



Pictured left to right: Dr. Antoinette Mensah (Director), Sr. Janeth Vasconez Pazmino, Anne Haines, Idalia Nieves-Reyes, Sr. Alice Thepouthay SCSJA.

Through Faith and Action

WOMEN IN MISSION

On Sunday, March 26th, the Office for World Mission had the opportunity to celebrate Women's History Month with our *Women in Mission* event. Women's History Month allows us to celebrate and recognize women's contributions to society. As we think about what that means in light of our faith, we cannot fully understand it without looking at the role of women in the Bible, like Mary Magdalene. She encountered Jesus when He healed her from demons. After this initial encounter, she became a faithful follower of Jesus and continued to be loyal even after the Crucifixion. Throughout her life, Mary Magdalene took action by caring for Jesus and the disciples. However, she also took time to intently listen and be present with Jesus. Luke Ch. 10:39: 'Mary sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak.' Just like Mary Magdalene, at different moments in our life we are called to take action and we are called to be present. During the event, two women were honored for their mission work: Idalia Nieves-Reyes, and Sr. Alice Thepouthay SCSJA. Both of these women shared their testimonies with event attendees.

Idalia Nieves-Reyes received the Bridge Builder Award, inspired by Sister Frances Cunningham. We present this award to a woman who sees each encounter as an opportunity to connect while sharing the Gospel of Christ.

Idalia's mission affiliation started in 2014 with the Archdiocese of Milwaukee's sister parish, La Sagrada Familia, in the Dominican Republic. Her introduction to La Sagrada Familia came through the Community of St. Paul, whom she attributes to being a fundamental part of her missionary engagement. At first, she started as a donor to the sister parish, La Sagrada Familia, while also fundraising and running drives when she served as the pastoral associate at St. John Paul II Parish.

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In 2017 and 2018, she visited La Sagrada Familia to serve as a translator for English-speaking missionaries. Being a translator between Spanish-speaking Dominicans and English-speaking missionaries was a great blessing that entirely changed her perspective on life. She explained, "It is like wearing new eyeglasses; you can see everything differently and better than before." Her experiences and encounters led her to deeply appreciate and give thanks for every little thing she has. When asked to provide wisdom to someone considering engagement as a missionary, she would tell everyone to go because it 'is going to be the best trip of your life... your best investment.'

Sr. Alice Thepouthay SCSJA received the Being Present Award, inspired by the life and legacy of Sister Rosemary Huddleston, and presented to a woman willing to identify with and accompany individuals while building solidarity with and for causes that impact human dignity.

Sr. Alice, a member of Sisters of Charity St. Joan Antida, has been a parishioner of St. Michael Catholic Church for 39 years! She is also the Pastoral Associate and the Religious Formation Coordinator at St. Michael Catholic Church. Sr. Alice's interest in missionary engagement grew from her passion for serving God's people, the poorest of the poor. Her mission revolves around training catechists and finding programs and resources suitable for the needs of children and family refugees at St. Michael's.

One of the greatest blessings from this work is seeing the spiritual growth of young adults and watching them help the younger children. She highlights a key lesson from these encounters: the importance of opening the door and welcoming newcomers into the church. When asked to give words of wisdom, she shared that refugees bring joy and life to the United States church and St. Michael Catholic Church in Milwaukee.

To further illuminate the value of being present and building bridges, our two guest speakers were Anne Haines, the executive director of the St. Bakhita Catholic Worker community, and Sr. Janeth Vasconez Pamino, a member of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Youth.

We appreciate our award recipients, guest speakers, and all attendees who made the event a celebration! If you want to watch the Women in Mission live stream, visit our Facebook page @worldmissionmke.

GOD LIVES HERE, TOO!

A reflection from Maria Gonzalez Edwards (March Lenten Retreat attendee).

When I thought about the upcoming Lenten season, I thought about what I understood it meant to be a good Catholic: "giving something up," "being of service," and "Rice Bowls." After all, isn't Lent about fasting, prayer, and almsgiving? However, something felt different for me this year. In prayer, I asked God to help me feel His presence more strongly. I yearned to step away from the comfortable into the uncomfortable, to step out there on faith. So I went on a Lenten Retreat to the church of La Sagrada Familia in Sabana Yegua, Dominican Republic, with the Office for World Mission.

Pope Francis said, *"art of accompaniment ... teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other."* When I think of a mission trip, I think of "a project-based action." Still, when I arrived at La Sagrada Familia community, I quickly learned to be present, listen, share about myself, engage with those I met in a caring and respectful way, and accept their genuine hospitality, care, and respect for me, "the project."

Initially, I was unprepared for the differences in the way we lived. I took things for granted, such as clean running water, clean places to live, schools that provide nutritious meals, an education that prepares students for family-sustaining jobs, and clean and safe places for children to play. The circumstances there were very different. Part of my transformation included an understanding that I wasn't there, nor am I on this earth, to impose what I think they "should" be doing. Jesus did not impose His will, but rather, He loved unconditionally.



Maria and the children at Divina Misericordia, a nutritional center, in one of the La Sagrada Familia communities.

GOD LIVES HERE, TOO! (CONTINUED)

In this community, I felt God's love in living color through eating, listening, talking, laughing, and praying together. I was impacted over and over again by the many ministries and experiences provided by the church:

- The nutrition centers where preschoolers count on receiving two meals a day while receiving their lessons.
- The parish started a bakery, and it is now a co-op, providing workers with a trade that helps them provide for their families.
- A reservoir built with generous donations secured through the funding support of twinning parishes in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. This reservoir provides desperately needed clean water to Barrera.
- The medical clinic and pharmacy that provide care for the community for little to no cost.
- Visiting the sick and homebound with Apolonia, where we received love and kindness.



Group photo taken at Casa Misio in Sabana Yegua, Dominican Republic.

I repeatedly saw God in the people I met. God lives in the small, simplistic moments, such as watching the children's happiness when Fr. Javier stuck a small piece of paper on their forehead and witnessing Dolores' great love of God and her passion for saving the earth through the recycling program. God also lives through all the women who embraced me and Antoinette freely offering hugs and smiles. Honoring and accepting others with kindness is powerful enough to create a bond between God's children, even from different parts of the world. God lives there, too!

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **May 13th, Saturday With Mary:** Join us for an afternoon of prayer and reflection as we honor Mary, Our Mother, during the month of May. There will be opportunities to engage in personal reflection, silent meditation, pray the Rosary, community prayer, and learning about Mary from a multicultural perspective! Sign up [here](#).
- **June 3rd, The Ugandan Martyr Mass:** Join us for an African-worship style Mass at 2:00 PM at St. Martin de Porres. Mass will be followed by fellowship and the sharing of African foods. Register [here](#).
- **September 29, Save the Date for a Mission Event:** Celebrate and learn about mission, taste different cultural foods, and engage with others involved in mission!
- **October 12-26, Sankofa 2023 Immersion Experience:** If you are interested in immersing yourself in the culture of Ghana, West Africa, learning about the place that was the point of departure during the transatlantic slave trade for millions of Africans, and much more, [visit our application](#).

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