



Silent Children's Mission

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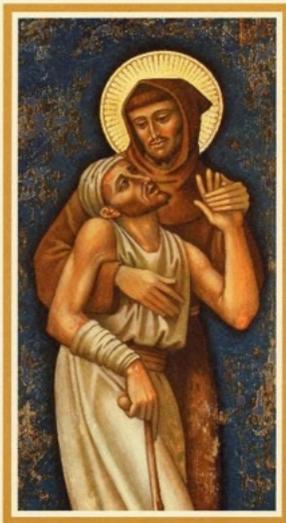
"No sign of affection, even the smallest, will ever be forgotten, especially if it is shown to those who are suffering, lonely or in need."

Pope Leo XIV



"His (Christ's) appearance in our midst has made it undeniably clear that changing the human heart and changing human society are not separate tasks but are as interconnected as the two beams of the cross."

Henri J.M. Nouwen



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Dear Friends and Supporters,

This past February, in collaboration with Guatemalan health care providers and translators, fifteen Canadian SCM medical volunteers travelled to Guatemala to care for a total of 626 children and adults in need of health care. We served at Valle de Los Angeles (a boarding school for vulnerable children), Moyuta (an Indigenous rural community closely connected with the Friars at Valle), and the Basurero (the Guatemala City dump community in collaboration with Dr. Hernandez and Juan Carlos Molina). Included in this newsletter are reflections from three of our team members as well as some interesting stats.

Guatemala is often described as a low to middle-income country, yet the reality for many people tell another story. Wealth and poverty exist side by side in stark contrast. A small number of people hold tremendous resources, while millions struggle to meet even the most basic needs. Access to healthcare reflects this inequality. Public services are provided through the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance, but funding is limited and most skilled medical personnel are concentrated in urban hospitals. Rural communities often have only community health workers who can provide preventive care but not treatment. When free medicine is unavailable, patients are sent home in pain and empty-handed. In the margins of this system—particularly in the communities surrounding the Basurero—suffering and charity are often found in the same places.

One day at our outreach clinic in the Basurero, I saw a young woman slowly making her way down a narrow alley in the slum. I will call her Maria. She was being supported by a neighbour who had heard about our clinic. Immediately, I could see she was gravely ill. Years of glue sniffing had left her apathetic due to long-term neurological damage. Her body, hair, and clothing were filthy. She held a dirty cloth over her mouth as she approached. I welcomed her inside the clinic and brought her directly to a chair. When I gently looked inside her mouth with a flashlight, even after all I had seen, I was shocked. The roof of her mouth was covered with black necrotic tissue. Many of her teeth were missing or severely decayed. She could not close her mouth. We soon learned that three days earlier

her “husband” had used pliers to pull out one of her teeth and had dislocated her jaw. Dr. Hernandez, a local physician who knows this community well, and Dr. Geeta quickly recognized that her condition was far beyond what our outreach clinic could treat.

In Guatemala there are few formal ways for citizens to demand their right to healthcare. Patients rarely have recourse when negligence occurs. Silence and a lack of accountability often prevail. The situation is even more troubling for those with mental illness. Federico Mora Hospital is the only publicly funded psychiatric institution in a country of more than sixteen million people. Patients admitted there effectively lose their liberty; by law, the hospital director becomes their legal guardian. With little judicial oversight and few community services, many remain confined with no ability to challenge their treatment. Dr. Hernandez explained that bringing Maria to a public hospital would be futile as they demand a willing guardian to avoid responsibility and so would most likely be denied care. Although Maria was not able to make this decision, she refused to go anywhere else for treatment. The reality of this sad scenario was heart-breaking.



With our Franciscan brother and sisters in Guatemala - a true collaboration in service of the poor.

People living with mental illness are among the most marginalized members of society. International standards exist to protect their rights, but in a country struggling with corruption, violence, and poverty, these protections are often ignored. For Maria, the hope she had was our small free outreach clinic. Although we could only offer antibiotics, pain medication, and food supplements, what seemed to bring her the greatest comfort was something else entirely. Later, together with Dr. Hernandez, Friar Leonardo, another team member, and I, we visited the place she was staying and prayed with her. It seemed for just a few minutes, Maria experienced peace because she knew we cared and we were willing to sit with her pain.

We cannot change the healthcare system of Guatemala, nor can we erase the deep injustices that exist in this world. But we can be present. Our small efforts are like the words of Mother Teresa: “We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.”

During this season of Lent, Maria’s story reminds us that Christ is still present among the poor, the forgotten, and the suffering. Though our efforts may seem small, each act of compassion becomes a living witness to the love of Christ in a wounded world. As we continue this Lenten journey, may each of us grow in mercy and walk ever more closely with Jesus, who calls us to serve Him in the least of our brothers and sisters.

Peace, Frankie Burg-Feret ofs

Thank you to everyone who sent us letters and cards - we love to hear from you! We will remember all of you at Mass at our SCM annual meeting on Thursday April 9, 2026.

St. Elizabeth Home of Light

“Everything is coming together - may God reward our beloved benefactor!” Sr. Veronica

We are excited to update you with the progress of the home for abandoned and trafficked children which will accommodate 20 children! Sr. Veronica, of the Sisters of the Visitation in Sierra Leone continues to provide us with weekly updates and photos. Soon we will require additional funds for solar power, a well and water system, as well as furnishings for the home. If you feel moved to help or know of someone that can - let us know! Together let’s make a difference!





St. Francis, the Jubilee and SCM

Franciscan Jubilee

Pope Leo XIV has proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of St. Francis of Assisi, running from January 10, 2026, to January 10, 2027, to honor the 800th anniversary of the saint's death. This special year, focusing on peace and conversion, offers plenary indulgences for visiting Franciscan churches and participating in pilgrimages. Pope Leo XIV emphasized this year as a time for spiritual renewal, particularly in a world marked by conflict, urging a focus on the Franciscan values of poverty, humility, and peace. St. Francis of Assisi met Christ by going out to the lepers and the poor and his radical embrace of poverty was a concrete response to the self-emptying love of the Trinity. It is this love that sends SCM to the margins as missionary disciples.

"The Lord led me among the lepers"

In his Testament, written towards the end of his life, Francis describes his conversion in explicitly Christological terms: "The Lord Himself led me among the lepers, and I showed mercy to them". He adds that what had once been "bitter" to him became "sweetness of soul and body", a sign that in the embrace of the outcast, he discovered a new taste for God. Early sources note that Francis had a deep fear and abhorrence of lepers before this grace, linking his revulsion to his state of sin and spiritual blindness. By obeying the inner call to ride up to the leper, dismount, give alms and kiss him, Francis crossed the threshold from self-protection to self-gift. Francis understood this encounter as foundational, so much so that at the end of his life he recalled it first when summarizing his entire vocation. Other accounts emphasize that, after this first embrace, he began to go regularly to the houses of lepers, giving them money, kissing their hands and even their mouths and living among them. In this consistent going out, Francis did not remain at a safe distance performing acts of philanthropy; he chose to share the social stigma of those whom Christ loved.

Kenosis and Trinitarian self-emptying

The Greek term *kenosis* (self-emptying) describes Christ "emptying himself" and taking the form of a servant, which Francis strove to mirror in his poverty and missionary zeal. Francis heard the Gospel of Christ sending the disciples with nothing for the journey and cried out: "This is what I want; this is what I seek; this is what I desire with all my heart." That response marked a decisive choice to embrace radical poverty, itinerancy and vulnerability as the concrete shape of his discipleship. By surrendering possessions and status, he opened space in his life to be filled by the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit poured out for the world. Biographers note that Francis' embrace of poverty was not a cult of deprivation but a desire to be conformed to the poor and crucified Christ who "for our sake... wished to be considered a leper." His identification with lepers, beggars and the socially excluded is best understood as a sacramental participation in the Trinitarian life, where each divine Person pours Himself out for the Other. In that sense, Francis' *kenosis* is a mirror of the inner life of God: love that does not cling to privilege but goes out in humility and tenderness.

Missionary disciple: seeking the lost sheep

The Gospel scene of Jesus touching and healing the leper—while others recoil—offers a key to Francis' missionary imagination. The Franciscan way of discipleship is a journey with and toward the marginalized. Francis took that pattern literally: he left the safety of Assisi's walls, rode into the countryside, and allowed himself to be interrupted by the "leper on the roadside" who embodied Christ's own wounds. In doing so, he lived what Pope Francis later calls going "to the peripheries," but already in the thirteenth century. Francis' emerging fraternity shared this missionary option, spending time in the company of lepers and the poor not primarily to display charity, but to become, in a sense, "spiritual lepers" themselves—men who chose the place of shame to be closer to the crucified Jesus. Early sources describe them living at places like Rivo Torto near leprosaria, praying, working and begging among those most despised. This stance echoes the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to seek the one lost sheep; for Francis, the "one" often had a disfigured face, a ragged cloak, or a voiceless cry from the marginalized.

Silent Children's Mission: Francis' charism today

Silent Children's Mission embodies this same Franciscan and Trinitarian movement outward by "relieving the suffering and neglect of those who do not have a voice – especially women, children and their families." Our stated goal is "to let the poorest of the poor know someone cares – that God has not forgotten them but loves them," which closely parallels Francis' desire to make the forgotten feel the tenderness of Christ. With your help our mission supports food, education, health care, spiritual help, and counseling so that people may live with dignity and develop in fullness, echoing Catholic social teaching on integral human development.

Our work with Catholic priests, religious, and lay missionaries is able to extend the Franciscan charism in places such as Sierra Leone, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, Ghana, Guatemala, and other countries, relying on volunteers and on

Fr. Michael's reflection continued..

refusing to spend money on advertising. The focus is women and children who otherwise might remain invisible and unheard. This deliberate choice to accompany the "silent" in remote or impoverished regions mirrors Francis going beyond the city walls to those his society had pushed out of sight.

Embracing the "silent lepers" of today

One account of the story of Francis' conversion is that after kissing the leper and giving him alms, Francis mounted his horse, looked around, and could no longer see him, realizing that it was Jesus whom he had just kissed. That insight is a powerful key for reading the work of Silent Children's Mission: in the hidden faces of hungry children, widowed mothers, and families displaced by poverty or corruption, Christ

is mysteriously present. When SCM sends school fees, supports feeding programs, or funds self-sustaining projects in African villages or Guatemalan communities, it is stretching out the hand of the Church to touch today's "silent lepers". Francis teaches that true poverty is a joyful dispossession so that God's love can flow freely toward those most in need, and SCM's reliance on volunteer service and trust in the Holy Spirit reflects that same kenotic spirit. Our mission becomes a living homily on the Trinity: the Father's compassion, the Son's solidarity with the least, and the Spirit's quiet movements in generous hearts. In going out to the "chorus of the poor" in Africa and Guatemala, they help the voiceless feel seen, loved, and gathered back into the fold of the Good Shepherd whom Francis followed so closely.

Peace,
Fr. Michael Della Penna OFM

Update from Sr. Lubingu, Poor Clare Sisters, Lusaka, Zambia



Baraka: A Blessing

When Sr. Lubingu was visiting her Sisters in Tanzania she had the great joy of meeting Baraka - his name is "blessing" in Swahili. She recounted this story of hope for us to share with our benefactors because she knows that each benefactor makes it possible for SCM to support our Sisters in their ministry to the poor.

Baraka's life began with heartbreaking loss. Just eleven days after he was born, his mother died, leaving him and his eight-year-old twin sisters in the care of their grandmother. With no milk and no money to buy formula, the grandmother kept the newborn alive for two weeks by giving him only water.

By the time she brought him to the Poor Clare Sisters, Baraka was severely malnourished and his skin had begun to peel. When Sr. Mary Joan, an elderly Sister, first saw the fragile baby, she called him a "blessing" and believed he would live.

A neighbor shared milk from her cow until infant formula could be found, and the Sisters carefully nursed Baraka back to health. He was baptized during this time, a sign of hope in the midst of hardship.

When the bishop heard Baraka's story, he arranged for his twin sisters to attend school. After six months with the Sisters, Baraka is finally strong and healthy — truly the blessing Sr. Mary Joan knew he would be!

Update from Sr. Mary Rose Koech, Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph Irene Vocational Training Centre for the Blind, Meru, Kenya

"A number of our students have benefitted from your generous donation. Six of our students have recently graduated. These young women have gone out well equipped to be self-reliant and are ready to contribute positively to society. They are now putting into practice what they have learnt while they were at the Irene Vocational Training Centre for the Blind. They are knitting sweaters, weaving table mats, sewing school uniforms, baking bread, cookies, and cakes for sale in order to earn money to support themselves and their families. Others are practicing small scale farming, poultry - keeping chicken for eggs, broilers and dairy cows. They are all very happy in what they are doing and appreciate the support received from Silent Children's Mission."



Reflections from our MST team members:



Serving Through Dentistry: 2026 MST to Guatemala

When Frankie first shared about the SCM 2026 MST to Guatemala in the fall of 2025, I felt a quiet but certain calling in my heart. This was an opportunity to use the gifts God has entrusted me to serve others in a meaningful way. It was a chance to give back to a profession that has blessed me greatly, while stepping into service beyond the walls of my practice.

The months passed quickly, and soon it was February 2026. This was my first visit to Central America, and in many ways, it felt like a leap of faith. I would be traveling to a new country and working with people I barely knew. Yet through Frankie's encouragement, her confidence in me, and my trust in God's guidance, I felt reassured.

When I met my fellow MST team members at the Toronto airport, there was an immediate connection. It was more than friendship — it was unity of purpose.

We arrived at Valle late at night, and the next morning I woke to breathtaking natural beauty. The peace of the surroundings felt like a gentle reminder of God's presence in this place. The week's schedule had been thoughtfully organized by the team at Valle, Frankie, Heidi, and Dr. Connie. After touring the facility and church, I met the children boarding at Valle during breakfast. Their radiant, innocent smiles were a warm welcome that touched my heart deeply. In that moment, any uncertainty I felt faded away.

On our first clinic day, I felt some nervousness as we set up the dental operatory with the materials and instruments we would need. But as the children began arriving, my focus shifted entirely to them. They were trusting, cooperative, and incredibly brave. It was a privilege to restore their teeth, relieve discomfort, and help bring back healthy smiles.

Our outreach visits to Moyuta and the Basurero were especially humbling. We encountered families facing significant challenges and limited access to care. Providing emergency dental treatment to children and adults — often relieving pain and infection — reminded me how transformative even simple care can be. In those moments, I was reminded that compassion speaks louder than words.

During this mission trip, the dental team served over 200 individuals and provided assessments, urgent, and preventive care to 45 children at Valle. We were blessed to work alongside Dr. Manuel and Dr. Cynthia from Guatemala, who generously offered their time and expertise. Eli, our restorative hygienist, supported us tirelessly. Our translators and the entire Valle team were instrumental in making the mission seamless and impactful.

This experience reminded me that dentistry is not just a profession, it is a way to bring healing, dignity, and hope. I returned home grateful, humbled, and deeply aware that when we step forward in faith, God multiplies our efforts in ways we cannot imagine.

Dr. Geeta Gautham
Humber Valley Dental, Bolton, Ontario

"It's difficult to explain everything we experienced over the last few days.

To try to put it fully into words wouldn't do it justice. To capture the weight of each story, each face, each moment would be impossible.

The people of Guatemala carry a love that is unlike any other. A community that holds itself together, even when circumstances try to pull it apart.

Despite the struggle, there is hope. There is pride. There is strength.

To the people I shared this experience with, thank you. It can feel difficult to hold pride after witnessing so much hardship. But I believe we must choose hope.

We brought hope not only to our patients, but also to the communities we served and the people we worked with. By choosing to show up, we proved that there is hope for a peace that goes beyond this mission.

I am deeply grateful to have met such genuine people. Thank you. I will never forget you."



Photo: Jacob Pace with children at Valle. A student in 2023, he returned to the medical mission in Guatemala as an experienced RPN. He shares an excerpt from his journal.



Reflection from Dr. Heidi Siu:

As a volunteer nurse, I recall my first time joining SCM's medical service trip to Guatemala in February 2020. Like most 'first timers', the trip was transformational and would change the course of my nursing career in ways I could not have imagined (a story I will share at another time). While our team's goal was to provide health care, I remember standing in Valle de Los Angeles' bodega looking in awe at the piles of medications, health supplies and equipment we had unpacked - realizing just how crucial these items were in our ability to provide care. I remember meeting Valle's nurse Mirna and quietly watching her communicate with our team about each child's health - realizing just how crucial her role was in following up and

monitoring the children's care after we leave. I think back on the community outreach work that we did from home visits with families living in the Basurero to pop-up clinics in Moyuta - realizing just how crucial social connections were especially for those who have no safety nets whatsoever. But most of all, I remember being surprised by the reach of SCM's support in all of these endeavours. Fast forward to my 4th medical service trip this February 2026, and I continue to be surprised by SCM's reach and impact. I am astounded by the growing number of clients we care for with each trip - made possible through the strong, local community partnerships SCM has established. I am amazed by the evident improvements in health and wellness among the children at Valle - a testament to the capacity, consistency, and care provided by local professionals like Mirna. I am inspired by the hope and dreams shared by the two strong sisters I met living in the Basurero - dreams to be realized through SCM's ongoing support. One can only imagine just how far SCM's reach can go - something I look forward to witnessing (again) at the next medical service trip.

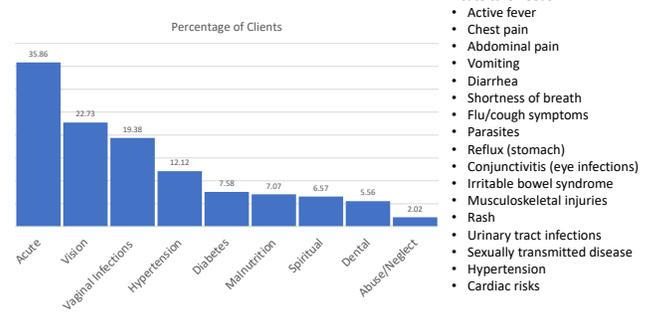
*SCM is grateful to our many benefactors who support us with donations of hockey bags, medications, medical supplies, and dental supplies - special thanks to our benefactor who generously supports most of Mirna's salary each year. *

Medical Service Trip Highlights

Moyuta – General Statistics

Data	Count	Percentage
Total clients	269	
Primary healthcare	198	73.61 %
Dentistry	71	26.39 %
To follow-up	55	20.45 %
Total provisions to families	197	
Hygiene kits	213	108.12 %
Food	157	79.70 %
Medications	133	67.51 %
Demographics		
Female	129	65.15 %
Children (under 12 years)	43	21.72 %
Male	21	10.61 %

Moyuta – Care Needs



Basurero – Highlights

Data	Count	Percentage
Total clients	129	
Primary healthcare	103	79.84 %
Dentistry	26	20.12 %
To follow-up	24	18.60 %
Total provisions to families	98	
Hygiene kits	105	107.14 %
Food	92	93.88 %
Medications	64	65.30 %
Gloves & Masks	13	13.27 %

- Stronger collaborations with local, intersectoral networks (local volunteer doctor, SCM missionary, community leaders)

Valle – General Statistics

Data	Count	Percentage
Total client visits	228	
Primary healthcare	183	80.26 %
Dentistry	45	19.74 %
Dental services		
Urgent care	14	
Fillings & sealants	50	
Extractions (of baby teeth)	5	
Screened with treatment plan for follow-up (with local doctor)	31	

Update from Fr. Sylvester, Ganya Parish, Malawi



A Letter of Appreciation for your Visit - Ganya Parish (Dedza Diocese)

I am writing this letter on behalf of Ganya Parish, and on behalf of Christopher, the first SCM beneficiary of Ganya Parish, who is now finishing Form Four and has expressed and submitted application letter to join the Spiritans in August 2026. I am also writing on behalf of the other vulnerable children supported by the Silent Children's Missions here at the Parish. All those whom SCM supports here were present during your visit so as to see you physically. The SCM Young Soccer Stars, express their gratitude for the soccer balls and shoes, socks, and shin guards. Many thanks for taking time to watch their soccer game!

After Holy Mass, you distributed religious items including rosaries, Chaplet of Divine Mercy, prayer cards of Carlo Acutis, etc. You also distributed at the school assembly and the kindergarten. Even people who are not Catholics or some Catholics who were not coming to Church received the items. Believe me, there is a miracle here. The Church is getting full on Sundays. Even weekday Mass has seen a number of people coming.....The Lord has his own way of converting us.

Ganya area has an estimated population of 54,650 people and during the evening of your arrival at Ganya - the Chiefs of the whole area were represented. With the generosity of SCM granting Ganya Primary School with a new water well, and with the good news of a school block of two classrooms, the Chiefs have decided to grant a five-acre piece of land for the purposes of the school. Thus, instead of the small portion of land where we visited, the decision has been made to construct the new block at the new site. We are therefore currently working towards the lease of the land so that it becomes part of Ganya Primary School. The piece of land is close to the current one. This is an expression from the Chiefs of appreciation for what SCM is doing in the area. People have never seen this before....all the school children who were there at the school assembly went home and shared what they had seen with their parents. The story of your visit continues to be talked and shared among many of us...

We were not able to visit the two pieces of land; one 2.5 acres which we will soon plant some maize and the bigger portion which will be reserved for planting bananas and sugarcane. We hope to put up a house where activities of SCM may be done, and vulnerable children may be accommodated during holidays. In addition, it can be a place where we can keep goats, chickens, and rabbits.

As I wind up this letter of appreciation, allow me to thank you for bringing the parishioners of Fr. Michael from Boston. We are grateful that they joined you to see what Silent Children's Mission is doing in Malawi. Please continue the good work of giving hope to the voiceless, those who according to late Pope Francis, live on the margins of society - the Silent Children. Be assured of our prayers for all the benefactors, friends and the entire family of SCM. Do share with us names of people whom we may include in our prayers at Mass.

Sincerely yours,
Fr. Sylvester Kansimbi

Pope Leo XIV writes: "The preferential choice for the poor is a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society". This is a striking claim. Renewal does not come from wealth, power, or prestige. Renewal comes from solidarity with the poor. The Church is renewed when she walks with those who suffer, when she listens to their cry, when she allows their faith to challenge her comfort."

Archbishop Paul D. Etienne on the World Day of the Poor

Guatemala Medical Service Mission Trip February 2026

Special thanks to our amazing team of volunteers!

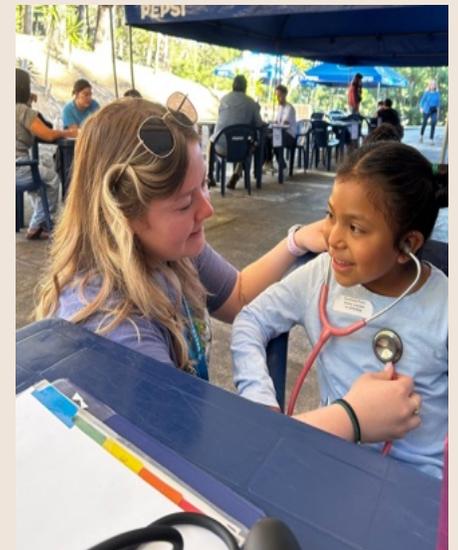


Left:

SCM team 2026 - a collaboration between Canadian and Guatemalan volunteers providing psychosocial, physical, and spiritual care. Photo was taken at the hotel in Moyuta, a small Indigenous community two hours north of Guatemala City.

Below - middle photo:

This mother and son heard the team had returned to Moyuta and eagerly came to see Dr. Connie Chen to share their gratefulness for her sound medical advice that saved the life of her son four years prior.



“The poor are living icons of Christ’s passion. To ignore them is to ignore Christ. To serve them is to serve Christ.” Archbishop Paul D. Etienne

How you can help:

CHEQUE DONATIONS: Payable to: *Silent Children’s Mission* and send to: 16060 Concession 8, Schomberg, Ontario, L0G 1T0, Canada (Make sure to include your mailing address for a tax receipt)

ONLINE DONATIONS: Send us an email money transfer to silentchildrenca@yahoo.com or donate using a credit card through Canada Helps (SCM Charity# 815949607RR0001) Please remember us in your will.

US DONATIONS (for a tax receipt): Send a cheque written to: St. Leonard’s Parish and mail to: St. Leonard’s Church 320 Hanover St., Boston, Ma 02113 – Please indicate on your cheque “donation for Silent Children’s Mission”.

QUESTIONS/REQUEST FOR SPEAKER? Write to silentchildrenca@yahoo.com or call us at 416-418-0314

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE: www.silentchildrensmission.com

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR TAX RECEIPT? Write to us at scmtaxreceipts@gmail.com

Please note: to save on postage costs, tax receipts are sent quarterly with the newsletters