



# MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

## DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

Fr. Jordan Bradshaw, O.P., Director

Lesley Warnshuis, Office Manager

Nancy Keating, Finance Manager

2506 Pine Street P.O. Box 15367 San Francisco, CA 94115-0367 415-931-2183 [www.dominicanmission.org](http://www.dominicanmission.org)

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## *Sweet Miracles of Creation, Great and Small*



Dear Mission Friends:

Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P., our long-time missionary in Rabinal, Guatemala, wrote this short meditation (*right*) in 2022, but I never shared it because it does not convey the tone of joy and hope I like to send at Eastertime and, while many of us can relate to the malaise of “unfinished task[s],” that mood is certainly not characteristic of Fr. Tim. In retrospect, it must have been brought on by the anomalous Covid because the next year he was back to his old, optimistic self.

Indeed, I don’t know anyone who better exemplifies the famous adage of Theodore Roosevelt to “**keep your eyes on the stars and your feet on the ground.**” Besides providing the youths of his scholarship program with educational and scholarship guidance and classes in computer skills and repair, Fr. Tim is constantly dreaming up and implementing new projects and goals “*to get them away from their phones and be real,*” as he puts it.

### *Flickering Easter Light*

Fr. Timothy Conlan, OP

*We stand holding the candles of Easter light.  
He who is the Light has illumined us this night.  
The flame crackles and lifts its fiery tongues  
To dispel the dark interior of the cavernous church.  
That light is hope and faith in the Risen Lord.  
But is there lightness of heart to embrace that hope and faith?  
In the crowded hallways of my mind,  
A flickering, smoldering wick with barely a glow  
Shelters beneath a heavy brow knotted in doubt.  
There always is one more unfinished task, goal, problem  
Weighing me down and keeping my vision on the ground.  
When can I march forward with that Easter candle high,  
Hopeful of seeing a sign of resurrection?*



He teaches himself and then his students how to grow difficult plants or build latrines; he regularly shows them old, classic movies after which they practice discussion and critical thinking skills; he takes them to museums, factories, and ancient holy sites to expand their horizons beyond their small villages; he “rewards” graduates with field trips to treacherous hiking trails and waterfalls to teach them to test their limits.

**Fr. Tim’s latest project is constructing and maintaining bee hives, which, besides having to learn the intricate science and logistics involved, also demands hard work and commitment.** It has been quite a process, as Father explains:

*“Two agronomy students in their third year of university, whom I pay to work on various farms as a condition of their scholarships, and who had previously set up a bee hive in their village, accepted my challenge to teach a group of high schoolers how to set up a bee farm. These two fellows are the shyest people you would ever meet, so it was quite a feat for them to go to three high schools and make an invitation, but 15 young people from one school alone signed up! Some of the girls had never even held a hammer and the boys could be lazy and act like they don’t care—they rebel against authority of any kind—but our agronomists very quietly brought them around. It seems that humbly explaining as opposed to loudly demanding can be much more effective.*”



*“Our first step was to find a location. A patch of land owned by the family of one of my former students was lent to us, and the first week we cut back all the overgrowth and set up a place for the hives. Next we poured a big wheel of cement, weighing over 100 lbs., that included a canal for water in order to protect the bees from ants.*

*Back in town we began the process of building the boxes for the bees, which took several weeks as we only meet once a week. We located conacaste wood planks and took them to a carpentry shop to be sanded as it is famous for irritating the throat and eyes. Then all the pieces for the boxes, each with 14 inset panels where the bees deposit the honey, had to be measured, cut, and nailed together. Finally we painted wax on the outside and covered the tops with metal sheeting. We had to buy the wax combs, gloves, and a smoke bellow to distract the bees from stinging. We made hats with mosquito netting. At last it was time to find some bees.*

*We captured one swarm from the house of a former teacher at our office and took it out to the hills. We have maintained that one and the number of bees is definitely growing.*

*We’ve taken three trips to the capital to attend a seminar on bee keeping with the fathers and brothers of St. Jerome Emiliani,*



*and after putting what we learned to practice, and by the grace of God, two new swarms of bees came to our office and we took them out to the hills. We thought we were done and only needed to make sure the bees were happy and stayed put.*

*But after one of our boxes had been stolen, bees and all, we learned that we needed to encircle the hives with a barbed wire fence, not only to discourage robbers, but also to protect them from any stray cattle who might overturn them, enraging both the bees who can kill the cattle and also its owners who could sue us!*

*So we carried up the hills over 140 lbs. of sand, dug up from the river bed below, 30 lbs. of cement, eight gallons of water, eight 8 foot long wooden posts, shovels, etc., and after digging for hours, we had created a fine protective fence with a door. We were all very proud of what we had done and came back to town to enjoy cookies and a tasty juice drink of the Carambola fruit, one of my favorites.*

*A few months later we celebrated the hard work and commitment of our beehive workers at their graduation.*



*We sang the ‘Easter Vigil Exsultet’ (see p.4) since it praises the work of the bees in making the candle, and the older students painstakingly made a card with a picture of the group and ordered a cake with little candy bees on the icing. We showed the old movie ‘Heidi,’ a touching story in a lovely mountain setting, which is what the youths enjoy seeing.”*

In this joyful month of the Resurrection, let us pray for true missionaries like our Fr. Timothy Conlan who miraculously cultivates potential, possibility, pride in one’s work, commitment to and respect for others, cheerfulness, and so much more in impoverished, poorly educated, secluded, moody, shy, insecure teenagers. **Hold your Easter candle high, Father. You are the Light.** And we can try to follow Fr. Tim’s example, for **“in spite of the fog of human brokenness and violence enshrouding the world, the Light is always there as well. We are the sun whose radiance can burn away fog. All it takes is for us to choose to be that sun, to be that Light, and to act from that choice”** (David Spangler). Some of Fr. Tim’s more positive prayerful poetry follows.

In peace and joy,  
*Lesley Warnshuis*

*Up the sandy hillside wildflowers lay down a thick carpet--  
Yellow daisies, blue fuzzballs, tiny white star-shaped blossoms.  
Higher up the hill under a tall Mother of Cacao tree,  
Hidden in the shadows of shoulder-high willowy undergrowth,  
Sits our beehive.*

*The brown box sits on a foot high platform,  
Straddling a pan of water to keep out the crawly creatures--  
Big black ants or roaches or any of a hundred other bugs.  
Today the bees are busy as is their custom.  
We were happy to see they were still active and safe.  
Another 400 yards up the same hillside, in a deep gully,  
Had been our only two-tiered beehive,  
But it disappeared last year, carted away by robbers, bees and all.  
So each time we find this one still there we are relieved.  
Today we rejoiced and began revising the hive to make sure  
The bees were healthy and pest-free.*



*A thousand moving pieces like colored dots  
Scattered along the belly of a big garden snake,  
Passing over, around, under and above one another;  
Or like the keys on a piano moving to a joyful song,  
Humming along and rising and falling in decibels,  
But perfectly tuned; or like the uplifting solidarity  
Of hearts dedicated to the sweetest of all unions,  
The most tender and generous of newly marrieds  
Rejoicing in the total gifts of self to the grand task  
Of creating a family, offering total support to new life:  
Such is the little box where our bees labor  
From morning to evening each day  
To bring back the honey that feeds the young eggs  
And nourishes the workers who enrich us all with their gifts.*



*Bees are an apt image for the everyday hurried clusters  
Of people who pass in our streets  
On snaking motorcycles, stacked three deep--  
Whole families: father and mother headed to work,  
The three children headed to school,  
The 3 year old hanging onto the handle bars,  
The other two jammed between mom and dad,  
And all clinging to each other, a coordinated beehive of human beings.  
The teens have their own bikes, moving faster, hiding behind cars,  
Weaving and dodging along streets with no sidewalks  
Already bustling with swarms of people buying and selling their goods.  
The movements are chaotic in spite of many police,  
Trying in vain to make them obey.  
This human beehive is uncontrolled chaos,  
The chaos which produces anxiety and anger, death and grief  
Unlike the controlled chaos of mother nature,  
Which speaks to us of God's intelligent design  
And calls us to build a society with cooperation and care,  
Just as these bees are doing in their strategic work.  
Jesus, the Lord of Creation united to the Father and Spirit,  
Invites us to enter the holy Mother Church to join him in loving embrace,  
Brought within reach of each member of his hive  
Sharing in his sacrificial offering at the table of Mass:  
A swarm of interlaced human beings, divergent  
Yet all joined in the mutual sharing of the sweet love  
That flows from the generous heart of the triune God.  
Let us sing of his glorious creatures and live in union with Him. (Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P.)*





If you light a lamp  
for someone else,  
it will also brighten  
your path.  
(Buddha)

from *The Easter Vigil Exsultet*

This is the night  
of which it is written:  
The night shall be as  
bright as day, dazzling  
is the night for me,  
and full of gladness.

The sanctifying power  
of this night dispels  
wickedness, washes  
faults away, restores  
innocence to the fallen,  
and joy to mourners,  
drives out hatred,  
fosters concord, and  
brings down the  
mighty.

On this, your night of  
grace, O holy Father,  
accept this candle, a  
solemn offering,  
the work of bees and of  
your servants' hands,  
an evening sacrifice of  
praise, this gift from  
your most holy Church.

But now we know the  
praises of this pillar,  
which glowing fire  
ignites for God's honor,  
a fire into many flames  
divided, yet never  
dimmed by sharing of  
its light, for it is fed by  
melting wax, drawn out  
by mother bees to build a  
torch so precious.

O truly blessed night,  
when things of heaven  
are wed to those of  
earth, and divine to  
the human.

Therefore, O Lord,  
we pray that this  
candle,  
hallowed to the honor  
of your name, may  
persevere undimmed,  
to overcome the  
darkness of this night.

Receive it as a pleasing  
fragrance,  
and let it mingle with  
the lights of heaven.

May this flame be  
found still burning  
by the Morning Star:  
the one Morning Star  
who never sets,  
Christ your Son,  
who, coming back  
from death's domain,  
has shed his peaceful  
light on humanity, and  
lives and reigns  
forever and ever.  
Amen.

