauty of nature's cycle in producing our food.

During this journey, the philosophical underpinnings of our mission became clearer than ever—cultural humility, love for our neighbor, and an unwavering focus on the poorest of the poor. These values drive us at Silent Children's Mission (SCM) to be a source of hope and support for children facing unimaginable hardships. We are deeply dedicated to our benefactors and missionaries who share our vision.

I recently found myself reflecting on a debate I once had with a colleague. He argued against providing immediate aid, suggesting that charity only perpetuates poverty by taking initiative away from the poor. I couldn't understand this perspective. How can we stand by while a child goes hungry today? In that conversation, I felt the weight of my responsibility—to offer a meal to someone in desperate need is to affirm their dignity and humanity. MacFarlane-Barrow wisely stated, "There is merit in sometimes just holding the hand of a distraught person without trying to pull them in some upward direction of your choosing." At SCM, we believe that meeting the immediate needs of children and families—providing food, clothing, and school fees—is essential. Yet we equally recognize the necessity of addressing the root causes of poverty: such as empowering women to gain skills for self-sufficiency and teaching young adults agricultural practices that cultivate lasting change.

Reflecting on the many blessings of our recent mission trip, I am grateful for the new learning and continued collaboration with our partners. For the first part of the trip (Malawi), Fr. Michael and I were joined by four parishioners from St. Leonard's Church in Boston and I stayed on to visit with several missionaries in Zambia. It truly was a Holy Spirit-led journey of the heart and soul! One of the most meaningful moments for me was a gathering of local women, organized by Sr. Lubingu (Poor Clare). The women shared their stories, their struggles, their hopes, and their visions for the future. I listened as they brainstormed possible solutions for their communities and spoke openly about their needs. Many approached me privately to share their personal stories, and I will offer a few of these in this newsletter, with deep respect for their courage.

Our collaborative approach is integral to our mission. We work closely with local leaders—our friends—who know their communities best. Their insights inform our projects, and we prioritize their recommendations on how to address immediate and long-term needs. As a grassroots charity, we are devoted to building authentic relationships and walking alongside these communities on their journeys toward self-sufficiency. It's often a slow and winding path, and we understand that true independence may take many years. We are blessed that these friendships have deepened, allowing us to be part of their stories and to share in their struggles and triumphs. It is hard to adequately describe the profound connection I feel for these incredible individuals who inspire us every day.

Another unforgettable highlight was an early Christmas party for the children. Every child received a meal and a gift — and then we danced! I felt so much joy to spend this time with the children. Returning home, I have carried these experiences close to my heart. I have also listened and reflected on the stories of the missionaries who travelled with us. It was a spirit-filled time, full of new insights and new ways of seeing the world. I am especially grateful to Maria, who generously shares her perspective in this newsletter.

Just before leaving Canada for the trip, I received a message from a former student who participated in a medical mission in 2018. After so many years, Tino felt compelled to reflect on how that experience had shaped him. His words reminded me again of a profound truth: when we open our hearts to the poor, their lives have the power to transform ours — teaching us, humbling us, and drawing us deeper into God's love. What is happening in the hearts of all who encounter this mission is not small, it is the quiet work of grace, planting seeds for future generations of people in Malawi and Zambia and at the same time, nourishing our own hearts. In this newsletter, you will find stories of resilience and hope - stories of the children and families and the dedicated missionaries we work with. As we continue this vital work, your support is crucial. Your donations enable us to address the pressing needs of the children we serve while fostering sustainable growth within their communities. Together, we can be the lifeline that nourishes hope and possibility. With heartfelt gratitude for your partnership, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. May your Christmas be filled with the peace and joy of Jesus. Peace and all good, Frankie



Two sisters and a dream...  
Sr. Bernadette and Frankie at the Simone Farm in Malawi



Meeting with these women was the highlight of the trip - their strength and resilience is inspiring.



The Poor Clare Sisters in Lusaka Zambia help to care for these children in the villages near the monastery. Without your support they would not have the opportunity to go to school!





### AFRICAN JOY

Our 2025 mission trip to Malawi and Zambia was filled with “firsts” that revealed God’s providential love in unexpected and liberating ways. What began as a journey to serve the materially poor became, for us, a school of surrender, trust, and perfect joy.

This was the first time SCM partnered with St. Leonard Church in Boston to bring four parishioners on mission to Malawi, marking a new chapter in SCM and a shared Franciscan outreach. For over fourteen years, Frankie and I have traveled together to different countries, but from November 3–12, 2025, we were joined for the first time by three Secular Franciscans—Anthony Coglian, Christina De Leo, and Maria Di Stefano—along with Tara Gear, forming a six-person team united in prayer and service. Throughout our nine days in Ludzi and Ganya, we sought to express God’s love and minister to the local people in simple, concrete ways. We toured Ludzi Hospital and the girls’ secondary school run by the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa, and we had the grace of attending Mass at the parish dedicated to St. Joseph, a living sign of the Church’s long-standing presence in this region. These visits reminded us how the Sisters quietly sustain education, health care, and pastoral care in places often overlooked by the world. We left feeling a new sense of reverence and respect for all of the ways that our Sisters have communicated God’s presence in such a tangible way.

In Ganya, we were graciously hosted by Fr Sylvester who made us feel at home. He provided a beautiful

feast with the Chief and local community leaders. Frankie cut the ribbon on a new well sponsored by SCM that will provide clean water to the village and local school and pumped the first stream of water as the community rejoiced. We also helped outfit a young soccer team. The community named their team SCM and painstakingly hand painted their jerseys with SCM-branded logos. We provided new cleats, socks, and balls so they could play together as an official SCM team for the first time, turning a simple game into a sign of solidarity, dignity and belonging.

We also visited the Simone farm—first blessed in 2011—to witness the remarkable progress made since its beginning as a mission-supported agricultural project. We checked on the chickens and pigs, tasted sugar cane from the fields, and learned that, for the first time, university students had been assigned there as interns to study and support the farm’s development. During our visit we met the village Chief, enjoyed skits and songs from the children, watched traditional Ngoni dancers, distributed blankets and clothing, celebrated Mass on the farm for the first time, shared rosaries blessed by Mary of Medjugorje, and blessed a newly acquired piece of land adjacent to the farm.

One of the most unforgettable “firsts” came during our visit to Kachebere Major Seminary, a philosophical college in the Kalulu hills on the Malawi–Zambia border. After celebrating a private Mass, we began our now-traditional Stations of the Cross, climbing toward the top of the hill together. Near the summit, the skies suddenly opened and a torrential downpour drenched every one of us; our two small umbrellas were no match for the storm. At first, we each tried in his or her own way to avoid getting soaked, but soon we realized there was no escape. Once we stopped resisting and simply surrendered to the rain, something interior shifted: what began as discomfort turned into a deep sense of freedom, peace, and even joy. In that moment, the Lord gently reminded us that life is unpredictable, and we are not in control, and that our lack of control is not an obstacle to happiness but a doorway into trust in Divine Providence.

Over many mission trips, a consistent thread has emerged: those who are materially poor are often more in touch with their existential poverty, finitude, and dependence on God. Without the illusion that technology, wealth, or constant planning can secure perfect comfort, they are often more ready to accept reality as it is and to entrust themselves to God’s care. The communities we visited in Malawi reminded us that acknowledging our limits and powerlessness is not defeat, but the beginning of genuine spiritual freedom. Their example showed us that when we embrace our own “poverty of being” and turn, in faith, to God’s providential love, we find a joy the



## Fr. Michael's reflection continued..



**Left:** First Mass at the Simone Farm to celebrate God's abundance and to thank our benefactors for their generosity.

**Below:** Blessing of the new parcel of land adjacent to the original 70 acres. This piece has rich fertile soil that will yield food for those most in need.



world cannot manufacture or steal.

Clutching those inadequate umbrellas in the storm at Kachebere, each of us reached the same inner conclusion: "We're not getting out of this." Once we accepted that fact, a weight lifted, anxiety evaporated, and an unexpected joy took its place. That experience echoed the Franciscan teaching on "perfect joy": that true freedom often comes not from escaping the cross, but from embracing the one we are given, in union with Christ crucified and risen. So much of our anxiety springs from trying to "manage the unmanageable" and fix problems that are beyond us. A simple spiritual practice that emerged from this mission is to pray with the phrases "even if" and "anyway": even if circumstances do not change, I will trust God anyway; even if the storm rages, I will choose to love anyway. As Jesus promises in John 14:27, His peace is not the fragile peace that waits for the storm to pass, but an interior peace that anchors us in the midst of it.

When we remember that Jesus is in the boat with us—as He was with the disciples on the raging sea—we can rest in the assurance that we will not go under, no matter how high the waves rise. His peace becomes our anchor, even when everything around us feels out of control, and that unshakable hope is the greatest gift this mission trip has renewed in us.

Peace,  
Fr. Michael Della Penna OFM

**Below:** The SCM mission team with our beautiful hosts the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa at the motherhouse in Ludzi Malawi. Special thanks to Sr. Adelaida (Mother Superior) and Sr. Bernadette for their gracious hospitality.

**Right:** What a blessing to officially dedicate the nursery school at the Simone Farm to our beloved Joan Simone!



## Reflection from our Missioner Maria DiStefano:



Malawi, Africa stole my heart. The kindness of the people of Malawi will stay with me always. The hospitality extended to our mission group was beyond compare. Every person we met throughout our journey greeted us with welcoming warmth – making us feel loved wherever we went. I realized very quickly that Malawi certainly is the warm heart of Africa.

Everything you've ever seen on TV about the life of the poor in Africa is true – that level of poverty really exists. I saw things I never imagined I would see, and I felt things I never imagined I would feel. It was difficult to visit a village and see those beautiful children living with their families in extreme poverty. Their homes, without electricity or plumbing, were simply four walls with a dirt floor. Their bed consisted of a couple of blankets and a thin bamboo mat on the floor where they risk ants and other insects crawling on them while they sleep. The children's clothing was ripped and dirty. Their feet, legs, arms and hands were covered in dust – many did not even have shoes. It was heartbreaking. I struggled with it then, and I'm struggling with it now. Although I had no special skill set to offer them, seeing their faces light up as we approached, made me realize the only skill I needed was the ability to show them love and to make sure they knew how much God loves them. I saw God in every single face I encountered. Our mission trip was filled with an abundance of prayer and love and we had many memorable

moments. We visited a hospital staffed primarily by nurses. While there, a touching moment for us was meeting three babies who were born hours before our arrival, and because of generous donations, we were able to give each newborn a gift. I was especially moved while attending Mass one day. During the offertory, families who had next to nothing, were putting what little they had in the offertory buckets. This reminded me of the Bible story "The Widow's Mite" (Mark 12:41-44) where a poor widow dropped two small coins in the box, showing us that giving unselfishly with faith and love is what matters.

A blessing for me was meeting a beautiful 12-year-old girl named Ruth (photo top left). Ruth is extremely poor, and her mother is struggling. We talked for a short bit, but she was very quiet and shy. However, I felt a connection to her. Her quiet way reminded me of myself – making me realize that as human beings, we're all the same. The poor experience happiness, love, sadness and sorrow...just like us.

There were so many powerful moments during this trip, but the one that impacted me the most was when I reached out to touch the hand of an older Malawian woman. When our hands touched, I almost gasped. The skin on the palm of her hand was thick, rough, dry and hard with calluses. These were the hands of a woman who spent her entire life taking care of her family. A woman who cooked over an open fire, hand-washed clothes, carried firewood, and pumped water from the well. I looked down at my own hands and felt guilty for always thinking my hands were too rough. I turned her hand over so I could see her palm, and I knew that the women of Malawi are the strongest women I have ever met. They carry the burden of feeding their children. Their hands tell the story of everyday life in Malawi. Their hands are God's hands. These women have strength, courage, resilience and a loving mother's heart. I don't think I'll ever forget what the palm of her hand felt like. I can still feel her rough skin.

However, amidst all the poverty and sadness, I found joy. My greatest source of joy came from listening to the congregation sing during Mass. All ages, all generations sang together loudly glorifying God. Their voices were raised in unison and perfect harmony. Hearing the joy of the parishioners expressed through their singing, was emotional and beautiful to witness. After seeing the level of poverty I saw in Malawi, including classrooms where the number of children were too numerous to count, where children sat on the floor because they did not have desks, where most school uniforms were torn and stained – I came to fully realize the importance of the work of Silent Children's Mission. Seeing the work SCM does to help the poorest of the poor, was incredibly inspiring. The new building, the acres of land, the new well – all these things improve the life of these struggling families. SCM is changing the lives of countless individuals. It was a privilege to see firsthand how they are providing opportunities for so many children who probably never thought they'd be given an opportunity. Listening to testimonies of success from young adults who SCM has helped gave me an enormous amount of respect for SCM and its volunteers. These young men and women are now financially able to support themselves in careers such as teaching, nursing, agriculture and banking to name a few – all because of Silent Children's Mission. Thank you to the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa in Malawi for being the most gracious hosts. You made us feel so special. I can't thank you enough. Thank you, Frankie and Fr. Michael, for opening my eyes to the poor and giving me an opportunity to help serve those who struggle. This mission trip was life altering. My view of the poor has significantly changed – I am so grateful for this change.

Thank you, Silent Children's Mission, for being a beacon of light to so many children and families – a light that lets them know God truly loves them. Maria DiStefano, OFS



## A message from Tino Minielli:



Dear Frankie,

It's Tino - one of your favourite students! It's October 2025 now, and I find myself reflecting with deep gratitude on the Guatemala experience we shared back in February 2018. So much has changed since then. I have now been a Registered Nurse for seven years and currently work in the Operating Room as part of a multidisciplinary team. I am married and blessed with three beautiful children. Yet, despite the years and all that has unfolded since, the memories of that Guatemala mission trip remain vivid and formative in my heart.

When I think back to those ten days in Guatemala, I realize how profoundly that time shaped the way I understand service. I was single then, living with my mom in her small two-bedroom condo in Toronto, working part-time as a PSW at a nursing home while completing my studies. Life was simple, but my heart was searching — searching for how God was calling me to serve Him. The opportunity to go to Guatemala, and especially to meet and work alongside you, gave me a tangible experience of what it means to serve with the heart of Christ. Being with the children at the orphanage and seeing the love and dedication of everyone involved in the mission stirred something deep within me. It awakened in me a sense of mission - a desire to serve with the compassion and self-giving love of God.

At that time, I was discerning how best to serve the Lord — even considering the priesthood. I remember speaking with you and Fr. Michael about these things during the trip. Though I didn't yet know what form my service would take, my heart was open to wherever God might lead. Looking back now, I can see how that openness — that “yes” — has continued to bear fruit. My vocation as a husband, father, and nurse has become the field in which I strive to serve Christ daily, especially in caring for others. The Guatemala trip was more than just an academic or clinical experience. It was a spiritual encounter that left a lasting imprint on my soul. It reminded me that true healing and service flow from the heart of God — and that every act of care, no matter where it happens, can be an expression of His love.

Thank you, Frankie, for your witness, your leadership, and the example you set during that mission. I remain deeply grateful for the opportunity to have shared in that journey and to have been formed by it. Looking back now, my heart is filled with joy and thanksgiving. With gratitude, Tino

## Martha and Mary: Fragility and Resilience



Martha and Mary are ten-year-old twins who live in a half-built structure 3 km from the Poor Clare Monastery in Zambia. Bright, soft-spoken girls who speak Nyanja, should be in grade four, yet they are only in grade one. Their inconsistent attendance, constant moves, and the instability of their home life have held them back from progressing in school because their mother, struggling with addiction and alcoholism, frequently relocates from place to place, never able to settle. There is no father in the picture, and the little food they receive is often sold to buy homemade spirits known locally as *junta kachaso*. The girls have learned to navigate life quietly, often fearful of their mother and her boyfriend, who also drinks heavily.

For now, Martha and Mary live with their mother in an unfinished house. The family begged the owner to let them stay temporarily, but at any moment construction may resume—and they will once again be forced to find another place. With no mosquito protection, no stable meals, the girls face daily challenges that no child their age should experience.

Their situation came to the attention of the Poor Clare Sisters, who were immediately moved by the girls' condition—dirty, neglected, hungry, and without a sense of safety. At first, the Sisters considered seeking a place for them in an orphanage. But just as those plans formed, a relative stepped forward and agreed to take the children in. The Sisters now support the relative with food, so the girls have

at least some reliable nutrition. However, they remain vulnerable in many ways. They still lack basic protection from mosquitoes, and their emotional world carries the weight of instability.

Yet, even in the midst of hardship, there are small lights of grace. Every Sunday, Martha and Mary walk to Mass on their own. Afterward, if hunger gnaws at them, they go to the parlor at the Poor Clares, where they know they will be welcomed with kindness and something to eat. Their story is one of fragility and resilience—of two young girls navigating a world that has not always been gentle. But it is also a story of hope, community, and the quiet power of compassion. With continued support from SCM and the Poor Clare Sisters, Martha and Mary may yet discover what stability feels like, and what possibilities can open when love finds a way in. (Photo: Martha and Mary in the space where they sleep)

## Mulambo: “The One Who Connects”



During our recent visit, we met Mulambo Hawatcha—a strikingly handsome young man with a smile that rarely leaves his face. When asked his age, he replied simply, “How can I know my years?” His father later confirmed he is 18. Mulambo’s story is both heartbreaking and deeply inspiring. As a child, he attended nursery school and was healthy until seizures began at age five in their home village of Mamba. Two years ago, during a seizure, he was alone and fell into a fire. His father rushed him to Mwanawasa Hospital, where he remained for three months. The burns were so severe—down to the bone—that after just three days, his legs “started to fall apart,” and the doctors could not save them.

He never received counselling and watching his brothers succeed while he struggles has been painful. He completed Grade 4, but the seizures have affected his cognition, leaving him confused at times. Though medications are affordable, he stopped taking them, fearing they would make him vulnerable to voodoo. He now has about one seizure per month.

Life is difficult. Poverty limits every option: Zambia does not offer free healthcare, and his family cannot afford physiotherapy or artificial limbs. A wheelchair was eventually donated through a local politician and social worker. His mother stays with him constantly to keep him safe, yet Mulambo sometimes disappears into the bush to sleep, overwhelmed by his situation. Recently, he asked Sr. Lubingu for help.

Still, his faith is unshakable. “I love the Lord,” he told us. “I suffer without legs, but God is good. When I read the Bible, I am happy. God made me in His image.” When asked why he longs for artificial legs, his answer was simple: “I want to walk—so I can help my father and mother, so my parents will not suffer with me.”

The Poor Clare Sisters are now exploring opportunities for him to learn art or carpentry, hoping to give him purpose and dignity. His father shared that life has changed since they connected with the Sisters. Before leaving, the Sisters gave him a bar of soap. Mulambo beamed, saying, “God has gifted me—now I can go to church clean.” His name, Mulambo, means “the one who connects.” And indeed, he connects all who meet him to compassion, resilience, and hope.

## Miriam Tanganika: Strength in the Midst of Struggle

With her permission, we share the story of Miriam Tanganika, a 40-year-old single mother of six whose quiet strength and humility have touched me deeply. Miriam discovered she was HIV-positive when her first child was born—yet by grace, all her children are HIV-negative. She works tirelessly on a farm, digging long hours despite constant fatigue from her illness.

Miriam’s daily life is shaped by hardship. Her husband left when the children were still young, and since then she has carried the full weight of providing for the family. Living in a remote area without a nearby market, she depends almost entirely on what she can grow. During the dry season, this becomes even more difficult, especially as she struggles with a painful growth near her rectum that leaves her chronically constipated. Treatment is out of reach; healthcare costs are simply impossible for her to afford.

Determined to keep her older children in school, Miriam took out a loan of 8,028 kwachas (about \$360 USD) to be repaid in 28 weeks. The lenders are strict, requiring payments every Monday—leaving her with very little money for food. Still, she works hard and pays faithfully, hoping not to fall behind and face even harsher penalties.

Throughout her challenges, Miriam speaks with deep humility—not demanding help but expressing heartfelt gratitude for the support she receives.

The Poor Clare Sisters assist her with food when her harvests fail, and SCM helps cover school fees for her younger children.

Miriam’s situation remains dire, and her health is fragile. Yet her resilience, faith, and dedication to her children are inspiring. Her story is a reminder of the strength carried quietly by so many mothers—and of how vital even small acts of support can be in sustaining hope.





# Malawi and Zambia Mission Trip 2025

Special thanks to St. Leonard's Church in Boston for their generous donations!



*"In each child, God whispers a new secret to the world; adds a new dimension of immortality to creation"*

Ven. Fulton Sheen

## How you can help:

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