

MISSIONARIES OF THE POOR



Newsletter Fall 2024

43 years of JOYFUL SERVICE



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Newsletter 2024

This summer Missionaries of the Poor celebrated the 43rd anniversary of its foundation. It was on that fateful Sunday 19th July 1981 when Jamaican founder Fr Richard Ho Lung, then a Jesuit priest, invited a group of young men to join him in dedicating themselves totally to Christ as servants of the poor.



Fr. Richard Ho Lung with the early members of MOP

He, along with Trinidadian Presentation Brother Gregory Ramkissoon, had spent the summer of 1981 training a group of 26 idealistic young men – sixth-form students of St. George’s College, Kingston, Jamaica, and American graduates of Boston College, U.S.A. – in the activities of prayer, scripture study, fellowship, and works among the poor.



Homeless men, women, and disabled children living in Eventide Home, 1980

From living way up in the picturesque, blue mountains of Newcastle, they travelled 25 kilometers daily down to the city of Kingston where they visited with hundreds of homeless men, women, and disabled children living in a government-run house of refuge called Eventide Home. They also worked at a boys’ orphanage run by the Mercy Sisters called Alpha Boys’ Home, two prisons for men serving sentences for weapons offences and more serious crimes called Gun Court and General Penitentiary, and a public institution for disabled children called Maxfield Park Children’s Home.

They were thoroughly immersed in these works of mercy in fulfilment of the Last Judgment of Matthew 25:31-46. And at the end of those intense four weeks of living the fundamentals of religious life, Fr Ho Lung proposed the formation of a group that would permanently live the way of life these young men had experienced during that eventful summer of 1981.

Five men responded to Fr Ho Lung’s invitation: Br. Gregory Ramkissoon and Hayden Augustine from Trinidad, Brian Kerr from Jamaica, and David Johnson and David Ferry from the United States: Brothers of the Poor was born *and the rest is history!*



Today, Missionaries of the Poor, which became an Institute of Pontifical Right in April 2015, comprises 340 Brothers and priests professing the religious vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and a fourth vow of free service to the least of our brothers and sisters. There are another 120 young Brothers in varying stages of formation.



MOP Brothers hail from a host of countries in the Caribbean, Asia and Africa. In the early years (1981-1990), Brothers lived at Monroe Road in Liguanea, suburban Kingston.

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Meeting Jesus



It was one month ago when my friend Judy Menzies and I left St Louis to fulfill a dream she had to visit Missionaries of the Poor in Jamaica. Watching EWTN she had known of MOP for years and long wanted to go. As a Vincentian serving at our local parish of St Clare of Assisi in O'Fallon, Illinois, I was being formed to serve the poor and see Jesus in the poor. This made my heart fertile ground to say yes when she asked me to join her, making her dream mine also. It was a trip, an experience, we will both always remember. Oh, there were little glitches like her luggage arriving a day late as well as becoming accustomed to not having AC or hot water for showers or when hand washing our clothes in the laundry basin, but very quickly none of that mattered. The crux of our experience was the various ways we met Jesus.

Certainly the way we most expected to meet Jesus was in the poor. There was however an intensity unlike what I had expected. Our first visit was to the Beatitude Home up in the mountains where there is also a farm and formation house.

The Beatitude Home is where disabled young men go who have aged out of the children's homes. It was my first taste of reaching out to a young man who was unable to see or hear, communicate or move. Still, by simply brushing his cheek gently, the slightest bit of a smile appeared. It really was barely discernible, but spoke volumes. It merged time into timelessness. That moment mattered because it was a window into eternity when moments aren't measured as time, but meaning. In that moment it wasn't the blank eyes that I looked upon, but the face of Jesus.



Each day we went to a different center. We saw children with severely disfigured bodies confined to their beds and adults with vacant eyes sitting crippled in wheelchairs. As Jesus hung with His majesty hidden, so too the dignity and image of God in these broken sons and daughters, these neighbors, was unrecognized by those who discarded them. In giving them personal care, there was a deep sense of personally

ministering to, of embracing, the wounded and suffering body of Jesus on the cross. Society's unwanted ones were cared for here, their inherent value treasured. They were loved and we were able to serve them, to serve Jesus in the least of these.

In the centers we didn't only see, didn't even mostly see, brokenness. We also saw Jesus in the joy of the residents singing songs of praise, in the faithful labor of the staff and in the impulse of many of the disabled to watch out and care for one another.

There was little Mary who had no legs, a single foot at her hip and two short stubs for her arms, but oh could she dance! She happily took over my iPad and played 'The Beach Boys' between scrolling through pictures while the children in the cribs beside her delighted in watching me blow bubbles. There was a happy gentleman who patiently waited until we could play frisbee and another who sat beside me as we prayed through four decades of the rosary. When Judy was handing out rosaries as gifts, there were several who were attentive to see that an unnoticed friend received one. And then there were the few take charge kind of residents who would say when to stop feeding someone, knowing that they shouldn't eat too much. Or ones who would take our hand walking us to someone whose turn it certainly must be to have lotion put on.

It was a singular honor to kneel beside them and rub the lotion into their often crippled hands, legs and sometimes very chapped feet... Or hold someone's hand to trim nails or apply polish. Simple but intimate. And Jesus smiled on it all.

The interior strength to recognize the beauty, value, joy and wonder in ministry to the cast off citizens of the Kingston ghetto was fueled by being immersed in the daily routine of the MOP Brothers. Receiving Jesus first thing each morning at Mass, followed by morning prayer and adoring Him in the Blessed Sacrament, then later midday prayer, evening prayer, the rosary and night prayer kept our eyes on Him and allowed Him to be the lens through which we saw. We were also very fortunate to have had the opportunity to begin our visit with the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to start with a clean heart open to the experience ahead.

Throughout the day, whether at a center or back at Jesus the Redeemer Monastery where we stayed, we also saw Jesus in action in the Brothers themselves. We recognized His presence as they lived in community with love and support of one another and extended the same to their broader family of the residents at



the Centers. In the way they are living out their consecrated lives in service and love we see Jesus. It isn't always easy: there is sacrifice.

Their homes of origin are far away, in India, Uganda, the Philippines, Tanzania, Kenya, Belize. But there is joy and a contentment with peace that is unknown to most in this world.



There is also the passion of love and concern as we saw burning in the MOP founder when we visited with Father Richard Ho Lung. Yes, we saw Jesus in all of them, as well as in the MOP Sisters on the days we served in their centers.

Closing I will add that I also saw Jesus in my friend. Three days before we were to leave, her 47

year-old severely disabled son, Patrick, passed away, his earthly journey complete. Judy, supported by her family in the loss they all felt, still came on the trip. Her experience was intense emotionally but also healing. Patrick had been wonderfully cared for most of his life by others. Grateful for that care, there was also a unique hole left in his mother's heart having been unable to care for her own child. Here she was able to give back, confident that from heaven Patrick recognized the love she shared as also for him. There was a final quality about Judy too that humbled me. Whereas I quickly grew to have an appreciation and respectful love of the Brothers, Judy simply loved them with the generous love of a mother, as a mom for her boys. Maybe it was because she saw in them those who cared for Patrick and was flooded with gratitude. I think it was just her heart filled with Jesus responding to Jesus in them.



**By: Laurie Edwards
O'Fallon, Illinois, USA**

The Works Among the Poor are Contagious

I first visited the Missionaries of the Poor in Kingston in 2016, and returned in 2018. I was so taken by the experience, that when I moved to Rwanda in 2020, one of the first things my wife Nathalie and I did, was to visit MOP in Kenya. Because it was during the COVID years, we weren't able to spend much time with the kids. However, we did get a chance to meet with many of the Brothers there, one of whom was Br. Fidel, who is now stationed in Jamaica. We became good friends and kept in touch regularly.

A few months ago, Br. Fidel mentioned that he was going on his home visit to Uganda. He also expressed an interest in visiting Kibeho in Rwanda, the only Marian apparition site in Africa recognized by the Catholic Church. Our Lady appeared there between 1981 and 1989. Since where Nathalie and I live is on the way to Kibeho, we invited him to spend some time with us. Finally, after a seemingly long wait, Br. Fidel, his sister and nephew arrived by bus one fine evening in early July, and things couldn't have gone any better. There was enough time for a nice dinner, his sister chatting with Nathalie, and Br. Fidel and I covering a range of topics, a lot about the differences between Rwanda and Uganda, as well as the MOP and serving the poor.

The Foundation that Nathalie and I are establishing serves various vulnerable and needy

people in the community, our mission being to receive and spread God's love. So I thought he might like to come with me and Claudine, my interpreter, the following morning on a visit to a village fifteen minutes' drive away. Br Fidel immediately agreed, declaring to me, *"What really impressed me and made me realize how contagious the works among the poor are, was that you had Fr. Ho Lung's book **Candles in the Dark** on your table as an inspirational guide to what you are doing in your community. You are actually putting into practice the charism of Missionaries of the Poor in your own way."*



After attending mass the following morning at the basilica where Nathalie and I got married, we picked up Claudine and headed out to see some of our beneficiaries and friends in the village. Br Fidel's recounted: *"We visited Jean Remy and her child, who was malnourished when Allan met them 3 years ago. The grandmother's speech was impaired by the trauma she experienced from the horrors of the genocide. Because of the love and care Allan and Claudine showed them, Jean and her daughter testified how they were rescued from the brink of death*



and given a new life."

Br. Fidel continued, *"After sharing for a while at Jean Remy's home, we walked through her village. The children showed Allan such deep affection, playing with him with ease, heedless of his race and culture, treating him as a brother and a friend. Though he did not know their language, he was able to interact with the people who received the gifts of his deep care and love for them."*

Nathalie and I have felt extremely blessed to have had such a wonderful visit with Br. Fidel and his family, and to be graced by his presence. I could never have imagined him being able to come and visit after all this time, especially after he had returned to Jamaica. And especially since his home visit happens every 6 years, this time round coinciding with Nathalie and I expecting our first child in August, I can't help but be reminded of how much we are loved by our heavenly Father.

**Allan Lane
Muhanga, Rwanda**

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Then, from December 1990 onwards, at the **Corpus Christi Motherhouse** in downtown Kingston. Brothers are now found in **24 monasteries in Jamaica, Haiti, St. Vincent, Paraguay, the United States, India, the Philippines, Indonesia, East Timor, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania.** As 43rd anniversary gift, Archbishop Joseph Harris, MOP Pontifical Commissary, has relocated our Generalate from Kingston to **Rome, Italy**, where the present members of the General Council comprise our newest community.



Missionaries of the Poor is committed to living out our motto of **joyful service with Christ on the cross** by being Christ to those who suffer from the scandalous neglect of homelessness and destitution. A fundamental characteristic of our mission is establishing centers for the homeless, wherein we build Christian community among the poor by serving the corporal and



Brothers with The Lord's Place residents

spiritual needs of the residents, restoring their human dignity, and witnessing to the love and compassion of Christ in a world that has grown cold through selfishness, indifference, and a lack of faith.

By God's marvellous and divine providence, Missionaries of the Poor serves thousands of poor and destitute people in 45 apostolates for the homeless and needy all over the world. There, they receive the compassion and loving care of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who goes in search of the least, the last and the lost.



Brothers distribute food packages to the poor



God, who is all good and has made us in His own image and likeness, has appointed and anointed us to go out and re-consecrate the world to Christ, inviting us wayward children back to His peaceful, loving Kingdom.

We pray that as we enter this 44th year of our existence, all MOP Brothers, caregivers, associates and friends, will join in unity with our beloved Father Founder, our Pontifical Commissary, and all our community leaders to be ever faithful to our cherished vision, mission, and charism in offering to the world **servitium dulce cum Christo crucifixio.**

**Fr. Hayden Augustine, MOP
Our Lady of Visitation Monastery
Nairobi, Kenya**

MOP- Volunteers



The opportunity to go on a missionary trip to Jamaica was an experience filled with blessings and joy. We spent a week learning and working with the Missionaries of the Poor Brothers at their many centers, where residents of all ages and various vulnerable conditions live. The example of the MOP Brothers' hard work and deep love for Christ through the love of their neighbor taught all of us the value of appreciation and sacrifice. I saw their care for the residents at the centers are admirable and beautiful. Our time in Jamaica was a mission of kindness and love, a mission to not only serve the love of Christ, but to grow in it. It was a gift to participate in the everyday life of the MOP and the residents, a gift that I hope everyone can experience. I thank God for the cherished memories and friends made, the MOP Brothers for the constant hospitality and the chance to allow me to immerse myself in their life of true charity, for Fr. Codd's support for the mission, Sister Jessica for patiently organizing and making this unforgettable encounter possible, and all those who prayed for us along the way. **-Abigail Gonzales**
Matthews N.C., U.S.A.

If I could summarize the trip in three words, the words that

come to my mind are Love, Happiness and Humbling. The mission trip changed my perspective in life and caused me to make a few resolutions about my direction of life moving forward.

I want to first talk about the unconditional and genuine love that was shared amongst the Brothers and residents of the multiple centers. No matter which center we visited, we were instantly greeted with smiles and hugs from the residents regardless of age. The residents were so welcoming of us into their home and we were never treated as servants although our purpose was to serve, instead all the residents saw us as new friends for them to love. Seeing that everyday led me to reflect upon how I treat not only my family and friends, but also strangers that I meet at school, the store, or other places I may go.

The next aspect of the trip was the happiness and joy that the residents and Brothers genuinely exhibited on a daily basis. We experienced a week where we didn't have a fraction of the comforts that we take for granted here in the United States. For one week we experienced life without A/C, hot showers, video games, etc. However I never heard any of the Brothers or residents complain about their lack of comfort, instead they embraced it everyday. Living there for a week, I could truly see that they understand and know that all they need is Jesus and if you have Jesus everything will be taken care of.

Seeing that for a week led me to reflect upon all the small things I complain about, put in perspective, and realized that it is nothing compared to what the residents and the Brothers deal with everyday.

Lastly, I want to talk about how much of a humbling experience the mission trip was. The first day walking into the centers and seeing kids either my age or younger than me was tough. Learning how they had their disabilities and deformities from birth was very saddening. I came to the conclusion that the only reason that I am as healthy as I am today is simply because of luck and God's grace. Nobody will ever willingly choose the life those kids have to live, they simply were unfortunate to end up like that.



It was revealed to me that I enjoy the freedom that I have and take a lot of things for granted, since those kids don't even get to experience a fraction of the freedom I have on a daily basis. I understood that God has blessed me with the life that I have, and I must work really hard to take full advantage of his blessings, so that I can also give back to those around the world who are extremely unfortunate. **-Joseph Nounagnon**
Charlotte N.C., U.S.A.

Missionaries of the Poor
P.O. Box 8525
3 North Street
Kingston, Jamaica, W.I.
Tel : (876) 922-2676

E-mail : mopmedia@missionariesofthepoor.org

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Missionaries of the Poor
P.O. BOX 20070 Southbrook P.O.
Maple, Ontario, L6A 4M4, Canada
Tel:(905) 940-2606
E-mail: mopcanada@gmail.com

Missionaries of the Poor
P.O. Box 450769
Atlanta, GA 31145, U.S.A.
Tel: (404) 248-1197

E-mail: mopusaoffice@missionariesofthepoor.org

On this mission trip to Jamaica, I had the joy of serving the residents at the apostolates of the Missionaries of the Poor. I've often been ignorant of the harsh reality that there are people whose lives are strikingly different from mine. As tempting as it was for me to feel for residents who faced greater challenges, I recalled the words of the story of a past resident with leprosy '*don't bring me pity; bring me joy.*' My short time in Jamaica taught me the importance of loving unfamiliar faces, not just familiar ones. Furthermore, I saw how these residents cared for each other: those who walked pushed another's wheelchair, those who saw guided another on the path, and so on. I'm forever thankful for the experience I had and I encourage anyone to go "*love one another as I have loved you*" John 13:34

-Romina Orbe
Matthews N.C., U.S.A.

Missionaries of the Poor, USA seeking a Warehouse Space

The Missionaries of the Poor, USA is looking for warehouse space to receive, stage and ship out food and supplies to their missions in Jamaica and Haiti. They process eight 40 ft containers a year. They need the use of a forklift, loading dock and space to stage 18 pallets. The time working in the warehouse only requires 4 days a month for each of the eight months. Please contact Woody Lott at lottw@comcast.net or Teresa Ebbs at mopusaoffice@missionariesofthepoor.org if you have any ideas of possible locations in the Atlanta, GA metro area.