

S O L T

missionary volunteers

SERVICE AMIDST COVID-19

Maria Schmitz

Suddenly my world was thrown upside down. First one, then five, then ten, then twenty missionaries were returning to the States. Did I leave? Did I stay? My sister, an ER nurse, emphatically said, "Stay." My mother, a retired nurse, said, "We'll fly you home if you want to, but listen to God's call. It does not necessarily change because of a pandemic." With freedom granted by my family's support, I headed to the adoration chapel to discuss it with Jesus. What did He have to say? Stay. With a heart brimming with peace, I told Fr. Beau that I would remain and serve amidst the unknowns of the pandemic.

I could never have imagined how joyful our quarantine would be within the strict lockdown imposed by Belize. Strengthened by the Eucharist and lifted by laughter, we poured ourselves out. At our first team meeting we decided on projects that could be accomplished to serve the mission while finishing the school year online. Silly us! Projects?! Our focus quickly shifted to feeding the hungry with physical and more importantly, spiritual nourishment. How many bags of food should we pack? Forty should last the week, right? We can station one person in the parish office to handle the demand, right? No.

One food distribution site became three. Our team of food packers grew as we recruited the youth to help us pack 2,400 pounds of rice and 2,400 pounds of beans weekly. Others were commissioned to share the Gospel with the hungry before distributing the food. Our agricultural knowledge increased as we distributed 32,000 bananas and hundreds of chickens. Our prayer skills became bilingual as we talked and prayed with each person. We all became donor relation



officers as we begged and prayed for money to feed the hungry.

Beautiful, challenging, joyful, exhausting, and fulfilling our days had become. The days were long and we were drained by our 3 pm holy hour. I would not change my experience. Yes, I was physically exhausted as I laid down at night. Yes, I was sweaty. But I was given an invitation to pour myself out for people in the community, most of whom I did not know. I humbly served and gave the little I had, yet He made it enough. He spoke through my errors in Spanish. He communicated through my imperfect vessel, and my trust in Him deepened.

My trust in Him has continued to grow as we progress into this interesting school year. As I write this in the second week of October, it is the second week of school and we are working off our third design for the school year. I have learned to plan, organize, and prepare, but not to rely solely on myself. I need His strength. I need His guidance. I need His peace as the world shifts. I needed this challenging yet beautiful period of service to grow in faith. Whatever comes, however the rest of this school year happens, it will be good. It will be with Him.

SACRED VESSELS

Fr. Beau

The day before the SOLT Missionary Volunteers flew to Belize, I was nervous. I turned to the spiritual father of Belize, Bishop Lawrence, for support, and his fatherly assistance was edifying.

Bishop Lawrence gave them “praise and support” by lending one of our diocese’s greatest treasures. He welcomed the volunteers with the chalice St. John Paul the Great used when he celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in Belize. Through that chalice, these young SOLT missionary volunteers were encouraged and strengthened for the journey.

“Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.’” (Matthew 26:27-28)

Dorothy Day, after an irreverent priest used a mug to celebrate Mass at a soup kitchen, quietly carried this vessel into the yard for holy burial. It is no longer a mug. It is a chalice. It must never again hold coffee. It has been transformed by what it contained.

How was I transformed by my encounter with the John Paul II chalice? He led the first rosary I ever prayed. He ordained my mentors and friends Fr. Mark and Fr. Tony, both pastors of this parish in Belize. As a Cardinal, he traveled to Geyser, Montana, a town of 200 people, where he presided at my uncle Walter’s Confirmation. His biography strengthened me when I did not think I could persevere as a seminarian. And now, serving as a Marian missionary priest, I find myself chancellor of John Paul II Junior College. His support has carried me my entire adult life.

To safeguard the people of Belize, the teachers and I began with a 11-day quarantine. Although I am honored to hold this relic of John Paul the Great for his feast day Mass, I find myself more awed by sixteen new chalices, men and women transformed by the blood of Christ they contain; they are minted for service to God and his family.

Undeterred by hardship and uncertainty, these men and woman fundraised thousands of dollars for the privilege of volunteering in a global pandemic. Where two or more people gather in



the name of Christ, you’re not in a hotel, you’re on your way to heaven.

In these living chalices that I heard re-echoed the words that John Paul the Great spoke to me as I embarked upon my own missionary journey.

It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness; He is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; He is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is He who provoked you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is He who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is He who reads in your heart your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle.

It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be ground down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal.

I was transformed, not by the chalice, but my encounter with Christ, present in the SOLT Missionary Volunteers. Their ‘yes’ has transformed them. The sacrament emboldens them. How it fills my heart to see their desire to pour themselves away to lift our God to thirsting souls.

"I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE IN MIND FOR YOU"

Dan Gamez

In late August, I arrived at St. Ann's Indian Mission in Belcourt, North Dakota to begin a year of service with the Chippewa and Metis. The first three weeks were spent on retreat, formation and quarantine. That was a time of community growth and friendship with the SOLT Missionary Volunteers. I marvel and am grateful that God called these incredible men and women to serve alongside of me for this year. After a lengthy retreat, orientation and unexpected quarantine, we began our missionary work.

Fr. Belcourt, whom the town is named after, began befriending and evangelizing the Chippewa during the frontier days. It is commonly known that Fr. Belcourt was beloved by the people and is known for going on the buffalo hunts with the people. Through his example the Chippewa grafted onto the Catholic faith which led to the founding of St. Ann's Indian Mission in 1885. The mission serves those who live on or near the Turtle Mountain Reservation. This comprises of five churches, St. Ann's Catholic school, and a multitude of ministries. St. Ann's is a piece of heaven where people come to worship, receive, and share the love of Jesus. In addition to serving the spiritual needs, St. Ann's provides educational and physical needs to the community.

St. Ann's partners with the local food pantry to run a ministry helping the needy within the community. Travis is one person who leads this ministry and when I first met him, he quickly shared his testimony. At one point in his life he was enslaved to alcohol, and one day he wanted freedom from this addiction. As he sought a way out he found a rosary and remembered being taught to pray the rosary at St. Ann's School. At that moment he began praying the rosary daily to break his addiction. Little by little Our Blessed Mother Mary helped intercede for him as he broke his addiction.

As Travis has grown in his faith, he wants to help others which is why he volunteers for the food distribution which doubles as a support system for those struggling with addiction and unemployment. Travis has been a missionary to me. He has shown me the radiant love of God, taught me radical trust, and deepened the hunger within to learn the faith. It inspires me in many ways. As a community we (fellow missionaries and local parishioners) are spending more time in adoration together. This is just the beginning of my time as a missionary volunteer with SOLT. It is only the beginning. "For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the LORD," (Jer 29:11) and what a joy it already is.



A NEW BEGINNING

Fr. Dave Brokke

Prior to ordination to the priesthood, my superiors posed this question to me, "Where would you like to be sent for your first assignment as a priest?" I answered, "I am open to anything. You can tell me where to go, and I will go." They asked further, "Do you have any preferences?" I responded, "I am willing to go (or stay) anywhere. If I did have to say a preference, I would say that I would eventually like working with missionary volunteers. I do have a passion for working with young people. But, again, I really am willing to go anywhere."

At the time, there was only one mission with a thriving missionary volunteer program, which was Belize, where I, myself, had been a missionary volunteer. Little did I know there was a plan in the works to revamp the missionary volunteer program in Belcourt, North Dakota on the Turtle Mountain Reservation. A month before my ordination I received my initial assignment phone call. Fast forward to July 18th, the day of my ordination..."And Fr. David's first assignment will be.... to Belcourt, North Dakota."

A few months into serving here at St. Ann's Mission in Belcourt, North Dakota I can see the wisdom and providence of God through my superiors. I have been blessed to serve alongside a great crew of priests, sisters, staff, and to be a chaplain to these SOLT missionary volunteers. I have never seen a group of missionaries so united.

These missionary volunteers are as unique and different from each other as they come, but they have a deep love and reverence for each other. They each have their own gifts and temperaments, their own passions and personalities, and yet they do not let those differences and peculiarities get in the way of loving each other. In fact, I might even say, they have largely grown to appreciate those quirks and differences. I, the team and parishioners are so impressed with these missionary volunteers. They evangelize simply by being themselves. They testify to their faith simply by loving one another. They radically proclaim with their lives; "By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

The SOLT missionary volunteers serving in various areas, some work in development, at the Catholic elementary school, with the food pantry, at the thrift shop, in catechesis, in the kitchen, and some even do online teaching abroad. Everywhere I go, I get compliments on these young adults who are vibrant, energetic, enthusiastic, hard-working, and faith-filled. They lift up the spirits of the mission. Everything they do, they do with a spirit of willingness and gladly inject their faith wherever they can.

Being a spiritual father to them has been a great



honor and privilege. To accompany them, counsel them, administer the sacraments to them, teach them, and befriend them has been one of the greatest joys of my priesthood thus far. I've been told that it takes a good while to really grow into one's paternity as a priest, to truly become a father to the people you serve, but it is a pretty great thing when within just a few months one of your missionary volunteers accidentally calls you, "Dad."



MISSION MOMENT REFLECTION

Hannah Weinwuth – Virtue of Joy

Open Scripture and spend ten minutes reflecting on Romans 12:12.

I find joy in a simple smile, I find joy in the shadow of His wings, I find painful joy in His suffering, His selfless giving, His sacred heart, His complete love for me. I delight in His gaze. I am joyfully chosen.

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” (Romans 12:12)

Rejoicing in hope is easy, I can do that. However, when passing through tribulation one can be buried in suffering and still in sorrow. That is when we tend to think, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” We forget that in absolutely every tribulation, there will be a glorious resurrection to find strength. This is why we must be patient and constant in prayer-with a heart that longs only for Our Lord. In the His Sacred Heart, the fountain of true joy resides. With our eyes and hearts on Him, we can align our crosses and sufferings to His crucifixion and to our most beautiful mother, Our Lady of Sorrows. Jesus and Mary know heartache, but find complete joy in the promise of resurrection.

Open Scripture to Philippians 4:4 and spend 10 minutes in reflection.

“Rejoice in the Lord always...” (Philippians 4:4)

One may think, “Impossible.” However, with a yearning heart that seeks the Lord and open eyes, it very well could be possible. We are all creatures of the Divine Creator dwelling in His creation. With open eyes and a slow wonder, we can dwell with him always. Look around...see the color of the trees, how they drift in the soft wind, they dance for you. Feel the coolness of water as it cleanses you. Submerge yourself in the grace of being clean. See the mountains, gaze at the stars, run through the wildflowers, fly with the birds and know that you are His most beautiful creation. Find joy and beauty within self, and wonder with joy of the beauty He surrounds us with. Rejoice in Him, for He loves us so well. God is Good.

Journal:

1. What thought stirred within you as you read this reflection?
2. Ponder the ways in which you naturally gravitate toward joy.
3. Are there areas of suffering that you struggle to find joy in? If so, what are they?