

August 2024 - Malawian youth take turns at the Simone Farm to learn and work together



Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium



July SCM Mission Trip with Jandira Dacaret (SCM lead in Guatemala) and Ana Lucia

We are so proud of Ana Lucia for completing her 2nd year of nursing school! This would not be possible without the generous donations of SCM benefactors. Ana Lucia looks forward to supporting the health care needs of her community in Solola when she graduates.

Dear SCM supporters,

About a year ago, I received a letter via one of our missionaries from a young girl SCM supports in Guatemala. She lives in the basurero (Guatemala City dump), and the letter was a heartfelt apology for not passing her school courses – she was distressed because she thought that I would be disappointed in her. To her, I was a stranger who cared enough to provide school fees and not much else. We didn't know each other as we hadn't spent any time together. However, I knew what she had gone through and why she "lost" her year – she was distracted and unable to do her schoolwork because of trauma; she had been brutally raped and beaten by a family member. Her fear of disappointing me showed that I hadn't fulfilled the mission and vision of SCM, that is: to accompany those in need, - to let them know that someone cares – that God has not forgotten them but loves them. It is our **mission** to communicate the love of God.

That young girl is a child of God - deserving of love, dignity, respect, mercy, and joy. I prayed that I would have the opportunity to visit with her and thanks be to God I was given the chance! Those were graced moments as I was able to let her know how much I loved her and how proud I am for all

that she has accomplished despite the trauma she had endured. This is the work that God calls us to. This relationship with the poor is not transactional, it is relational. In order to build a community of love, we need to listen to each other, to choose a stance of humility where we accept people exactly as they are. We are called to love this way because as Fr. Greg Boyle says: **God is in the loving.**

Fr. Michael, myself, and six wonderful people from Boston travelled to Guatemala on our first “mission trip”. Our goal was not to change anyone or to tell anyone what to do – but to be present, to listen, to learn, to befriend. Our mission was (and is) to see Christ in others and bring Christ to others. Just like in the Visitation scene in the Gospel of Luke, Mary made haste to help her cousin who upon seeing her, the baby leapt in his mother’s womb, and she praises Mary’s faith. Elizabeth recognizes Christ because she was filled with the Holy Spirit, and it was her faith that allowed her to see the presence of Christ in Mary. In the Visitation, Elizabeth and Mary remind us that we are called to both recognize the presence of Christ **in** others and to bring Christ **to** others. Elizabeth is a **model** for us – reminding us to look for Christ in others – to see beyond the surface of the people we encounter. Seeing Christ in others should fill us with joy and awe. We are all here on a purposeful mission to accompany the people we encounter for a reason. Mary is a **model** to us of being Christ-bearers to all we meet; she does not take credit for her faithful yes but points it all back to God. That is what accompanying those in need is all about. Let’s pray that we **all** may be attentive to the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives, that we may respond with haste to bring Christ to others, and that we see Christ in everyone we meet.

Thank you for your generous donations that continue to support the work of SCM. The Simone Farm in Mkanda, Malawi continues to flourish with many children reaping the rewards of your generosity. Groups of 20-24 young people stay at the farm for two weeks at a time learning agricultural skills and helping to grow food for those experiencing food insecurity (see photo on front page). What a joy to see the farm flourishing and to witness the dream of Sr. Bernadette and the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa come to fruition!

In this newsletter, you will see updates from Zambia and Sierra Leone. I hope they affirm your choice to support SCM and demonstrate that together we are providing basic needs, education, healthcare, spiritual care, and counseling as defined in our mission statement so that the most vulnerable can live a life of dignity.

We were blessed to have a fruitful and fulfilling mission trip this past July where we were able to visit many of the children you support and most of the missionaries we collaborate with in Guatemala. Three of the six participants shared their thoughts in this newsletter; we hope you will find their stories inspiring.

Peace,
Frankie Burg-Feret (Executive Director)



The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious and laity—into this ‘art of accompaniment’ which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium



Photo top right: July 2024 SCM mission trip team with the Carmelite sisters in Solola

Photo bottom right: visiting SCM families in the basurero

Spiritual Director's Reflection



Accompaniment

Our latest SCM mission trip to Guatemala July 15-25 included a retreat on Pope Francis' key insight into the New Evangelization called accompaniment. Accompaniment is a gift to the Church because it presents a means to empower the laity to evangelize like never before. More than just the latest buzzword going around the Church, I believe it is a new way for lay people and priests to understand and engage in mission in the 21st Century.

What is the art of spiritual accompaniment? The phrase first appears in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, where Pope Francis speaks of his vision of the New Evangelization. In a culture paradoxically suffering from anonymity and at the same time obsessed with the details of other people's lives, shamelessly given over to morbid curiosity, the Church must look more closely and sympathetically at others whenever necessary. In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ's closeness and his personal gaze. "The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious and laity—into this 'art of accompaniment' which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other". (169)

Etymologically, accompaniment comes from the Latin *ad cum panis*, which conveys the idea of sharing and breaking bread with another; expressing a deep friendship and mutually nourishing one another. This is

highlighted more directly in Spanish as the root of *acompañamiento* is *compañero* or friend. Accompaniment then is quintessentially relational and expresses solidarity with others, journeying together on a common path. Pope Francis said "We need a church capable of walking at people's side... A church which accompanies them on their journey".

The art of accompaniment then is the process of intentionally walking alongside someone in their faith journey. Pope Francis names the art of accompaniment as the steady, reassuring pace and concomitant physical and spiritual proximity necessary for healing, liberation, and spiritual growth. Its practical and mystical approach "which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other" has been adopted as a key way for the Church to engage with the poor, families, global mission, and pastoral care in the modern world.

In the Proclamation of the Gospel, Pope Francis explicitly states, "Genuine spiritual accompaniment always begins and flourishes in the context of service to the mission of evangelization." He beautifully explains, "Spiritual accompaniment must lead others ever closer to God... to accompany them would be counterproductive if it became a sort of therapy supporting their self-absorption and ceased to be a pilgrimage with Christ to the Father". The model comes from the road to Emmaus where Jesus meets his followers where they are. Jesus meets and accompanies them in their suffering. This nearness, this proximity, to those who are suffering—particularly to those who are poor or otherwise marginalized—is the first essential aspect of a theology of accompaniment. The first movement of solidarity then is to physically enter into a broken reality—the reality of suffering, the violence of poverty, the social context that is normative for the vast majority of people in our world. (Potter, 2011, p. 835).

There is risk involved in this proximity, for it requires, in the words of Fr. James Keenan, "the willingness to enter into the chaos of another". In that chaos, one may be exposed to the same structural and biological scourges that plague those who live on the margins, just as Saint Damien of Molokai contracted and eventually died from the leprosy that afflicted the community of lepers to whom he devoted his life. Goizueta writes: "We are happy to help and serve the poor, as long as we don't have to walk with them where they walk, that is, as long as we can minister to them from our safe enclosures. The poor can then remain passive objects of our actions, rather than friends, *compañeros* and *compañeras* with whom we interact. As long as we can be sure that we will not have to live with them, and thus have interpersonal relationship with them, we will try to help "the poor" - but, again, only from a controllable, geographical distance" (2009, 199). Accompaniment therefore implies first and foremost an attitude of listening with sincere and open intent. We respond to those who suffer with compassion and mercy which requires the

Fr. Michael's Reflection cont..

formation of a culture of listening and of attentiveness to what happens to the lives of others.

The Amazon Synod talks of “becoming like Jesus as he reveals himself in the Gospels: close to people, able to listen, to heal, to console, patient, and not seeking to demand but to manifest the tenderness of his Father's heart”. Cultivating these values of encounter and listening with no agenda, simply being present to the other person, are key. Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, states, “We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. Listening helps us to find the right gesture and word which shows that we are more than simply bystanders”. True listening is both a spiritual and practical act. It creates intimacy

and fosters trust. It invites both parties to an encounter with the other, and to leave changed. It also equips the listener with the tools to respond well, whether in word or deed. True listening which fosters authentic encounter always demands a response. After listening to their disappointment, Jesus responded by admonishing the two disciples and reminding them, using scripture, that self-sacrificial, enemy-loving suffering and death—followed by resurrection—was always meant to be God's answer to the world's violence. In accompaniment, after first listening fully to the story of the one who is suffering—whether from illness or poverty or structural injustice, among others—one must respond.

Accompaniment then is an exciting tool that will equip all of us to bring the good news to others and enable us to be missionary disciples who lead others to Christ. I believe this is a method that can unite and marshal all Christians to not only help but lead the Church into the next century.

Peace, Fr. Michael Della Penna OFM

UPDATE FROM SIERRA LEONE

Sr. Veronica in Sierra Leone:

Helping others smile is a mission. The countenance of one brightens another. Her given name is Mamatorma Fayia (bottom two photos), but she is widely recognized as a smiling girl with the community of Bo in Sierra Leone. Despite facing challenges, she has shown remarkable resilient strength. She suffered from gang rape in the street where she lived. She was living on the street for the three years before the intervention and rescue and after many months of counselling, she showed interest in enrolling in secondary school. The generous donation from Silent Children's Mission has helped her to regain her dignity as a young and promising girl. She is twelve years old and lost both her parents to Ebola which engulfed Sierra Leone and took the lives of many and made so many children orphans. She is presently living with an older couple who support the work we are doing here in Bo. Her food and education costs are paid for with the donation from Silent Children's Mission.

Looking at the poverty rate in our country, the most deprived group are children and women who have suffered a lot from hunger, sickness, inequity, and other deprivations. ***There are a lot of children who are abandoned and really need to be taken off the street. We can't help all, but we can help by finding the children who are suffering the most.*** Our dream is to better their lives by empowering them through education, providing life skills, and to help them be self-reliant. If we have donors, we would like to build an orphanage for them so they can live in an atmosphere of love and care. Please continue to support us to provide basic necessities for the children.

Faith without works is never enough, it is not a feeling of faith or hope that will save us. But rather what we do, supported by God's Mercy.
St. Jane Frances de Chantal



SCM MISSION REFLECTION – Denise and Tim

“You Don’t Know What I’ve Been Through”

These words were spoken to me by Cesar, a young 17-year-old boy, who lives at Guatemala’s city dump with his family and friends. As he looked me directly in the eyes and said this, I felt like he was reaching down into my soul. I replied, “You’re right. I don’t know what you’ve been through.” The fact of the matter is I couldn’t begin to imagine what this young man had been through. I then gave him the biggest hug I could possibly give, because it seemed there was nothing else I could do in the moment to ease his suffering.

I was part of a group of volunteers serving a hot lunch in the neighborhood. Cesar was crying when he said this to a number of us who were hugging him as we were getting ready to leave. He had enjoyed his lunch and was so happy to see those of us who he knew from previous trips. He was simply overcome with sadness when he realized we had to leave, and he desperately wanted to know when we would return. It was heartbreaking..... I’ve thought about this scene and this young boy every day since we met him and his friend, Giovanni, who was with him.



As Denise and I reflect on our trip to Guatemala, Cesar’s words keep echoing in our minds. To see first-hand the suffering, violence, abuse, and lack of basic social services available to the people living in the worst type of poverty is indescribable. The city dump is a terrifying place to live. For us missionaries, the place was scary during the day, but we could not imagine how frightening it was to live there at night. There was little or no lighting and no one, not even the police, was going to come to the aid of anyone in danger, or in trouble. Believing that there is no chance of ever getting away from the situation can cause a person to lose hope.



We pray daily for the people living there that they will not lose hope and that by some miracle they may one day find a way out, and live a peaceful, secure life.

After this encounter, the bible story that kept coming to mind was the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke chapter 16. After the rich man died and was in hell, he begged Abraham to relieve his suffering. Abraham replied, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.”

In this story, Jesus reminds us that we cannot blatantly ignore those who are less fortunate. If we do, we risk losing our souls. For those of us that went on this journey we kept reflecting on the fact that we were able to leave the place where Cesar and his family and friends lived, but they could not...

However, amongst such sadness in this poor community, there were true saints. For example, there was a holy family living in a two-room concrete home with a dirt floor. We learned they were fortunate to have a concrete home as it could withstand the rain. While the home was dark and damp, it was very clean and well maintained. The grandparents lived there with their daughters, and granddaughter, who suffered from a chronic illness. The grandmother welcomed us into their home and after introducing everyone, she mentioned that once they learned we were coming to visit, they had been praying for us – that we would have a safe journey. We were struck by this thoughtful gesture. With all they had going on in their lives, they prayed for us. It made us wonder, when have we prayed for people coming to visit our home?

We went on to learn how this family takes in people who need a place to stay. The grandparents – who look to be in their 70s – give up their bed and sleep on the dirt floor so that someone in need can sleep in their bed. Sometimes the people take advantage of their kindness and rob them.

SCM MISSION REFLECTION – Denise and Tim cont...

We observed so many people living under the cruelest conditions in Guatemala, but we also saw families living heroic lives: faithful to God despite the harsh environment in which they live. Again, we wondered, would we give up our bed and sleep on a dirt floor for strangers? How can we take this selfless gesture, this act of love for a stranger, and bring it home with us? How do we incorporate that level of love into our interactions with people in our community?

Our experiences in Guatemala led us to believe that we **MUST** pray, fast, and offer sacrifices to assist those who suffer the indignity of material poverty. We **MUST** pray to our Lord in heaven to allow Grace to enter the world and soften peoples' hearts that they may have the courage to end corruption and provide social services so that no human being has to endure suffering on a level such as we witnessed in Guatemala. It's comforting to remember the words of the Angel Gabriel when he spoke to Mary at the Annunciation and said, "...nothing is impossible with God." Knowing and believing in the words spoken by Gabriel, we can have faith that poverty can be eliminated; that people do not have to live in a dump; that every child can have a chance at a good education and an opportunity to live free from the fear of abuse, violence and malnutrition. All of these things are possible with the help of Almighty God and the determination of a faithful people to eliminate the tragedy of poverty.

We were blessed to see and witness with our heart the misfortune of those who are living under such difficult circumstances. After that experience, the only option is to do everything possible to make sure that children like Cesar never again have to say to grown adults, "You don't know what I've been through."

SCM MISSION REFLECTION - Dennis



I would like to thank Silent Children's Mission, Frankie, Fr. Mike, and all the wonderful people we met along the way, and of course my other first time, missionary brothers and sisters for making this journey to Guatemala the most humbling and fulfilling trip that I have ever experienced. We had no idea what we were getting ourselves into when we signed up for this trip and let me tell you, we did not get cheated out of anything. From the highest of highs

to the lowest of lows, we were challenged as a group physically, mentally, and most of all emotionally each day and happily accepted these challenges with gratitude.

We were lucky enough to see some of the most beautiful views and picturesque scenery of Guatemala ever imaginable and met so many great God-loving, beautiful people along the way. However, things were dramatically different when we arrived at the Guatemala City dump. I speak for myself when I say there is no preparing for what came next, I have never witnessed this level of poverty before in my life. Human beings living in tin shacks with no food, electricity, water, floors, roofs and so on; literally surviving one day at a time. It was unimaginable and shocking to me. Somehow in all that ugliness, we had the privilege of meeting so many great people and families who were so welcoming and happy to see us and to share their homes and stories with us! We got to meet Leidy, a three-year-old miracle baby who wasn't supposed to live past six months old and her amazing family. We got to bring supplies to three young, beautiful children who skipped school to welcome us because their mom and older sister had to work for survival.

There were so many heart wrenching stories and moments on this journey but the one that really sticks with me is a woman named Mercedes. She told us her story as a young girl who found God and to this day, she is somehow able to provide meals each day for 250 people in the dump with little to no money! She is an Angel sent from Heaven.

Thank you, God Bless! Dennis

Photo left:

Denis with Mercedes in the basurero

From the POOR CLARE MONASTERY in LUSAKA, ZAMBIA



Sr. Lubingu with the children under her care

From the roots of Zambezi River (God's river), where Zambia gets its name (God's country), springs out the song of gratitude to all our benefactors small and big, young and old!

We are the Silent Children of Palabana area at the monastery of Saint Clare in Lusaka, Zambia. Coming from different backgrounds, we have made a family here because each one of us come with different, beautiful, and yet painful experiences of daily living. We have something in common, searching for true love. We come for catechism and learn about the love of God and that God is love. And yet to know and experience the love of God on an empty stomach gives the emotional suffering as a normal thing. Until Mama Frankie and Fr. Michael visited us. Then we realized that the love we experience with the Poor Clare Sisters can be found even from far away, with the people who do not know us, but trust that we are alive and in need of food, education, clothing, and many more things.

We come from very poor families, but we are rich in love and because we have encountered SCM through Mama Frankie and Fr. Michael, for us they bring the Love of God to us by sharing about you - our mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters in Christ. It is not so much about the material things; it's all about that love, a thought of a suffering child somewhere, the care of doing something about it. Giving hope, the constancy of God's love, and the regularity of his blessings through you. Each morning when we wake up, it is a reminder that someone

gives us a chance to fulfill God's purpose for our lives. Last year we had a drought and throughout this year food is very scarce, we don't have electricity most times and the water is very low. However, because of the love you have for us, we are still going to school because our school fees were paid for the whole year. We are going to be educated, and we shall continue to strive with hunger as the whole country is affected. Two weeks ago, our staple food (mealy meal) from the maize combs tested positive to aflatoxin, and many bags were offloaded, not good for consumption. But many children rushed to get something to eat from there because of hunger. These children are not different from us, taking the risk of contaminated food.

We humbly ask your prayers for this big intention, knowing that someone is somewhere praying for us and thinking about us is a big consolation and grace from God. That is what you, our very own benefactors, do for the love of God and neighbour. We thank Mama Frankie and Fr. Michael for loving us, and for traveling and coming all the way to Africa. May God reward you and bless you. We promise to pray for you and to work hard at school and at home in order to contribute positively to society and humanity.

To God be the Glory, Amen. On behalf of the Silent Children, I thank you for trusting us with this beautiful apostolate.

God bless you, Sister Lubingu



SCM SPONSORED FEEDING PROGRAM IN NDOLA, ZAMBIA



Updates from Sr. Josephine, Franciscan Sisters of Assisi:

May 21, 2024: I am excited to be able to feed and help many children. I will go for adoration to pray to God who knows how to thank you. Frankie – you don't know what you have done. God love you.

August 7, 2024: Today, one hundred children have eaten today from the help you sent. You have given great joy to the children and their parents! Their voices were so low but after eating something there was great joy and were able to carry their parcels home – the parents especially were happy to see cooking oil – something they rarely see. Thank you so much!

August 27, 2024: Thank you for your support. Tomorrow we are preparing for another food distribution. Each package includes vegetables and cabbage from our garden. The serious problem we are facing because of the drought this hot season is that people are drinking the dirty water – they have no water. We need your prayers and encouragement for these people to survive.

How you can help

CANADIAN DONATION: Send a cheque written to: **Silent Children's Mission** and mail it to:
16060 Concession 8, Schomberg, Ontario, L0G 1T0, Canada (Make sure to include your mailing address for a tax receipt) *Please note: tax receipts are sent quarterly with the newsletters*

US DONATIONS (for a tax receipt): Send a cheque written to: St. Leonard's Parish and mail it to:
St. Leonard's Church 320 Hanover St., Boston, Ma 02113 – Please indicate on your cheque "donation for SCM".

DONATE ONLINE: By sending us an email money transfer to silentchildrenca@yahoo.com or through Canada Helps (SCM Registration #815949607RR0001). Please remember us in your will.

QUESTIONS OR INVITE FRANKIE TO SPEAK? Write to silentchildrenca@yahoo.com or call us at 416-418-0314.

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE: www.silentchildrensmisson.com

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

PRAY FOR SILENT CHILDREN'S MISSION We pray and fast for the children and families we serve, our missionaries, and our benefactors every First Friday of each month. Contact us if you would like to join in prayer and receive an email reminder.

Please consider sharing this newsletter with your family and friends