

Wounded Knee. We all know the story: a hundred years of segregation, Jim Crow, mob rule, police brutality, lynchings, voter suppression, all-white juries in a world of “separate but equal,” Brown v. the Board of Education, the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King’s assassination; Charlottesville, Black Lives Matter; notions of white replacement, white grievance, critiques of critical race theory, and the argument against studying the effects of systemic racism (the Church has long acknowledged the sinful prevalence of systemic racism.) When it comes to colonialism, racism, slavery, antisemitism, the Holocaust, sexism, white Christian nationalism, January 6, climate change, or anything else, if we’re willing to promote self-serving conspiracy theories, if we’re willing to create God in our own image and likeness, if we’re willing lie to ourselves and others, we can create virtually any narrative which serves our narrow self-interest. Then the Good Lord himself, who was tortured and crucified for speaking truth to power, could rise from the dead and it would still not convince us to embrace integrity and honor truth.

In 1999, *Guatemala: Never Again* was published by the Archdiocese of Guatemala Human Rights Office. It recounts the genocide committed against the Mayan population during the 1960-1996 Civil War. It was a “recovery of historical memory project” that is as disturbing in its scope as the account from Las Casas. Guatemalan Bishop Juan Gerardi, a defender of human rights, helped lead the process. Three days after the report was released, Gerardi was murdered. In 2020, Pope Francis declared him a martyr, clearing the way for his eventual beatification.

As we move toward Good Friday in our liturgical season, let’s take a moment to ponder an insight from St. Oscar Romero, who was also martyred: *“For the church, abuses of human life, liberty, and dignity are a heartfelt suffering. The church, entrusted with the earth’s glory, believes that in each person is the creator’s image and that everyone who tramples it offends God...The church takes as spittle in its face, as lashes on its back, as the cross of its passion, all that human beings suffer, even though they be unbelievers. They suffer as God’s images. There is no dichotomy between man and God’s image. Whoever tortures a human being, whoever abuses a human being, whoever outrages a human being, abuses God’s image, and the church takes as its own that cross, that martyrdom.”*



Guatemala 2023



“This is the mission entrusted to the Church, a hard mission: to uproot sins from history, to uproot sins from the political order, to uproot sins from the economy, to uproot sins wherever they are. What a hard task! It has to meet conflicts amid so much selfishness, so much pride, so much vanity, so many who have enthroned the reign of sin among us.”

Archbishop Oscar Romero



Opening Comments

Our medical delegation to Our Lady of the Assumption parish in Tacana, Guatemala returned at the end of February. It was a delegation of 17 and went extremely well. Thanks for all your prayers and support! A heartfelt thanks also to Lizardo Lopez, who has helped provide leadership on these delegations since 2009. Lizardo has done just an excellent job, helping both stateside and in Honduras and Guatemala. Gracias amigo! Padre Silverio, pastor of OLA recently met with their parish council and decided:

- The next housing mission will be November 10-17, 2023, coming thru Tapachula (we can take 5-8 and are in need of a good bi-lingual translator.)
- The medical delegation will be February 16-23, 2024.
- Their top project is trying to implement a technical school to learn skills in areas that might provide a livelihood, such as carpentry, becoming a blacksmith, starting a bakery, etc.

Vatican II states that the church is like a sacrament, the sign and safeguard of the intimate unity of all humankind. One of the beautiful things about a sister parish is that we enter into relationship with people from different economic, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural heritages. It's a lens helping us to see with the eyes of Christ and to sense a spiritual transformation calling for a vision of liberty and justice for all, for mutual companionship, co-development and cultural humility. Some reflections follow.

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Thank You!

Armando Montana

I was fortunate to be able to go on this year's medical mission trip to Guatemala. This being my first trip, I was somewhat apprehensive even though those who have gone previously were very supportive and encouraging during our planning period. Once we started our mission work helping those in need, I began to realize how lucky I was and thanked God every day for allowing me to be there. I met many wonderful, grateful, and beautiful people. At the end of each day, I felt in my heart that they gave me much more than I was giving them. I thank God for giving me the opportunity to use the skills He gave me in the medical field to help those in need and to be able to practice what our Catholic faith teaches us! Matthew 25: 31-46



ple created in God's image...Yet, as we shall see, worse was still to come." No, Bartolome de Las Casas isn't a revisionist historian. "Only I," he writes, who have been "an eyewitness for all the years since the Americas were discovered" could be trusted "to know what I write." In 1537, Pope Paul III issued Sublimis Deus. It says in part: *"We define and declare...that notwithstanding whatever may have been or may be said to the contrary, the said Indians and all other people who may later be discovered by Christians, are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property, even though they be outside the faith of Jesus Christ; and that they may and should, freely and legitimately, enjoy their liberty and possession of their property; nor should they be in any way enslaved..."*

This edict, it seems, was almost totally ignored. There are arguments that most of the indigenous died of diseases such as smallpox rather than through bloodshed

and slavery. Either way, if the mission of the Europeans was to bring Christianity, save souls and care for people in the New World, this mission was an unmitigated moral disaster. My sense is that this colonizing Church of empire is antithetical to the person and teachings of Jesus; that this is the advent of white Christian nationalism on this continent, manifesting itself in exploitation and violence in search of worldly power and privilege; the same evils we are still unable to reconcile in our country and church today.

"The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference."

"The logic of the colonial system was extractive and exploitative of both resources and people," write Farrel and Khylllep. After the death of so many indigenous workers, "this period saw the beginnings of the transatlantic triangular trade route, formed around the transportation of sugar, tobacco, and cotton from the Americas to Europe; rum, textiles, and guns from Europe to Africa; and the forcible capture and enslavement of an estimated 12.5 million Africans to fill Europeans' need for cheap labor in the Americas."

In 1619 the first slaves arrived in Virginia. By the time of the Civil War, over 3 million people could be bought, sold, exploited, and abused at will. All the while, indigenous land was stolen, treaties were signed and broken; a Trail of Tears, Manifest Destiny and Bury my Heart at



Even though I marked the Quincentennial of Columbus's landing in 1992 by going on a pilgrimage for indigenous rights in Central America, I was unfamiliar with Las Casas' troubling account. He writes: "At a conservative estimate, the despotic and diabolical behavior of the Christians has, over the last forty years, led to the unjust and totally unwarranted deaths of more than twelve million souls, women and children among them, and there are grounds for believing my own estimate of more than fifteen million to be nearer the mark." Las Casas recounts one genocidal atrocity after another, taking us to Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Cuba, Florida, Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, down to Venezuela, Colombia, and Peru—all the while refuting the bigoted notion that the indigenous were some kind of inferior sub-species of humanity. "They are among the poorest people on the face of the earth; they own next to nothing and have no urge to acquire material possessions. As a result, they are neither ambitious nor greedy, and are totally uninterested in worldly power." He recounts teeming populations of "vast and marvelous kingdoms" composed of "the simplest people in the world—unassuming, long-suffering, unassertive and submissive..."

That's not what he said about the so-called Christians—"There are two main ways in which those who have travelled to this part of the world pretending to be Christians have uprooted these pitiful peoples and wiped them from the face of the earth. First, they have waged war on them: unjust, cruel, bloody and tyrannical war. Second, they have murdered anyone and everyone who has shown the slightest sign of resistance. Or even of wishing to escape the torment to which they have subjected them...it has led to the annihilation of all adult males, who they habitually subject to the harshest and most iniquitous and brutal slavery that man has ever devised...The reason the Christians have murdered on such a vast scale and killed anyone and everyone in their way is purely and simple greed. They have set to line their pockets with gold..." When we look at war, oppression, and neo-colonialism today, we recognize that maybe "love of money" is still the root of all evil.

Las Casas paints with exaggerated brush strokes and in painstaking detail. "When the boy again insisted that he did not want to go with him, he (the conquistador) hacked off his nose, laughing out loud as he did so...this was the same fiend who was later to boast to a venerable cleric, without any sign of shame or remorse, that he always labored long and hard to make the local women pregnant so that they would fetch a higher price as slaves...they took a little boy from his mother, cut his arms and legs into chunks with his knife and distributed them among the dogs...These examples should suffice to give some idea of the brutality of the Spanish...and of the attitude they take towards a local peo-



I Came To Serve, Not Be Served

William Austin Emmons

What an amazing opportunity I was given to be a part of such an incredible experience. My life will be forever changed because of this trip to Tacana, Guatemala. As I reflect back on this trip, I am reminded of the purpose of why we are called to work by God. Jesus says in Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Our calling is to serve the people of this world.



Many things about this trip stood out to me including how necessary it was for us to be there and see the 1,500+ patients who we provided care to. Young to old, the people of the rural villages that we drove to each day lined up to receive a wide variety of medications to improve their health in many ways. I was given the opportunity to work alongside my fiancée, Alessia. It was the first time I was able to see Alessia in her element and appreciate her love for medicine. We weren't the only ones in the pharmacy and I want to give a shout out to Joy Crump for fielding all my questions when I didn't want to approach Alessia for the third time about whether we had something or if I could find an appropriate substitute for the medication listed. I was also very thankful for all the translators who helped in the pharmacy and saved me from butchering my attempted reading of the prescription in Spanish. Overall, this trip was an amazing experience and very humbling. Our drives each day alone could be upwards of four hours by gravel road. It makes you appreciate the highways we have in the U.S. Speaking of the drive, we took buses each day out into the rural villages. Some days we drove four-wheel drive school buses up and down the mountains, tossing and turning, feeling every bump of the road. This didn't stop us from having a dance party on the way back to the hotel one of the nights! We traveled as a team which included all of us from the Marietta parish, the dentists who traveled from Mexico and other parts of Guatemala, the nursing school students who helped with intake each day, the church leaders of Tacana, and the rest of the translators.

Aside from all the work and the fun memories I'll cherish forever, I learned what Solomon calls "meaningful toil". The work we did was short but so impactful to this region. I cannot wait to return again next year, if given the opportunity to serve these people again. My heart is so full from this trip and I am so thankful for God opening this door for me to walk through. This trip has sent me on a journey to find more opportunities like this and to listen to God and where he's calling me next!



A Feeling of Great Joy!

Dolores Lomeli

In recent years, I have not had the time to attend the Medical Mission, but this year I felt the need to do so, which has given me great personal satisfaction. It was a pleasure to work with Dr. Bill Dowdell as a bilingual translator. We were able to bring healing and witnessed the joy that the patients showed. Most of the people we saw were indigenous, and some spoke a combination of Spanish and Mam, a Mayan language. Even when it's difficult to communicate, we all can understand the language of a big SMILE and a THANK YOU. It is very beautiful to be able to help the most vulnerable, even when they are in faraway places.

The personal reward is gratifying. One is always reminded of the parable when Jesus tells us: "When I was sick, you visited me. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me. Whatever you do unto the least of these, you do unto me." I very much appreciate the sister parish relationship between Our Lady of the Assumption and Saint Joseph Parish. It opens our eyes and gives us a way to realize that the Catholic Church is universal, and that all people are sacred in the eyes of God. Although I have already been on numerous missions, both in Honduras and now in Guatemala, I always find something new in each one. It was a very fruitful trip; each member of the group shared their gifts, and so we finished this mission with a feeling of great joy! I will gladly serve others again with the humility and talents that God has given me.

The Opposite of Love Is Not Hatred, It's Indifference

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Having worked in the church for some forty years now, I've helped initiate parish twinings in Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti, Honduras, and Guatemala. These are those existential peripheries where a person is taken to a world of sprawling slums teeming with disease, stench, and poverty; where a person is lured to hospices for malnourished children and cleans open sores in unsanitary wound clinics; where a person is taken by the scruff of the neck to garbage dumps where children forage with vultures for survival, to war zones where rows of campesinos lay on cots with a foot blown off from land mines, where violence runs rampant with protests, tire burnings, and gun shots sounding throughout the night; where a person is taken to the caravans, where uprooted refugees ride the tops of trains, swim rivers, and are left to die in desert looking for a simple home and a Promised Land. These are also places of great beauty, filled with beautiful people, seeking to live a Christ-like life of dignity.

Our sister parish of Our Lady of the Assumption borders Chiapas, Mexico. Racism and discrimination toward the indigenous continue to be among the most serious problems. Bartolome de Las Casas, the "Defender of the Indigenous," became bishop of Chiapas in 1544. Las Casas was initially a slaveholder. After a series of conversion experiences, he



became a priest, calling for the abolishment of slavery. The process for his beatification began in 2002, and he was cited when Pope Francis visited the indigenous peoples of Maskwacis in Canada. Pope Francis expressed profound sorrow for the residential schools and for the genocide inflicted by Christians. "To remember the devastating experiences that took place in the residential schools hurts, angers, causes pain, and yet is necessary" he said "it is right to remember, because forgetfulness leads to indifference and it has been said 'the opposite of love is not hatred, it's indifference...'" (Elie Wiesel).

A book called "Freeing Congregational Mission" by B. Hunter Farrell and S. Balajiedlang Khylllep speaks to the necessity of freeing mission from its colonial past. "For more than four centuries the church's mission provided the theological justification for brutal colonial policies—genocide, enslavement, and exploitation of other nations resources, generally along lines of racial difference," they write. "The propagation of the Doctrine of Discovery by Pope Nicholas in a series of papal bulls beginning in 1452 stated that, because our missionary activity was necessary to save those we perceived to be 'savages,' European Christians were justified 'to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens (Muslims) and pagans and other unbelievers and enemies of Christ wherever they may be, as well as their kingdoms... and other property and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery...'" Pope Alexander gave similar permission to Spain in 1493.

And that's what happened.

I was reading The Lonely Planet guidebook entitled "Guatemala" for tourists and travelers, which speaks in part to the Colonial Period of 1524-1821: "The Spanish effectively enslaved Guatemala's indigenous people to work what had been their own land for the benefit of the invaders, just as they did throughout the hemisphere. Refusal to work meant death...Enter the Catholic Church and the Dominican friar Bartolome de Las Casas. Las Casas had been in the Caribbean and Latin America since 1502 and had witnessed firsthand the near complete genocide of the indigenous populations of Cuba and Hispaniola. He described the fatal treatment of the population in his influential tract *A Very Brief Account on the Destruction of the Indies*. Horrified by what he had seen, Las Casas appealed to Carlos V of Spain to stop the violence.

