

# MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

## DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

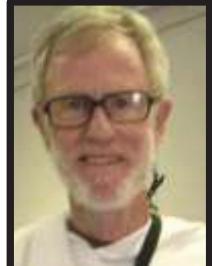
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### *Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart: Reviewing, Renewing—and Recycling—in Rabinal*

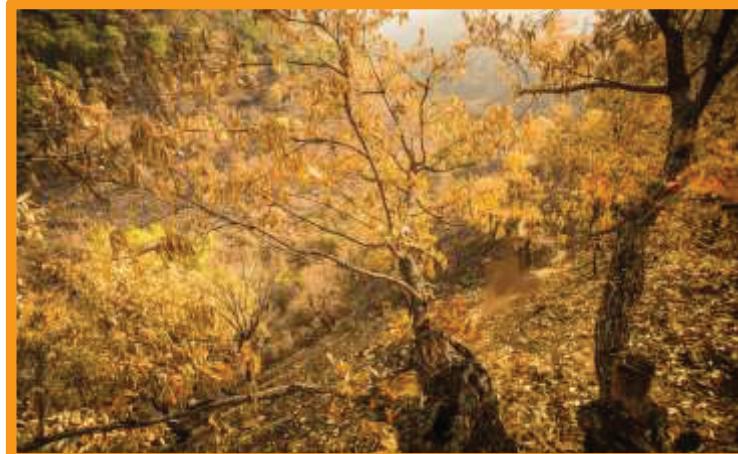


*Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P.*

Dear Mission Friends,

This past June, a few former classmates and I celebrated 50 years of ordination. We are of an age to be able to excuse ourselves from our long-time aspirations and retire quietly to poke around in our files and albums, reminiscing about long-forgotten stories and people. No one would expect us to still be entertaining some great dreams about reforming the world and the Church. The time has come to be treated as elder statesmen to be revered and to be allowed to rest on our merits. Of course this presumes that we have actually accomplished something!

**In truth, the world is not much better than when we entered religious life, a fact that pains all of us.** And so as we begin, reluctantly, to hand over our larger responsibilities and try to come to terms with our great limitations, we can't help but look deeper and deeper for answers.



*Autumn  
in the  
mountains  
high above  
Rabinal.*

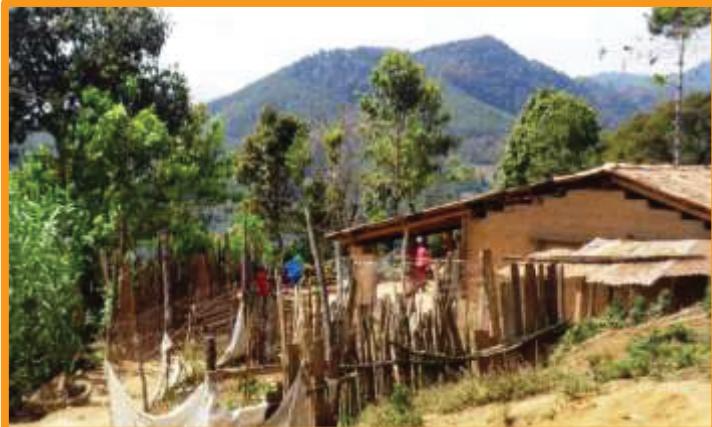
*I got the first Thanksgiving card with a picture of late harvest—  
Corn on the stalk and pumpkin in the field.  
And I here, with no turkey dinner on the horizon.  
Yet I sit at the table of the Lord every day, celebrating Thanksgiving,  
While I await, still in the distance but in ever-closer view,  
The true Thanksgiving.*

*Soon fall will have fallen, but where does it go?  
Gone the leaves, the colors, the scent of change in the air,  
Hidden under the mantle of winter,  
Frost clinging to the branches, snow shrouding the ground.  
This year, once new, has come and almost gone,  
And I can't follow after to detain it.  
It will lie hidden with the others in the recesses of my mind.  
This year is not yet so far down—  
I can try to dredge it up like water from a well—  
But how deep the rest?*

*Is time speeding up or am I slowing down?  
It seems everyone's speeding up hoping to make time slow down.  
Ask the young what time it is and they will say "Tomorrow."  
Because they live for tomorrow.  
They push me aside to take over the computer.  
I am too slow, trying to take it all in. They leap around by intuition.*

*They are ahead of time, moving just under the speed of light.  
Now is already past. They dare not stop,  
Or even slow down, to gaze at the face of God.  
They can't grasp that time is always now for God,  
That God's time is eternal and we are in his hands.*

~Fr. Tim



*Left, a typical home in the mountain villages; middle and right, the annual yield of corn, which makes up 80% of the people's diets, goes bad without fertilizer, as well as both lack of rain, and like this year, too much.*

We are more determined than ever to find the fountain of wisdom, the ultimate solution for peace and justice for the world, and for happiness and health, holiness and wholeness, for ourselves and everyone.

There is a temptation to work harder, to make one last push for more points on the board before the final whistle, but the best course is to take a time out in order to listen to the coach, who alone knows the answers. Only if we remain calm and listen to Jesus—if we learn to be open to his plans for us and the world, which come to us through his family, the Church—only then can we hope to fully execute those plans.

For example, our goals in Guatemala are just as keen today as they were at the beginning, but now we are more aware of the pitfalls of quick and easy solutions. The country's population, the vast majority of which is far below the poverty line, is close to 17 million and growing exponentially, creating a looming crisis. The country is actually rich in resources but its corrupt leaders sell off the land, mineral rights, and anything else in order to enrich only themselves.

The young poor are met with many obstacles, particularly in getting an education, but the number of those striving to go to college is growing and there may come a day when they organize a true revolution to support politicians who aren't afraid to address the wrongs. **Indeed, our goal has always been to convince the students to stay here to work in their chosen field and thereby help to improve their own country.**

But the biggest impediment to that, and one of the driving forces of immigration, is the lack of jobs. Tens of thousands of young people each year graduate in careers, but there is very little industry and only a handful of jobs. After searching in vain for a job in their field, many decide, therefore, to make the journey to the USA. And so today, after 17 years of guiding and supporting, with your much-needed help, multiple students in such careers as business, teaching, nursing, and computer science, I am switching gears.

**Because the country still has much undeveloped land and natural resources, I'm realizing that careers in agronomy will offer students and their families with the best opportunities and the country with the most sustainable future.**

Indeed, Guatemala's basic system of survival is tied to farming, but the techniques remain antiquated. While groups have provided educational programs to farmers over the years, once the technical expertise of the groups is gone, the farmers eventually revert to their familiar routines. Local students majoring in agronomy, however, could lend their expertise to ensure that these programs continue, and they might even develop their own.

One example of a worthwhile program that fizzled out was one that I introduced when I first arrived here in 1991. I'd learned that **only 10% of families have indoor flush toilets.** The rest dig a hole in their back yards, insert a plastic bowl, and cover it in between use with a cement lid; when it fills up, they dig another hole, and after 20 years there are three or four of those on the property, along with attending odors and incessant flies.

I also saw that the land was full of fields of corn that did not produce good ears because the people are too poor to have fertilizer. So I organized a project that could tackle both of these areas—creating latrines that could produce fertilizer!



*Far left, mother of the house with the finished product, her first “semi-sheltered” latrine; left and below, family members participating in its construction, with student technician.*

I constructed two of them as a test run, two more a few years later when I returned for a visit, and in 2003 the project became official when we built 37 in 14 villages, at \$200 per latrine, made possible with the help of the Latin America Community Assistance group from Castro Valley, CA where my sister lives.

This type of latrine works without ether and the process creates fertilizer that is completely contaminant-free. And it not only increases the corn yield but also improves the quality of the crop and the soil. One latrine can yield 40 square yards of good corn, enough for a family of six to live for half a year. It promised to be a boon for health and sanitation as well as the family's nutrition and income. But because there were no trained experts to maintain the project, it lost its momentum, which is an example of why I've now decided to devote my few resources to scholarships in the field of agronomy. It costs us a little over \$2,000 a year for a student's three-year degree in agronomy, but it should prove to be a worthwhile investment.

Last year I recalled the success of the latrine project and I decided that it deserved to be revisited. I still had the molds and I had three agronomy students who needed to fulfill a social service project, so it was a perfect time. They studied the scientific field manual and constructed a latrine for each of two families. The cement latrines are roughly four feet high and two feet wide and consist of a toilet bowl and two compartments for depositing and curing the fertilizer. Each family contributed their own money and labor so that they would have an interest in maintaining the latrine as well as an understanding of its inner workings so as to spread the technique to their neighbors.

Besides our new push toward agronomy, we have also begun encouraging young women toward careers for which there is a demand here in Rabinal but which require degrees that have been unaffordable. For example, we have no secretarial schools here and very few can afford to study and live away from home, so there are many job openings in that area.



Our program offers secretarial courses on weekends, enabling students to continue living at home and only pay the cost of staying two nights in town. In addition, for those interested in becoming legal secretaries, which does require daily classes at the university, the cost was thought to be prohibitive, until a former student of mine, now studying law, returned to give a talk to my students and actually taught me a lesson. She explained how our two year program for secretary not only facilitates entrance to the university, but it can also secure a city job with a decent salary, making the move to the university affordable. Students will be able to work and pay their way through their final two years of college, return home, and be in demand to fill the many open positions.

Other current undertakings include enhancing our Facebook page with job and scholarship opportunities; offering training in how to write effective curriculum vitae; and teaching guidelines for successful job interviews.

**During this month of Thanksgiving, I thank God for his constant guidance and help during these 50 years. We can only pray and trust that he will continue to guide us in making headway, giving us hope for the future, in Guatemala and wherever there is suffering. Of course my thanks extend to all of you through whom God's love and concern have been manifested, and I ask for your continued prayers and support.**

In peace and thanksgiving,  
Fr. Tim

*Like our current director, Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P., our departed former director, Fr. Joseph Asturias, O.P., had a special devotion to St. Martin de Porres, naming him the patron saint of our missions. On November 1, 2, and 3, in honor of St. Martin's feast day, a Triduum of Masses will be offered at St. Dominic's Church in San Francisco, invoking his intercession for your intentions, particularly those marked on your returned slip. We invite you to join us in prayer each day by reciting the Triduum below.*

*November is also the month for us to pray for the souls of those who have gone before us. If you have sent in the names of your departed loved ones, they are on the altar at St. Dominic's and are being remembered all month.*

### A Thanksgiving Dinner Prayer

*Oh, God, when I have food,  
help me to remember the hungry;  
When I have work,  
help me to remember the jobless;  
When I have a warm home,  
help me to remember the homeless;  
When I am without pain,  
help me to remember those who suffer;  
And remembering, help me  
to destroy my complacency  
and bestir my compassion.  
Make me concerned enough to help,  
by word and deed, those who cry out  
for what we take for granted.*

~Samuel F. Pugh

## St. Martin de Porres Triduum November 1, 2, and 3

### First Day:

*St. Martin, you always had sympathy for the poor and those who were suffering. I need your help and now ask for it with great confidence in your goodness and power. Please remember me, as you adore God. Amen.*

**(Your petitions, followed by Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)**



**Closing Prayer:** Dear St. Martin, I turn to you in my sorrow and anxiety to seek your friendly protection. Please intercede for me with our merciful Father in heaven so that I may be truly sorry for all my sins and be freed from the evils that shackle me. Ask that I might have something of your spirit of love and self-sacrifice, and so be at all times reconciled to God's holy will. Oh heavenly Father, in the name of your Son and of His blessed Mother, and by the merits of your faithful servant Martin, help me in my trouble and do not forsake me. Amen.

**Second Day:** St. Martin, we praise God for the manifestation of His love. The favors you received from God encourage us now to seek your intercession and help. We ask you most humbly to befriend and assist us from your place in heaven; but most of all, we beg you to command us to our beloved Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**(Your petitions, followed by Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)**

**Third Day:** Brother Martin, when you were here on earth, you spent your life loving God and your neighbor. This we know from the testimony of your own Dominican brethren. Now that you live in the presence of God in paradise, intercede for those who stand so much in need of the healing help of God and beg the Divine Physician to give us health of the soul and body. Amen.

**(Your petitions, followed by Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)**