

PERSPECTIVES FROM A RETURNED MISSIONER: Things That Don't Make Sense

When FMS lay missionaries return from their service abroad, it is understood that their call to mission does not cease. Rather, they embark upon



McNeil speaking at the 5th World Care Benefit.

In a talk given at this year's annual fundraiser event, returned missionary Dan McNeil described how the lessons learned in mission can play a part in life after mission. Dan was an FMS missionary in Novosibirsk, Russia from 1992-1995, an experience that he describes as "a blessing beyond measure." One of the things he witnessed in the people of Siberia was a great trust in God, particularly in the fortitude they had shown under Soviet rule: "In a country where the State controlled where a person lived, worked and where their children when to school, I saw over and over how people had taken great risks to preserve and live their faith." He realized then that trusting in God

"It was not convenient to give up the stability and security of a career and become a missionary"

means that "sometimes you have to make a commitment to do things that don't make sense". In his own case, to go and minister in Siberia hadn't logically been the best choice; it was not convenient to give up the stability and security of a career and become a missionary in a place where in winter the temperature can drop to negative 40° Fahrenheit, with one and half hours of sunlight a day. The decision, however, came from a spiritual source; it was the answer to an insistent call to give.

"lifelong mission to North America", bearing witness to the Gospel by sharing their experiences and by continued personal commitment to the Franciscan values of service to the marginalized, simplicity of lifestyle, and the promise to actively seek justice, peace, and the integrity of all creation.

mission

In the tradition of Saints Francis and Clare, Franciscan Mission Service prepares and supports Catholic lay people for a mission of presence and service in solidarity with poor communities overseas.

This transformational experience equips our women and men for a lifelong mission of social change in North America.

Dan is currently Executive Director of Peace Maker Foundation (PMF), a non-profit organization that raises money to fund school programs for violence prevention and conflict resolution in Minnesota. He noted that the decision to found PMF, which began in 1998 when he and some friends put together \$10,000 to start a small endowment fund, was an answer to the same call that had taken him to FMS and Russia. He and his friends had reached a point in their lives, he said, where what they were doing was not enough; they felt compelled to step outside of their own needs and to give back.

Dan is certain that without his experience in FMS, he would never have been able to start PMF. Moreover, the lessons learned on mission continued to be applied. At one point, while working at Catholic Charities in St. Paul, Minnesota and about to be married, Dan was trying to decide whether or not to quit his job and start working part-time, so as to be able to devote more energy to the fledgling Peace Maker Foundation. A colleague tried to dissuade him, pointing out that Dan was just months away from being included in the organization's pension plan, and that not only he but soon his family would need financial security. Again, however, Dan said that he felt that God was calling him, asking him to trust and do something that did not seem to make sense.

This past year, Peace Maker Foundation provided almost \$83,000 to more than 60 schools.



P.O. Box 29034
Washington, DC 20017-0034

T: 202-832-1762 | F: 202-832-1778
www.franciscanmissionservice.org

Did You Notice?

This issue of *Franciscan World Care* is full color AND it is less expensive than our previous newsletters. We are always looking for ways to reduce costs and have done so with an online printing company.

We hope you enjoy it!

The Opportunity to Say *Yes*



"Vocation" is derived from the Latin word *vocare*, meaning "to call". Today it is most often heard in Catholic circles in reference to those who are drawn to serve in the priesthood and religious life, but it shouldn't be forgotten that God has something in mind for everyone; no one is without a calling in their life.

I have always been taken with this word; I think that in my own life it is at its core the desire to pay attention to the voice of God speaking within me. My decision to leave Minneapolis (my beloved community!) and settle

in Washington, DC, was a response to a (rather loud) voice within me that I chose to trust. My faith assured me that good answers would be revealed to the many questions, including "why there?" and "why now?", and that allowed me to move forward.

As the staff at FMS walks alongside lay people discerning their vocation to mission, I am grateful to have recently had that experience, and for the opportunity to continue to say yes each day. Franciscan lay missionaries engage in a discernment process for a minimum of one year, requiring them to discover and say yes to their call again and again. There are many opportunities and weak moments where it is much easier to say no (and sometimes there are good reasons). The November 8 commissioning of our seven lay missionaries was a big "yes", but not their last. They are still at the beginning of their journey of saying yes.

Mission is part of the baptismal call of all Catholics. It was central to the ministry of our namesake, St. Francis. I am continually humbled by and grateful to the lay men and women who sell their homes, say goodbye to their families and loved ones, and go to foreign lands for the sake of this call.

Please consider saying YES in support of our lay missionaries. You can partner with them through prayer, by reading and responding to their blogs, and by contributing financially to their support. We ask that you consider saying yes each month by signing up for automatic monthly donations. It is through consistent giving that FMS can continue to support lay people in their saying yes to God's call.

Much peace,

Kim Smolik

Executive Director



world care

WHAT IS MISSION?

As evening falls over Northeast Washington on a Wednesday in late September, four FMS lay-missioners-in-training and several FMS staff members settle into chairs in the living room of Casa San Salvador to hear a presentation on the Franciscan Charism by Sr. Ilia Delio, OSF. Her presentation is only one of many ways the missionaries receive, but in many ways it is one of the more significant, describing what, at heart, mission is to a Franciscan.

Francis' way of ministry, Sr. Ilia begins, is to be with people, rather than just to do things for them. This is a hard concept to take in, especially for those raised in a results-oriented North American culture. We tend to think of service as a one-way street, a provider on one end and a receiver at the other, and we try to measure the amount of good being done by noticeable changes in the receiver's condition. Conversation, however, rather than monologue, is the style of ministry.

St. Francis, she points out, had been disappointed in worldly ambition, and thereby came to experience *metanoia*, a shift of the mind. His embrace of the leper signified the transfer of interest from self-centeredness to God-centeredness, and he took on the life of poverty to maintain that focus. Quite literally, he sought to remove anything that would come between himself and God, and between himself and others.

St. Francis understood very well that it was not material things that stood between him and others, but the invulnerability that those things afforded. The vow of poverty does not, as is often thought, mean that one should live without things; we are human beings, and we need to have things to survive. Rather, it means to live without possessing things; that is, to give up the independence that comes from owning property, to throw away the safeguard against misfortune that property is.

This vulnerability is what defines Franciscan ministry. To minister to others, it is the minister who must let go. She or he is not bringing something, a gift, to others; he or she must go down, become dispossessed and vulnerable. Only then does the impediment of the impersonal, giver-receiver relationship disappear. Only then can we attend; only then can we converse.

In addition to becoming poor, the minister must strive to recognize God in everything, including that which is most tragic, disgusting, frightening, and sorrowful. Prayer is essential for this, says Sr. Ilia. St. Bonaventure wrote that every person on earth is an icon, a mirror of Christ. Francis certainly felt this, and, we are told, "became a living prayer". Francis' prayer was attentiveness to God wherever he was. In his footsteps, Franciscans seek to recognize that "the person where you are is the Word".

In that respect, Sr. Ilia mentions, the Franciscan tradition really is a very contemplative one. To contemplate reality is to "see with the eyes of the heart". Contemplative prayer serves to take us out of ourselves and into the other; we become able to see that the love of God in our own lives is in the lives of others as well. Through contemplation, we are able to look past the surface and recognize Christ in others.

We often feel helpless when faced with tragedy, powerless to help. For missionaries, Sr. Ilia notes, this is a daily occurrence. They must live in the midst of great suffering and injustice, unable to relieve large portions of it. In those times, contemplation both teaches trust in the love of God to cure all evil, and nurtures compassion. We learn to love others in their weakness and suffering. By compassion, by sharing in suffering, we, as St. Paul says, "make up...what is lacking in the suffering of Christ".

The missionary can not neglect to do, and should strive to make a change, concludes Sr. Ilia; but she or he should also remember that, "all you can do is give your life out of love, and trust that love can heal". The aim of Franciscan ministry is to sit down and see God in people, to name the good in their midst, and to live in it and return it to the source of all good, who is God.

FROM THE FMS STAFF...

We wish you all peace and good during this Advent and Christmas Season! May you be filled with joy by the presence of God, renewed in hope for a better world, and blessed with determination to continue to build God's Kingdom here on earth. We thank you for sharing in the life of FMS this year and for all that you continue to do to support our lay missionaries.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Patrick O'Neill
President

Catherine Grosso
Vice President

Joseph Nangle, OFM
Secretary/Treasurer

Marian Bobershmidt, OSF

Tom Bello, SFO

George Corrigan, OFM

John O'Connor, OFM

Joe Rogenski, OFM

Megeen White Testa

STAFF

Kim Smolik
Executive Director

Beth Riehle
Program Director

Mariam Mitry
Program & Development Associate

Jill Staudt
Communications
& Development Associate

Peter Mueller
Grants Associate

Katie and Kelvin Mulembe
House Managers

Selwyn Barnum
Bookkeeper

MISSION MATTERS:

Married Couple Share Their Stories of Mission in Bolivia

"¿Reechard, hay refrigerio?" The thirty-something leader of a gang of glue addicts was asking me if I had remembered to bring bananas today. I eat at least two bananas a day and being the boss, I force the fifty-odd students in the after-school program to eat bananas, too. Once, they received tangerines. If I have leftovers, I share with the local addicts. In exchange, they tease me about my hair, my shoe size, and my lack of soccer skills. Once in a while, they talk about their past lives. I listen, spellbound.

"¡Cuñado!" Miguel screams to me from across a congested intersection. He is with his posse of petty thieves--thieves that I know very well. He has called me "brother-in-law" for more than two years. I have seen him pass many times through the shelter, but I cannot remember the origin of the joke. I do remember his origins. His mother abandoned him immediately after birth at the hospital. He was born with a deformed arm and leg. He spent years in each of the shelters of Amanecer. Now he is twenty-three, without a diploma or employment, but always with a smile. Each one of his posse shares a secret handshake with me. Celso, the smallest of the group, corrects my sequence. "How could you forget?" he



Kristen Zielinski-Nalen and Richard Nalen being interviewed on Bolivian radio.

asks. I said that it had been over a year, shocked at his recollection.

"Zeechard, no te vayas," whines Marcos, who expresses dissatisfaction as I near the door. He is my two-and-a-half year-old friend, although Kristen recently overheard me renounce our friendship after Marcos threw my clothespins over the balcony. A fire-tested friendship, for sure. Marcos lives down the hall from us. He is here because he was burned and needs intensive therapy. He helps me water the garden and watches me cook. I sometimes feed him and put him in his crib when he is ready for a nap. It is very difficult to close the door behind me, knowing Marcos is on the other side of it.

After almost three years, it will be very difficult to close the door on Bolivia. This is mostly the fault of FMS. The nature of FMS calls for us to connect to humanity. Building and maintaining relationships is central to its mission. What a privilege it has been to establish relationships and to be able to walk alongside a few Cochabambinos for a short while as an FMS missionary in Bolivia.

Richard Nalen

25TH MISSIONER COMMISSIONING

On Sunday November 8, 2009, Franciscan Mission Service commissioned its 25th class of Lay Missioners. The ceremony was part of Sunday liturgy at St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring, MD; in it, the seven missionaries declared before the assembly their acceptance of the call to mission and their intention to live, pray, and work with the poor and disadvantaged and to bear constant witness to the Gospel in their actions and words. Fr. Joseph Nangle, OFM, presided and preached at the mass, concelebrating with Fr. George Corrigan, OFM, and Deacon Tom Bello, SFO, both FMS board members.

For the missionaries, the ceremony was a deeply moving experience which gave them a new sense of connectedness with the Church around the world. Joel and Lynn Vaughn now feel that in going to Bolivia they are not leaving their Church family behind, but rather expanding it. Nora Pfeiffer, also bound for Bolivia, spoke of looking out over the congregation and seeing a community of diverse people gathered from around the world. "I could literally see the Body of Christ, a beautiful sight," she says. Many of those present felt personally affected by the pledge the missionaries made, which South Africa-bound Tim Marcy says is very fitting; he saw the ceremony as, among other things, an invitation to all present to realize that they too had been "called by name" for a special mission, whatever it might be. The new missionaries will arrive at their mission sites in early January of 2010.

news

Help us celebrate our **20th Anniversary** in 2010. Visit our website to post a memory our our "**Wall of Memories**" about the way FMS has touched your life.

Need for Volunteers! We are in great need of volunteers to help plan next year's World Care Benefit and Celebration with Richard Rohr, OFM. Please contact Mariam at mariam@franciscanmissionservice.org to inquire and sign-up for the event planning committee.



Fr. Joe Nangle, OFM, Executive Director Kim Smolik, and Doug Garofalo at this year's Benefit.

FMS WORLD CARE Benefit & Celebration

The 5th Annual FMS World Care Benefit & Celebration, held on the evening of October 9, 2009, was a welcome opportunity for interaction between FMS lay missionaries past and present and over 130 people who help support FMS' lay mission program.

In his keynote address, entitled, "FMS and A New Way of Being Church," Fr. Joe Nangle, OFM drew on his recent travels to Asia, Africa, and Latin America to describe how the "young churches" of the world are entering into a "dialogue of equals" with people of other cultures and faiths, and most importantly, with the poor. This dialogue is mutually enriching for all, and is something that the "older churches" of the world could learn from (Fr. Joe's full talk can be found via a link on the FMS website).

Fr. Joe also described how important returned missionaries are to the challenge of renewing North American churches. FMS lay missionaries have the privilege of encountering the realities and customs of different cultures, and then the opportunity and responsibility to incorporate and disseminate their insights through their commitment to lifelong service in North America.

Three exemplary models of lived commitment to mission in North America were honored after Fr. Joe's talk. Russell Testa and FMS returned missionary Megeen White Testa were jointly presented with the Fifth Annual Anselm Moons, OFM Award, and FMS returned missionary Dan McNeil was given the First Annual Joe Nangle, OFM Lifelong Mission Award.

We look forward to celebrating our 20th Anniversary next Fall; our speaker will be well-known Franciscan teacher and author, Richard Rohr, OFM.

Thank you

A very special thanks to our Brookland neighbors Fr. Jeremy Harrington and the Friars of the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land for donating the use of St. Francis Hall for our annual event!

A Special Thanks...to \$300 World Care event sponsors, Sandy Beddor, Jean and Paul Delker, and the Franciscan Friars of Sacred Heart Church in Tampa, FL, as well as our \$4,000 event sponsors: the Leadership Team of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary in St. Louis, MO and an anonymous donor.

BAILAR EN BOLIVIA

"Dance, dance, wherever you may be. I am the Lord of the Dance, said he. I will lead you on, wherever you may be. I will lead you all in the dance, said he." Dancing describes the journey on which God accompanies me. The rhythm is in my bones and sometimes moves me despite myself; sometimes alone, sometimes with a partner, and sometimes in a group.

I learned this song at St. Ignatius Jesuit Mission School, in Hunts Point, the Bronx. We sang it at most liturgies. St. Ignatius School was a practice field for the educational and spiritual theories Richard and I had learned at Fordham University, where we had met. There, we were formed in Ignatian spirituality and its lived charism; "cura personalis", "ad maiorem dei gloriam", "finding God in all things". There, we learned the importance of play and celebration with the boys and their families. There, we began to dance as partners.

Then we decided to follow the Lord somewhere else and learn a new dance. He said He would lead us wherever we may be, after all. We became lay missionaries with the Franciscan Mission Service and came here to Cochabamba, Bolivia. We learned the charism of the Franciscan brothers and sisters and tried to practice the jewels of wisdom that the three month FMS orientation had packed in our suitcases.

We learned to bring bread and fruit with us to share along the way in case a campesina mother sitting on the sidewalk asked. We learned to walk the rocky, dirt roads of the parish, greeting in badly spoken Quechua the women washing in their yards and the men arriving home exhausted with pick-axes over their shoulders. We learned to summon the courage to approach and invite strangers to Sunday Mass in a neighborhood where 4 evangelical churches had already gathered their faithful. This dance surely was awkward at times!

We learned to recognize Jesus incarnate in the vulnerable, humble form of an Amanecer orphan, demanding attention and love. Although frightening at first, we learned to kiss the leper, holding the blackened hand of a high, glue-addicted street kid demanding money and asking him for his name and his story, inviting him to the shelter. While the Andean cosmos-vision of Pachamama, Mother Earth, and other powers of nature seemed pagan and just superstitious at times, St. Francis' relationship with Brother Sun, Sister Moon and Sister Death helped us to grasp the reverence a believer can have for the powerful gifts of nature God has bestowed us. We learned that the dance incorporates more people and new moves to keep it alive and interesting.

Dancing in Bolivia is a way of life; it's a way to celebrate, to gain relief from the burdens of surviving day to day. In fact, my first day of ministry at the Madre de Dios shelter tested my humility with the girls' request to dance reggaeton with them. A Bolivian party always has dancing, or it's not a party. All children learn the dances in school and the main extra-curricular activity in college is to join a folkloric dance group. A fellow Franciscan missionary, Kim Acquilano, invited me to join her in a Bolivian folkloric group for which we danced in parades and formed new friendships. Each FMS missionary here has learned the dances.

We've danced, oh how we've danced as FMS missionaries. The Lord continues to lead us in this celebration of life, wherever we may be. How blessed and privileged are we.

Kristen Zielinski-Nalen

Bolivian folkloric dance group, including missionaries Kristen Zielinski-Nalen (far right) and Kim Acquilano (third from right).



INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT BOLIVIA

Bolivia is incredibly rich in natural resources, and has one of the highest rates of biodiversity in the world. In area, it is about three times the size of the state of Montana, with a population of about 10 million.

The country has three distinct climate zones: the altiplano, a high altitude desert area, a middle zone which is temperate year round, and the rainforest.

The minimum wage is 550B (Bolivianos), approximately \$0.50 an hour assuming a 40-hour work week. A liter of milk costs 5B (\$0.70), public transportation, 1.5B (\$0.20), and lunch at a fast-food place, 8-10B (\$1.14-\$1.42).