



# MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

## DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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### *The New Creation*

Millions of faces disappear from their homes and villages;  
Dire predictions accompany photos of devastation;  
Catastrophy is prophesized in the street in protests;  
Voices of alarm sound out warnings on the airwaves,  
In the halls of parliament, congress, and the sanctuary.  
Forces, movements, cries, and sounds from the sky  
Impel us from distant places, but all rising to a crescendo.  
It is a moment we are all in, if our eyes are open:  
The world is peering into its own abyss.  
It means we take on the burdens of the world today—  
There is no other world, no Plan B, as they say.

We need hope that life endures forever.  
That was the message that the Angel Gabriel  
Gave to Mary of Nazareth when he announced  
She would be the mother of the God-Man, Jesus.  
The New Creation, the hope of mankind, began at that moment.  
We belong to that new beginning, the family of God,  
First seen in the earthly presence of Jesus and his Holy Family.

The intimate union of the family is the foundry of values  
Where the precious coins of love are buried in the hearts  
Of those who strive to put into practice the gold standard:  
To serve and affirm the good, to correct the weaknesses,  
To raise up children in the light of the true and only God of Love,  
The true love of each person.  
That is the workshop of the New Creation,  
Of the truth that we humans must learn and live by—that *love is all*.  
Advent brings hope that even from the darkest, most remote niche,  
The light of love will spread into a future that endures.

~Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P.

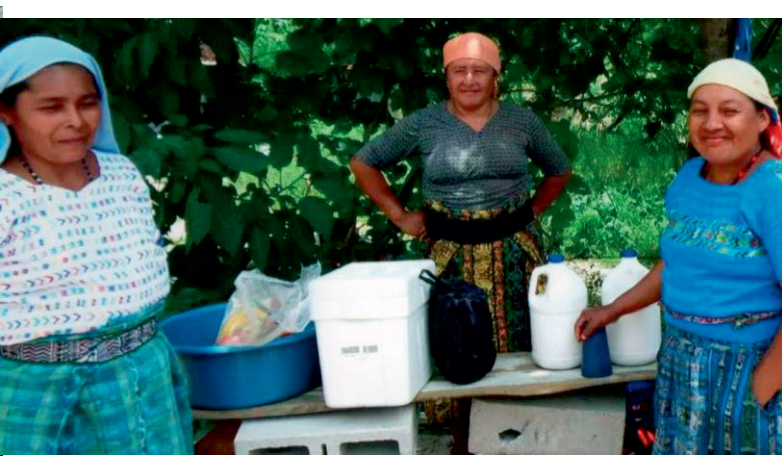


### *A Time to Build Up*



Dear Mission Friends:

If you follow the news about Guatemala, you know that it is one of the poorest of all the Latin American countries, only bested by Haiti and Honduras, stemming from high levels of government corruption. The two conditions of widespread poverty which I have always focused on alleviating, thanks to you, our compassionate donors, are malnutrition and illiteracy. And so you might say that spending money on building structures, particularly a chapel, is not the best use of precious donations. But there are a couple different ways to view this apparent dilemma: One is to help in providing a decent material life and minimal education; the second is to offer a vision for a full human life, which includes faith in God and love of others. I have tried both in these past several years, and I have found that **when I am able to facilitate building a church, all of the above is achieved!**



*Far left, work in progress; left, refreshment committee who kept the workers hydrated and, on payday, plied with snacks.*

The community profits materially through the jobs that are created and the experience gained, during construction and thereafter; psychologically in the pride and sense of achievement earned in having such a thing of beauty in their village; and of course, spiritually. **It is not that a church building guarantees a strong faith, but it gives a sign to those living in this remote area that they are part of a bigger family and have not been abandoned or forgotten.** And the Church's teachings are so much more accessible with a more accessible chapel. Religion counts.

And so in 2020 we began planning and requesting donations for a chapel, *Santa Rosa de Lima*, in the village of Pichec, about four miles from Rabinal's main plaza. The community covers five miles and is home to about 2,000 scattered inhabitants, of which 80% are Catholic. But while there are 12 Protestant chapels, the few Catholic ones are about 4 miles outside the town's boundaries and none can hold more than 20 people. A group of catechists prepares each chapel's children for first communion and confirmation, but the chapels must join together for their celebrations and none can ever have a celebration of its own.

**W**e kept our vision and cost estimates basic because the community would have to contribute all that it could, such as planks for the forms for the columns and the scaffolding. They also would have to do the manual labor and, if experienced at all in carpentry or cement, oversee and supervise.

Like the carpenter Joseph and his apprentice-son Jesus who lived a simple life in Nazareth, working in obscurity for 30 years, the humble workers I found in and around Rabinal live in poverty, are not well-known, and don't care to be. They all gave of their talents for nothing, or next to nothing, other than for the glory of God.

In spite of several stops and starts (due to Covid, running out of money, difficulty in finding affordable professionals, cost overruns...), we finished the bulk of the chapel in 2022 (*see p. 1*). With the help of some very generous donors, we were able to make it a little larger than we had originally planned—inside it is 26 feet wide and 55 feet long, with 14 foot walls—so it will seat about 200 (in benches we don't yet have). We were also able to add some beautiful

and unique touches, including a statue of St. Rose of Lima in authentic Dominican lay habit and a plaque with names of all the contributing artists.

I personally took on the task of making the two doors (the entrance and the bell tower) true works of art. They are made of conacaste wood which is thick with very heavy backing to keep it from warping and is impervious to termites. I wanted the entrance door to be hand-carved with the theme of the New Creation at the Angel Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary that she would be the Mother of Jesus, who would be the Savior of mankind. After a rather extensive search, I found a fellow to carve the entrance door by hand, a feat that took him a few months.

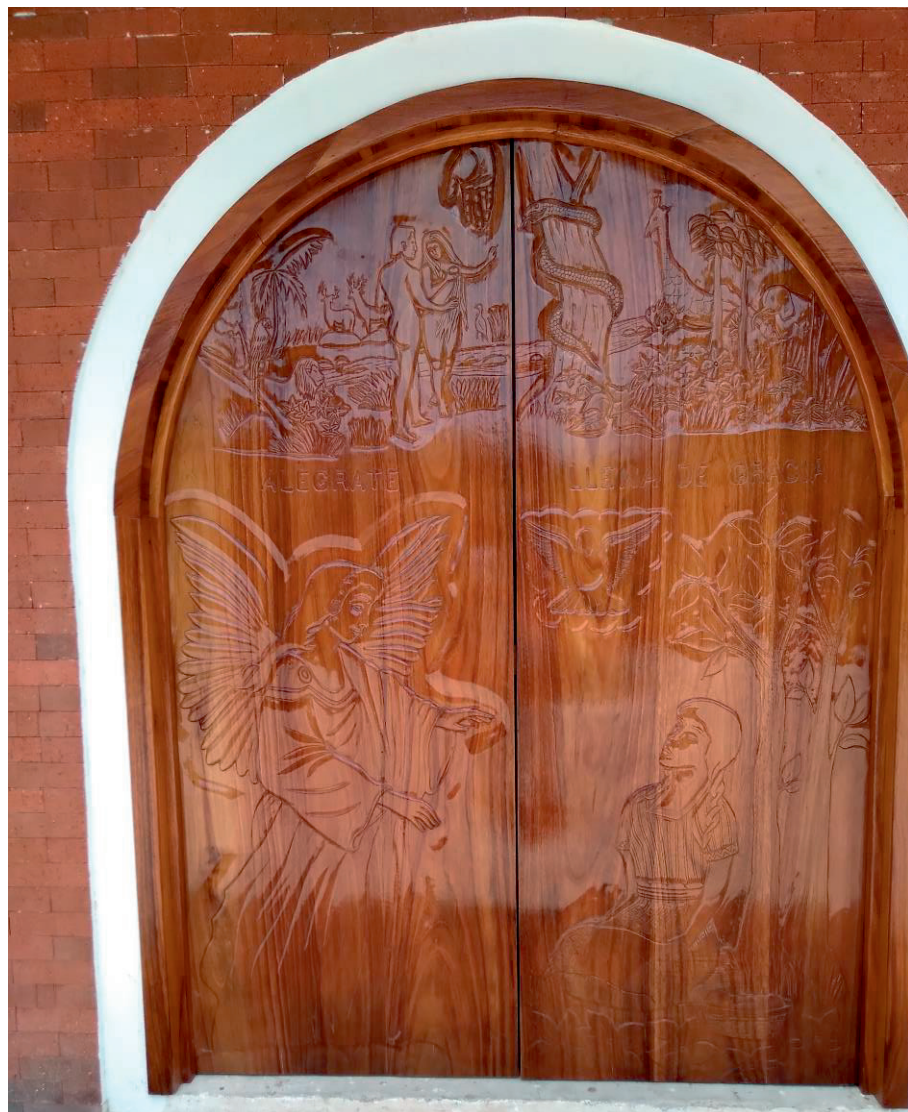
I wanted the door to the bell tower to be carved with a new technique, a computerized carving machine. On the internet there was only one company who did such work in all of Guatemala, but when I visited their office in the capital, I found the cost to be prohibitive. Then the wife of one of my architects mentioned that she had bought a statue made by a man who had a computerized carving machine. I learned he had just moved—to the most isolated place he could find, as far as I could tell.





I traveled the four hours there, hiked up his rugged, narrow road, explained what I had in mind, and he very generously agreed to carve the door of the bell tower for a rather modest sum. The only problem with this artist was that he was so protective of his lovely work that he would only allow the door to be installed if there was a roof over the entrance to keep out rain.

So I got busy. It would be a small roof but it became a very complicated job. I designed a suspended roof that would not interfere with the patio, but I went through several metal workers who didn't agree with the design. I was thrilled to find a carpenter's assistant who offered to help without cost, but after making adjustments to the design as he requested, he disappeared. Desperate, I dropped by an office in Salama, and the fellow not only liked my design, but he was happy to help without cost.



All that took over seven months. I added some lattice work and the bell tower carpenter was very happy with the result, finally releasing the door to us. This summer I brought my students to his isolated workshop on one of our excursions. He was delighted and gave us a captivating demonstration of his high tech machines, asking us to spread word of his work. I also gave his new space a blessing, definitely called for as it sits precariously on the precipice of a hill.

The doors had been finished for two years when we were finally able to install them, but it was a great day and a great relief. The varnish we used is so brilliant that the photos make it difficult to fully appreciate the images, but the bell tower door—carved by computer (*left*)—has the image of the bell upon which is the

likeness of St. Rose of Lima, and a poem I wrote just below it (*see p. 4*); the entrance door—carved by hand (*right*)—depicts the First Creation on top with Adam and Eve in Paradise being tempted by Satan; and the New Creation—at the Annunciation—below that.

Another finishing touch and great source of pride is the bell. Forged by a father and son whose foundry (*see p.4*) is behind the kitchen in one of the poorest houses I've seen in the capital (theirs was our lowest bid but I wish I could have paid them more for their beautiful creation), the bronze and zinc bell weighs 75 pounds and hangs in the 25 foot high bell tower.



Forged into it is the image of St. Rose of Lima and one of her quotes, "Love is all there is" in Spanish, as well as the name of the chapel's major donor. Its sound is clear and welcoming, giving great glory to God while calling his faithful to hear his word and spread his good news.



Above the door is a marble sculpture of the Last Supper, each face unique, created by an artist who sculpts gravestones and statuary for a cemetery.



### *La campana*

*La campana suena sonora  
Me llama a participar  
En la iglesia fundada por Jesus,  
El senior resucitado,  
Dios Hijo y hombre verdadero,  
Que vencio la muerte y el pecado,  
La voz de esperanza de la vida  
eterna.*

**The bell rings sonorously  
Calling me to participate  
In the Church founded by Jesus,  
The one resurrected,  
Son of God and true man,  
Who conquered death and sin,  
The voice of hope in life eternal.**

### *Amazing Peace (excerpts)*

*Into this climate of fear and apprehension, Christmas enters,  
Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope, and singing carols of forgiveness.  
It is the Glad Season. Hope is born again in the faces of children.  
It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into their sunsets.  
Hope spreads around the earth, brightening all things,  
Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corridors.*

*In our joy, we think we hear a whisper, a sweetness.  
The word is Peace, louder than the explosion of bombs.  
It is what we have hungered for.  
Not just the absence of war, but true Peace.  
A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies,  
Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.  
We clap hands and welcome the Peace of Christmas.  
We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and Muslim, say come, Peace.  
We the Jew and the Jainist, the Catholic and the Confucian,  
Implore you, to stay a while with us,*

*So we may learn by your shimmering light  
How to look beyond complexion and see community.*

*It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.  
At this Holy Instant,  
we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ  
Into the great religions of the world.  
We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.  
All the earth's tribes loosen their voices  
To celebrate the promise of Peace.*

*~Maya Angelou*



***The devout Chapel Committee—overseeing construction,  
payroll, volunteers, worship services, catechism.***

#### **Year-End Giving**

We hope you will consider making a charitable tax deduction in support of our missions.