



# MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

## DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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Winter 2025

Vol. 62 No. 1-2

## *Life That Is Truly Life* (1 Timothy 6:19)



Dear Mission Friends:

As I pack up the Christmas decorations and begin the New Year, I am once again reminded of my hypocrisy. **While I preach that Christmas should be a time of peace and quiet joy, I do not practice it.** Every year I advocate cutting down on all the clutter and obligations—of deep-cleaning and decorating, shopping and wrapping, baking and party-planning, kids' programs, family visits, hurried texting and phone calls, way too much coffee and too little sleep—to be able to actually appreciate and meditate on the true meaning of Christmas. And not only do the holidays seem to come faster each year, but I'm moving slower, and my plan to reduce and prioritize, to stop and smell the pine boughs, becomes hazier and hazier in my memory. So once again the season came and went and I focused on everything **except** what we all know is 'the reason for the season.'



To add to my angst, I came upon this short meditation of renowned theologian and civil rights leader, Dr. Howard Thurman (a one-time colleague of Fr. Martin Walsh, O.P.):

*When the song of the angels is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with their flock,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
to hear the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among others.*

WHAT? The work of Christmas is just beginning? Will I ever get to relax?

And these days when we are flooded all day every day on a myriad of devices by actual images of those who, like in the poem, are lost, broken, hungry, imprisoned, or living in or displaced from lands that are disaster-ridden or war-torn, we are continuously overwhelmed and anxious, wondering how we can possibly help. Simply knowing more about poverty doesn't necessarily lead to actually feeding the hungry or clothing the naked.

In fact, while the internet has made us more aware of the needs of others, it has paradoxically turned some users into believing they're helping when they're not. Many believe they're doing their part in supporting a cause simply because they've "liked" someone's post or quote. Pastor and author Shane Hipps has coined the term "empathy at a distance," by which one thinks that the mere state of being worried or posting worry shows they care and have done something about it. Sadly, the related term "slacktivism," a combination of "slacker" and "activism," has become quite common. Defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* as, "Actions performed via the internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement," it is the growing trend to *appear* empathetic—adding links or quotes or symbols

for various causes (eg. Pride rainbows or black backgrounds for Black Lives Matter) but not tangibly supporting them. Users who pretend to “like” or “follow” a charity rarely take any action or put any concrete effort into helping. *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds* (James 2:14)? Revered writer and thinker C.S. Lewis who died in 1963, long before the birth of the internet, somehow seems to have precisely predicted these effects. In bemoaning the plethora of news, he writes, “*A great many people do now seem to think that the mere state of being worried is in itself meritorious.*”

Lewis’ main point, however, was to advocate the need to limit our individual sense of responsibility for fixing all the world’s injustices. As he eerily foretells, “*It is one of the evils of rapid diffusion of news that the sorrows of all the world come to us every morning. I think each village was meant to feel pity for its own sick and poor whom it can help and I doubt if it is the duty of any private person to fix his mind on ills which he cannot help.*”

Dr. Joseph Chuman of a New Jersey ethics society expands on that notion that **no one can do it all**: “*For those of us who ... try to remain informed about the world around us, it seems that the moment we are in is besotted with problems. Whether it be the erosion of the middle class, chronic unemployment, the waging of expensive and senseless wars, mass atrocity crimes or the despoliation of the environment, there are lots of reasons to feel crushed, or wanting to just tune it out...When we look at the human condition,*



*“it seems to me that injustice is infinite, while the forces that we mortals can marshal to combat injustice are finite and limited. The most we can hope for are partial victories...In more depressing moments, it seems like we are like Sisyphus, fated to push the heavy boulder up the hill, only to see it roll down again, and to repeat that struggle over and over, with no resting point, no plateau, and no utopia in sight. And so we need a philosophy of life to ensure that we not lapse into despair and grow passive. And we need a philosophy of life to help us renew our energies in the service of justice.”*

Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P., our long-suffering missionary in Rabinal, Guatemala, our Sisyphus, believes that in order for “*a missionary to impart the truths of his faith about Jesus and the Church and be heard, he must know the ever-changing struggles and needs of the people he serves, seeing the world from their position.*” And so in spite of years of pushing that same heavy boulder up the hill, he chooses to stay. Any successes lie in pushing the boulder a little bit at a time, even if it means one step forward and two back. If one looks at the whole desolate picture in Rabinal,



Fr. Tim has had partial victories with a tiny fraction of the land and its people. But taken individually, each of those accomplishments—water, latrine, and agricultural projects; construction of houses, chapels, meeting centers; computer courses, scholarships, diplomas, degrees, jobs...to name a few—should be seen as a total victory for that village, for that family, for that student. And he should be proud.

When I once dared to call him a role model for his beloved students, however, he laughed and replied, “*A gringo like me could never be a role model, unless it’s as a crazy Americano who is sort of lost and floundering around, trying to do a bit of good here and there. Educated people here see Americans as the problem. We have never suffered as they have. We are anti-role models, foolish people who come here when they all want to go there. What I am doing now is inviting my former students who are examples of hard work and perseverance to come and give presentations about how they passed through the phases of their education, so the younger ones see **them** as role models. The young people do know who is boss, but I readily admit to them that I make a lot of mistakes, so they realize they can be open and there is forgiveness.*

“My role,” he continues, “is to be the human face of Jesus, offering my counsel like a father figure but also weak and struggling, depending on others to help me.”

One of Fr. Tim’s current programs, to help alleviate malnutrition, consists of gathering donations of food and delivering packages to families living in three of the poorest and most remote villages outside the city of Cubulco. Typical of his one-foot-in-front-of-the-other philosophy, he instructed the driver he hired “to deliver the first supply of food to five families, helping 35 people eat well for a few days.” (See photos p.2.) **His goals are realistic and concrete**, and while appearing to be small or partial victories, are actually hugely significant victories for those five families. **Perhaps limiting his focus is Fr. Tim’s philosophy of life, how he keeps going.**

As well-stated by another member of the New Jersey ethics society, “Sometimes, you have to **narrow down your field of vision** to see patterns more clearly. ...Life often swirls around us—family, friends, work demands, political turmoil, and the constant hum of commercial noise. This winter break, set aside one day to capture the essence of it all by narrowing your focus to a single [activity].” (Curt Collier)

Continuing, he encourages re-energizing by taking time for oneself: “Play with your grandchild, take a walk through a winter forest, feed the cardinal chirping outside your window, or lose yourself in a good novel. What do you see in that moment? What do you feel? Put on the old song ‘Get Together’ by the Youngbloods,

and when they sing, ‘We are but a moment’s sunlight,’ smile and remember the simple truth of our shared humanity: ‘Come on, people now, smile on your brother, everybody get together, try to love one another right now.’”

And so let us be generous with our time toward things like our local church, missions, and other causes that we know genuinely serve others and share God’s truth and love. But know that we can’t do it all. C.S. Lewis would agree: “We must, if it so happens, give our lives for others. But even while we’re doing it, I think we’re meant to enjoy Our Lord and, in Him, our friends, our food, our sleep, your jokes, and the bird’s song and the frosty sunrise.”

Dear Lord, next Christmas time, help me remember what I always forget—that I must slow down and “narrow my field of vision,” that people are far more important than things, and that you became love for me so that I can become love for others.

Peace to each of us in ‘25,  
Lesley Warnshuis

Technology is said to progress every 20 seconds—the same amount of frequency in which a child somewhere dies from lack of clean water. I pray that the gift of technology will eventually be used to connect us with tangible ways to care for those who need help, beyond simply “liking” a cause.

## Poem for the New Year\*

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,  
The flying cloud, the frosty light:  
The year is dying in the night;  
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:  
The year is going, let him go;  
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind  
For those that here we see no more;  
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,  
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,  
And ancient forms of party strife;  
Ring in the nobler modes of life,  
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,  
The faithless coldness of the times;  
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes  
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,  
The civic slander and the spite;  
Ring in the love of truth and right,  
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease;  
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;  
Ring out the thousand wars of old,  
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,  
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;  
Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be.  
~Alfred, Lord Tennyson

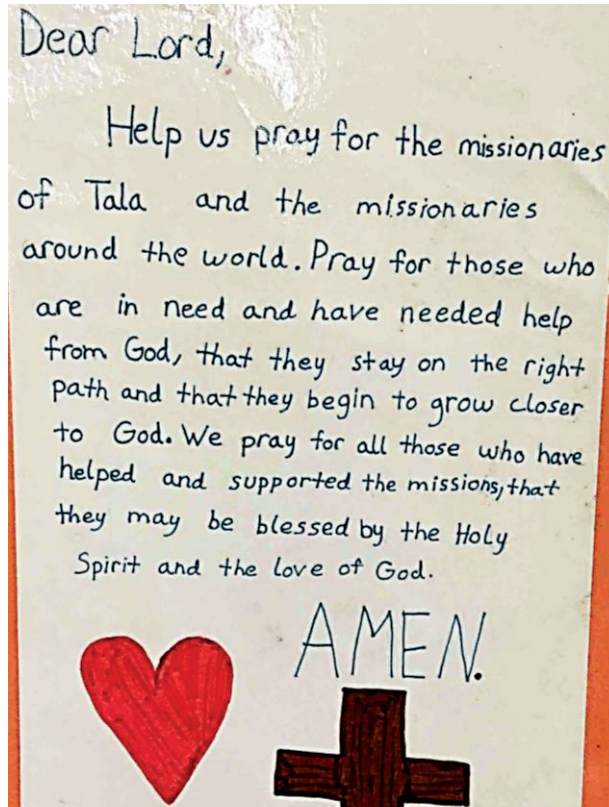
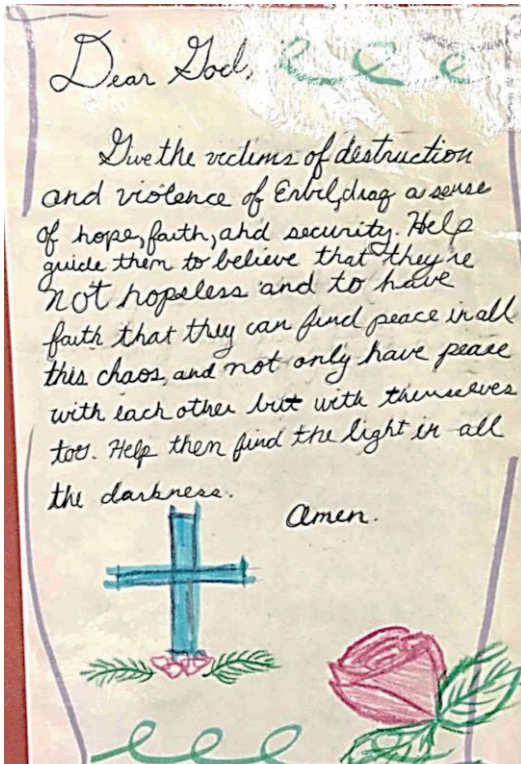
\*I have included this poem several times, but it seems to take on new meaning with each passing year’s most significant events.

### Every Little Bit

At St. Dominic School in Benicia CA, the 8th grade class, under the guidance of their homeroom teacher and Vice Principal (and my daughter) Emily Candela, takes an active and educated role in supporting our Dominican Mission Foundation. At the beginning of the school year, student groups choose a mission to study, with the goal of creating and presenting a slide show to their classmates about that mission and its needs. One group wrote the following prayer for their ending: "God, please watch over all those who are suffering and need your love." The class regularly offers such prayers for the missionaries and the people they serve, and each morning throughout the school year, a basket is passed to collect donations for them.

(Below are examples from previous years' projects.)

**Thank you, SD Eighth Grade!**



Below, a recipient of Fr. Tim's food and 2 of the homes.

