

Witnessing Faith through the Hearts of Youth

2018 World Mission Sunday

(Data and quote below from an interview with Father James Peterson)

“How many young people find in missionary volunteer work a way of serving the “least” of our brothers and sisters, promoting human dignity and witnessing to the joy of love and of being Christians!” Pope Francis, 2018 World Mission Day message.

World Mission Sunday is celebrated in every parish, every school and every religious organization on the same day around the world, supporting over 1,100 mission dioceses worldwide. This is a time to recognize and join our brothers and sisters in mission dioceses who strive to animate the Gospel message of love and compassion. Youth are critical to witnessing this Gospel message.

And their actions touch many: the young people serving, those receiving the care and the parish of the youth. They all witness the Gospel through their actions. We can support these activities in mission dioceses through the World Mission Sunday collections. This year, as an example of a mission diocese receiving grants from the World Mission Sunday collection, we highlight the mission Diocese of Ciudad Guayana, Venezuela.

Our archdiocese has sent priests to the mission Diocese of Ciudad Guayana for the past 50 years. Today, Fr. Greg Schaffer serves in Jesucristo Resucitado, in San Felix and as he has for the past 21 years. Life in the eleven barrios of that parish has always been difficult because of violence and gangs. But with the current economic collapse in Venezuela, violence in San Felix has escalated. That is why the actions of the youth are so notable.

For 20 years, the St. Vincent de Paul Society has been actively serving the parish community through members 16 to 25 years old. These members visit the sick, the elderly and the poor of the parish bringing food, clothing, medicine, cleaning homes and offering prayers. They are inspiring witnesses of our faith. Dubraska and Andrea are two of the 25 active members.

Dubraska is a young woman with a huge heart for service. She has individually initiated a campaign to deliver food, clothing and toys to needy families within the barrios of the parish. And since she is a gifted cook and baker, she is sure to bring cookies with her to her visits.

Andrea lives with her mother as her father and brother have left for a better life in Chile. She is involved with music ministry and regularly visits the needy and most vulnerable in the parish, often sharing prayer and music.



Both of these women witness their faith and the gospel message by serving through their own gifts. The group is very appreciated by those they serve. “It give me life and I am grateful for any help. I am so honored and touched that these youth care enough to help me, “ says Carmen, 90 years old. Carmen isn’t even Catholic but asks to pray the rosary with the St. Vincent de Paul visitors.

The St Vincent de Paul young people tend to be very active at Jesucristo Resucitado and through their witness and stories, are respected by the parish at large. They are “catalysts for others to animate their own faith,” Father Peterson observed, “especially in this parish.”

This is an inspiring example of a mission diocese receiving support through the World Mission Sunday appeal.