



# MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

## DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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## Our Best Hope



Dear Mission Friends:

In reading over our newsletters since the 60s when the Mission Foundation was established, I've noticed a common thread: our missionaries invariably mention the gifts *they* were given—the lessons that they took home from their experiences. One such oft-mentioned lesson to learn from and emulate is the value of traditional faith celebrations that, even in this internet-obsessed era, are still frequent and joy-filled, particularly in Mexico and Central America, while in my neck of the woods anyway, enthusiasm for time-honored Church traditions has long been waning.

Having just attended a local First Communion and then reading up on the several First Communion celebrations held at a mission we help support—San Jacinto Parish in Ocosingo, Chiapas—I was struck by the differences. The San Jacinto parish newsletter describes their celebrations with excitement and pride: “On Sunday...we had the joy of arranging for 20 children to receive the Body and Blood of Christ by making their first communion...”



*This recent First Communion photo and all others are from the website of Parroquia San Jacinto de Polonia in Ocosingo, Chiapas.*

*It was a very emotional Mass where we invited the little ones to walk in the footsteps of Christ who calls them to follow him in order to be happy. It was a celebration of joy since from that day these children will be able to commune with the other Catholic Christians in all the celebrations. Our congregation, all in their Sunday best, thanked the Lord for the new members of the communion of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. We pray that God continues to keep in their hearts the desire to be preachers of the Gospel in their own lives. At the end of the Mass, certificates were given out by Sr. Esperanza Dominica de Maria to each and every one of them for having completed their formation in children's catechesis. Later each of the children went home to celebrate this event with their family.*

*Blessings to our little brothers and sisters, having received the spiritual food that strengthens the Christian life of us all!”*

The First Communion Mass I attended, on the other hand, was not celebratory or emotional. While the children, in suits and white dresses, were quietly excited as they processed down the aisle, once they joined their parents in their pew, the Mass was no different from any other. The readings, responses, and songs were geared toward adults and the homily was about death and decay; and until Mass was over and the priest called for a round of applause, there had been no mention of the communicants, neither in the homily nor at Communion.





For as long as I can remember and for many generations earlier, such occasions were marked by huge, happy celebrations and I have the memories and the old photos to prove it. Today, though, in my experience anyway, such milestones seem to be barely acknowledged. It seemed to be just another Sunday.

**Back in Ocosingo, the almost weekly, always joyful celebrations, particularly those involving the parish's youth, continue to bring faith to life.** Recently, “in front of the parish congregation, several youth, after intense preparation, received their altar server robes.” Fr. Raymundo Tamayo, OP, the vicar for the Tseltal Zone and parish priest of San Jacinto, “blessed them and they were invested by their parents. *We thank God for the service they will provide to our parish.*” At another Mass that evening, “the thirty veteran altar servers of the parish, full of joy and with great enthusiasm, renewed their commitment and received their cross. *We thank Fr. Raymundo, Sr. Lupita, and Jacqueline, the eldest altar girl, who are in charge of the children's formation.*

*We thank God for the call to these smallest servants of the Parish, but also to their parents and family who, with time, energy, and sacrifices make it possible for their children to prepare for their roles.”*

Confirmation too is cause for formality, respect, and joy. Fr. Raymundo writes that it is a “sacrament that can only be imparted by the Bishop of the Diocese, or by his vicars whom he appoints to such a beautiful task. As its name implies, the sacrament confirms in faith those who receive it through the anointing of holy oil (Holy Chrism), imparting to them the Holy Spirit in abundance, just as Jesus gave to his apostles. *‘He breathed on them and said unto them, Receive the holy spirit’*”(John20-21).

In January, “one hundred young Christians in the parish were confirmed, having made their own decision to say ‘yes’ to the Lord. Two celebrations were held, at 9:30 am and 12:00 pm, in which youth ...confirmed their faith in God, accompanied by parents and godparents... In April, San Jacinto Parish was present in the [rural] community of Pamalá where more than 70 young people embraced the faith and asked for Confirmation.”

All these celebrations were presided over by vicar Fr. Raymundo, representing Bishop Monsignor Rodrigo Aguilar, pastor of the nearby diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas. “Our parishioners dress up to celebrate the Confirmation of the young people who have decided to tell Jesus that they want to follow him!





*It is the desire of each and every one of them to celebrate this sacrament of faith. It fills us with joy and happiness that they sustain that 'Yes' to the Lord Jesus and follow him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. These young people have prepared hard and are aware that God loves them and that He expects a lot from them. They are the hope of our communities, of our people, and of our Church of San Jacinto. May God our Lord continue to bless them and their families so that they may continue to respond freely and consciously to the Lord."*

All this energy sharply contrasts with the cursory mention of Confirmation in our parish bulletin. And regarding upcoming Pentecost, which had always been celebrated with a Holy Spirit parade and festival but which had diminished to almost nothing, even before Covid, parishioners were invited to look in the internet for a novena to pray.

I have been focusing on activities for the youth as they truly are the future—not only of the Church but of our world! In Ocosingo, the MJD (Spanish initials for Dominican Youth Movement) is the base from which many youth ministries branch out, ensuring that the faith activities of the youth of the parish don't stop with Confirmation, that the youth remain the hope of the future.

MJD is a group that lives the charism of the Dominicans, the Order of Preachers founded by St. Dominic de Guzman. New members enter at the first stage, which consists of an initiation to the spirituality of our Order and the Dominican way of living the Gospel. In the second stage those youth who are ready take up the cross and commit themselves more



deeply to living our Dominican life—at work, at school, and at home. Those in the third stage make their "Promise" for a year to live even more closely aligned with the gospel of Our Lord as young Dominicans.

Fr. Raymundo writes, "Recently our parishioners were witness to the initiation ceremony of several new members at stage one; to six more who took up the cross at stage two; to five more who had chosen to make 'the Promise' for a year; and to many who had already made 'the Promise' and chose to renew it. The church was filled with joy to receive the new young people wanting to commit themselves more completely to belonging to our fraternity. We rejoice because our family continues to grow and renew its commitment to live as Christ according to the charism of St. Dominic. We pray that our young brothers and sisters will remain so in joy and fidelity."

Fr. Raymundo expands on the vital role of youth: "Our parish is concerned with the formation of the conscience of young people, thus working with God's plan to strengthen Christian society in cooperation with the welfare of all.

*We count on the youth ministry to provide the tools by which young people can live their faith and discover the primary principle of the MJD: To Love Others.*

Youth ministry aims to reflect and share the faith of a young Christ among young people. The hope is that they reach out to and beyond their communities, visiting the sick, assisting the elderly, and performing other similar apostolates. That is why we have meetings, retreats, 'Easter Youth' groups, a St. Jude Group (where young people can safely meet each other), and a university student group which meets in the parish to reflect upon and share the word of God and also to supervise younger people in projects of Christian life.





*In addition, there are 21 choirs in the parish with approximately 18 young people in each who praise the Lord with their singing and animate liturgical celebrations. We thank God for our growing Dominican youth community, our young evangelists!"*

Fr. Raymundo does touch upon some universal traits and behavior of today's youth everywhere: *"In universities and high schools, and increasingly in middle schools and younger, there are many youth who are confused about their own values and vocations, and what's more, they are all embedded in a global digital village, one where they have most expertly developed the internet skills needed to navigate social networks and media, all too often leading to insecurity, resentment, and isolation. We are often unable to control what our young people are watching and participating in."*

*Through our youth ministries we seek to diminish screentime and get closer to that young man or woman, full of fears, loneliness, and frustration, and help them find and focus on their hopes, joys, and exciting challenges. We emphasize the fundamental value of love in service to others as the engine that keeps our Christian life activated."*

The parish certainly keeps their youth busy, not only providing them with ways to learn about their faith and actively participate in faith-based activities, but also with ways to learn about themselves and provide positive opportunities to meet and socialize with others. The photos of the children and teens herein reveal true pride and joy as the church community witnesses their age-appropriate activities and healthy milestones.

I worry about all our young people, too much of whose time is taken up with instagram, tictoc and the like. I worry that they too often find themselves at the end of the day—and indeed, many times during the day—alone with their screen, and with superficial thoughts of who they are and who they wish they were. Communities such as San Jacinto Parish in Ocosingo have been able to provide opportunities for kids of all ages to keep busy with positive and healthy choices, many becoming highlights of their lives to remember always. If only the rest of us could somehow rekindle the energy we used to put into our old-fashioned faith-based traditions, more of our young people might be actually enjoying a life of love in service to others and making happy memories as well. Peace,

*Lesley Warnshuis*



#### Upcoming Mission Appeals

June 4-5: Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Bakersfield (Fr. Mark Manzano)  
 June 11-12: St. Bruno, San Bruno (Fr. Emmanuel Taylor)  
 July 9-10: Sacred Heart, Bakersfield (Fr. Jordan Bradshaw)  
 July 9-10: Our Lady of the Pillar, Half Moon Bay (preacher pending)  
 July 16-17: St. Dominic, Benicia (Fr. Jordan Bradshaw)  
 July 30-31: St. Joseph, Lincoln (Fr. Jordan Bradshaw)  
 Aug. 6-7: San Clemente, Bakersfield (Fr. Jordan Bradshaw)  
 Aug. 27-28: St. William, Atascadero (Fr. Jordan Bradshaw)

*We continue to collect aid for Ukrainians, sending it directly to our Polish friars on the ground as they frantically help where they can.*