

Fr. Hesburgh, the president of Notre Dame, made a vital statement to the graduating class of 1980, "Twenty percent of the people in the world enjoy eighty percent of the world's resources, while eighty percent of the world's population only enjoy twenty percent of the world's resources." He encouraged us to give back to the world for we had received much more than most. This had been impressed upon me when, during our senior class trip to Acapulco, we lost the road to the cliff divers and found ourselves in a poor neighborhood filled with dirt floor shacks. Whoa!

During Lent that year, Archbishop Oscar Romero had been assassinated while celebrating Mass because he gave voice to the poor and oppressed in El Salvador. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, our generation's icon for wholehearted free service to the poorest of the poor had just received the Nobel Peace Prize. A year later Pope John Paul II was shot four times in St. Peter's Square and in as many days communicated forgiveness to his would-be assassin. Ten weeks later Fr. Stanley Rother was killed in Guatemala as a shepherd and friend of the Tzutujil who lived in Santiago Atitlan. That was a time of saints and martyrs. These resolute lives of faith caused a fire to burn within me until I finally found myself among the poor in Northern Peru ordained to serve them as a Catholic priest.

The priestly journey given to me is now in its 25th year. Hundreds of faithful from many Milwaukee parishes have either come to Piura or provided gracious support to the poor with their talents, medical prowess and compassion to those in need, and modern Gospel stories came to life. Priests and faithful from St. Anthony on the Lake, St. John Vianney and St. James have organized medical missions, family trips, and university groups to join in providing services to the needy. Visiting missionaries have gone into prisons, up into the mountains, and out to the desert to offer the ailing and poor the best of themselves - often born of their own graceful poverty. Together, the local faithful, the parish workers and missionary visitors from the North created a medical clinic, therapy centers, shelters and a hospice. Several schools were built, farmers are empowered with tractors and micro-loans, and families in need are aided with housing, food and prayer.

Generous donations from individuals and parishes in Wisconsin have come to Piura during this quarter century span to create and sustain multiple works of mercy. The most ubiquitous program to date is the Family to Family program where a \$30.00 monthly food package and often additional help is provided from a family in Wisconsin to a needy family in Piura, Peru. Against the odds, we have seen hundreds of families in Piura break the cycle of poverty and develop their potential through this program as dreams - vocations - were made real. Our faith in the One who had suffered united us like family.

Amazing projects have also been initiated or supported by generous faithful such as the Angels' Grace Hospice and the Jim Wallace Nursing School. A career school - St. John Vianney - that bears the name of the parish in Brookfield that created it, has enabled high school graduates to acquire a professional degree in auto-mechanics, computer science, cosmetology, clothes production, masonry and more. Scholarships continue to provide a way for impoverished students to develop their potential and rise above the weight of poverty. The St. Lucy Eye Clinic where sight has been restored to hundreds of people with cataracts, the St. Michael's Counseling Center, the Blessed Margaret's Physical Therapy Clinic, and the Vida Nueva Rehab Residence have also been created to freely serve those in need. A dozen breakfast kitchens in the poorest neighborhoods also provide a morning boost to hungry children. Educational development has been supported by the Wisconsin faithful in the building of a large K - 12 school in a marginal neighborhood. A micro-loan program for farmers was created, (John Deere

tractors included) and other employment initiatives have been supported as well. Aid from Wisconsin has transformed several bamboo dirt floor churches into impressive brick structures where hundreds of Catholics gather for worship and formation. Thousands of homes (of both bamboo and brick) have been built too. Professional services like family legal counsel, a team of nurses, optometry, obstetrics, social services, and counseling are provided freely thanks to support from Wisconsin.

Twenty-five years of priesthood in Piura, Peru, moves me to say thank you to the generous people of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Passing beyond a quarter century of priesthood has been deeply Eucharistic, like a family gathered by the Good Shepherd, we are united in sacrifice and thanksgiving as we journey together to our Father's kingdom. This beautiful expression of the Church in America has been a revelation to me over the past 25 years. Seeing faithful throughout the United States join faithful in Piura, Peru doing "something beautiful for God" for the "salvation and sanctification" of His people (ref. St. Mother Teresa) has resulted in the celebration of 17,373 baptisms, 19,691 first communions, 26,487 confirmations, and 5430 weddings and the many services thanks be to Jesus Christ who called us to pick up our cross and follow Him. It is a blessing that we have been able to do that together.

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