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# Inspired

Stories of encountering Christ in global mission

Fall 2018

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By Deacon Mickey Friesen

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*"The university was robbed three times last week while classes were in session."*



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# Inspired

Fall 2018

Stories of encountering Christ in global mission



## Shared Mission

By Deacon Mickey Friesen  
Director, Center for Mission



*I shared this reflection in the Catholic Spirit for World Mission Sunday and thought it was pertinent to the topic of this newsletter. So it is reprinted with relevant revisions.*

The first time I went on a mission trip, I traveled to our archdiocesan mission in Venezuela. I was enthusiastic and knew that mission had something to do with sharing faith, but I wondered how I would be able to communicate and bring



God to Venezuela. When I arrived, I was surprised to learn that God was already there!

God was alive among the youth who welcomed me and shared their love for Jesus in worship and service to the poor. My faith came alive through their Christian witness. When it was time to leave, I wondered who received more from the experience. I learned that sharing faith renews faith.

The Gospel message is forever

young and ever new. God continues to call us to share in the good news of Jesus. When we share faith or assist others to share faith, something new and beautiful can happen to all of us. Mission revitalizes faith. We learn more about who we are and who God is for us. Young people excited about their faith and willing to share themselves in serving others can energize and renew us.

Youth play a pertinent role by giving themselves fully to God's plan in their lives. Seeing young people excited about their faith and willing to share themselves in serving others is an inspiring model for us.

At our archdiocesan mission in Venezuela, young people play an important part of building up the Church. For example, activities through the St. Vincent De Paul Society give opportunities for youth to visit the sick, bring food to the hungry, clean and provide household chores to those who are disabled. These young people bring their spirit of joy, listening ear, and love of life into homes too often lonely and dark by isolation and illness. They are not only the future of the Church, they are already witnessing Christ in the present.

At the Center for Mission, we admire these youth and recognize their importance in living out the Gospel as witnesses to the Word of God. They are catalysts of inspiration

and faith as they grow themselves, inspire their own parish community and animate the Gospel for those they serve. For example, 90 year-old Carmen, who is visited regularly by the St. Vincent de Paul youth, said, "Their visits give me life and I am grateful for any help. I am so honored and touched that these youth care enough to help me." Carmen is not even Catholic but asks to pray the rosary

with the youth.

This newsletter provides a peek into youth in Venezuela with articles and comments as they share experiences, especially in the very difficult economic environment. It is so inspiring hearing about their lives and faith.

There is a saying which says that



some give to the missions by going. Others to the missions by giving. Without both there are no missions. Thank you all for the many ways you share in God's message in mission. Remember, when we share faith, we renew our faith.

Serving the global mission activity of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis



## Youth in Venezuela

*Stories and reflections below are provided with the help of Fr. Greg Schaffer and Fr. James Peterson*

This newsletter, we are focusing on the dire situation in our archdiocesan sister diocese in Venezuela and the youth who serve through the St Vincent de Paul Society. They serve the hungry, the poor and the sick in the parish of Jesucristo Resucitado. They inspire others through living the Word of God. The following columns reflect comments from many youth as they describe their situation and faith. Father Greg Schaffer has posed several questions to each. Here is what they said:

### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE CURRENT SITUATION IN VENEZUELA?

**Richard Ruiz** (22 years old, Accounting Major):

The situation for Venezuela is that it is slowly dying and no one, including the government, is addressing the many problems we are facing - no food, no medicine, and an increase in violence.

The education level is dropping because many professors and students are leaving the country. There is no longer government support to help universities and schools function. Professors no longer receive salaries.

I am very frustrated by the situation. I want to start my own advertising business but it is not possible. I am working full time at a grocery store for minimum wage which is about \$20.00 /month in U.S. dollars. I can barely afford to take a bus to work. If the situation continues to deteriorate, I think I will be going to Portugal to work to survive.

**Dubrasca Medina** (20 years old, lives with mother and grandmother):

The situation right now in Venezuela is affecting everyone, especially the young people. Many want to graduate from university but are unable to do so because of the



many strikes by teachers for unjust pay, lack of basic goods and food and the lack of public transportation. Many students who are able to

go to university, do so by not eating. Many others cannot go to school because they have to find work in order to support their families and survive.

Many have left our country to find work and a better life.

**Jose Antonio Brito** (28 years old, grew up in Jesucristo Resucitado and



is now a seminary student):

The situation in Venezuela today has provided me with an opportunity for me to practice my faith. Because of the shortage of medicine, I find myself spending more time with the sick and am closer to those who suffer. My own family is suffering from food shortage like all other families in the parish, in the diocese, and in Venezuela. I find it important to put all our faith in God.

**Andrea Ramirez** (20 years old):

The situation is very difficult in all areas of daily life. Everything is also

very expensive. Emotionally, it is very hard because tomorrow my father is leaving for Chile. He needs to find work to try to build a better life for his family. My brother has dropped out of school and also left for Chile. He has been there for over a year. My brother found a job as a waiter and is making a better living than he was able to in Venezuela. We talk a lot and he is always asking me to join him. I would prefer to stay in Venezuela to make it a better country, a better place to live.

### HOW DOES YOUR FAITH HELP YOU DEAL WITH THE SITUATION IN VENEZUELA? WHERE DO YOU FIND GOD IN THE SUFFERING?

**Richard Ruiz:** My faith is a pillar that supports me and helps me have faith in the future. My faith gives me hope, and it helps me to continue and to keep going.

I experience God all around me. Walking home I see people worse off than me, people looking through trash to survive. I see professors at the university and teachers on strike for the little salaries they receive, yet continue to teach, almost for free because that is their vocation to educate others. And it can be very dangerous. The university was robbed three times last week while classes were in session. They took students' and teachers' cell phones and



money. Still the teachers give their classes. I see God in the students and

their solidarity with each other as some share food with those who come to class hungry. I see God in my bosses at work as they give food to workers as a bonus for extra work.

If I need to leave Venezuela to work, I will one day return to help those who are marginalized from society. Specifically, I would like to help drug addicts who have given up on themselves and life.

**Dubrasca Medina:** The crisis in Venezuela has helped me trust more in God. I have been fortunate to receive what I need to live and have been

able to help others who are suffering more than me. I have experienced God using me as an instrument to help others. God has given me the strength to move forward and to keep living...never to give up.

**Jose Antonio Brito:** My faith is my daily sustenance to help me respond to the many needs of so many people. My faith helps me in my service to the suffering I encounter every day.

I encounter God in the generosity of others who are helping those around them. I encounter God in the hope of people and in their positive attitudes that enable them to keep fighting to survive.

My hope for the future is that people will continue to look to God for their support and help. And that God will continue to help.

**Andrea Ramirez:** I go to church a lot to be close to God as He is the one who can help my family and help



my country.

I know God hears my prayers. God gives me hope to stay here to help my mother. I pray every day for my family and country. I especially feel close to God when I visit people in need with our St. Vincent de Paul group. I also feel the presence of God when I sing in the choir at Jesucristo Resucitado.

### Andrea has also written another reflection in Spanish.

Mi nombre es Andrea Ramírez tengo 20 años. Comencé asistir a la iglesia Jesucristo Resucitado a la edad de 10 años. Me integre al grupo musical junto

a mi hermano, Ahí aprendí a tocar varios instrumentos entre ellos pandereta, tambor, cuatro, batería y otros, reforzando un poco lo que ya que mi padre es músico. Me bautizaron, hice la comunión, la confirmación en esta iglesia. Cuando tenía

16 años me llamo mucho la atención un grupo que se encargaba de visitar a personas de bajos recursos, este era un apostolado que hace vida en la parroquia, se llama San Vicente de Paul, la primera vez que asistí fue muy fuerte ver la realidad que otras personas viven, que no tienen como alimentarse, algunos sin un techo donde vivir otros con enfermedades muy delicadas.

Simplemente me enamore de este grupo, me sentí afortunada de vivir con mis padres y ayudar así sea poco a esas personas. Comencé asistir siempre, mi constancia fue tanta que hasta me convertí en la presidenta.

Es difícil tener que lidiar con la situación del País ya que Venezuela está pasando por un proceso muy complicado en el que a todos nos afecta. Sin embargo la Iglesia siempre está dispuesta para ayudarnos y colaborarnos con lo que tengan tanto en lo material como en lo espiritual. Siempre tratamos de cumplir uno de los legados de San Vicente que dice "La perfección no consiste en la multitud de cosas hechas,

sino en el hecho de estar bien hechas." A mi en lo personal la crisis del país me ha afectado mucho ya que mis abuelos, mis tíos, mis primos, hasta mi hermano y mi papa se han ido del país debido a esta terrible situación. Actualmente vivo con mi madre que es desempleada, antes ella tenía una mini empresa de transporte junto a mi padre y tuvieron que dejar este empleo ya que los repuestos para los carros están sumamente costosos, me esfuerzo cada día por sacar mi carrera de Ingeniería a pesar de que no tenemos transporte y ya casi no tenemos profesores. Aunque mi hermano siempre me llama para que me vaya a vivir con el, yo le digo que no dejaré a mi país y que lucharé hasta que Venezuela mejore.

The parish of Jesucristo Resucitado in the mission Diocese of Ciudad Guayana, Venezuela is one of the many locations suffering from economic and social hardship. Many of the youth in this diocese are inspiring as they serve others who face spiritual and physical challenges as they themselves, face economic hardship. As they animate the Word of God through action and speech, we also see their strength through their faith in Christ.

As evident in this newsletter, the world is full of those who suffer for others, who truly live the Word of God and inspire us to a more compassionate life.

