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October 2016



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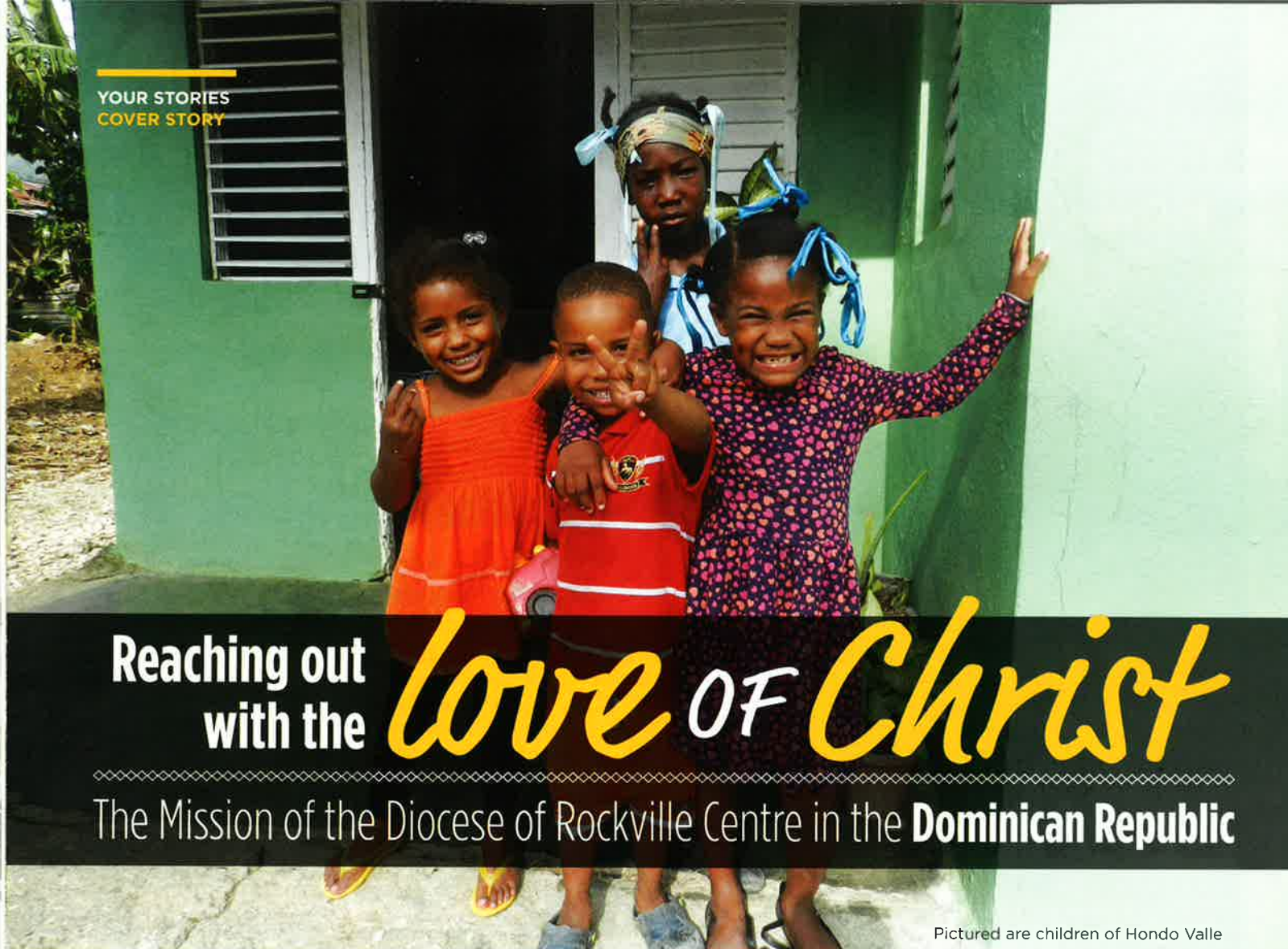
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Reaching out with the *Love OF Christ*

The Mission of the Diocese of Rockville Centre in the Dominican Republic

Pictured are children of Hondo Valle

In the remote village of Hondo Valle, in the mountainous region of the Dominican Republic near the Haitian border, families live an existence that is unthinkable to most of us. Daily life means little food or clothing; poor sanitary conditions due to the lack of running water; few educational opportunities; and small houses, no bigger than a garden shed, with dirt floors. Some might look at these material conditions and be tempted to despair. But for those who have visited the campos and the villages that make up the Diocese of Rockville Centre's mission territory, another impression comes clearly through: joy, faith and hope.

STORY BY PAUL MCAVOY
PHOTOS BY SARAH MCATEER

"Our people are a very hopeful and happy people," wrote Sister Babs Barry, CSJ, who spent more than 30 years living in the Dominican Republic as part of the missions. "National disasters and setbacks never seem to bog them down!"

"They are a joyful people, and a generous people," said Deacon Ray D'Alessio, from St. Edward the Confessor Parish in Syosset. "When we arrive, they will share with us anything that they have."

For more than 35 years, the Diocese of Rockville Centre has done mission work in the Dominican Republic. The ministry began in the late 1970s when the local bishop, Bishop Connors, who had a connection to Long Island, had asked Bishop McGann if he could spare two priests to minister to the people living in remote areas of the Dominican Republic. The diocese responded not only with the priests, but also with the Sisters of St. Joseph in Brentwood, who had volunteered to staff other sections of the missions. Ever since, the diocese has maintained a continuous presence in the area.

Even more impressively, the people from the Diocese of Rockville Centre have responded year after year with donations and monetary support that make the ministry work possible. The continued generosity has allowed the mission to expand and complete numerous quality-of-life



1. 2015 Missioners arrive at Mission Retreat House. Parishioners from St. Edward the Confessor and various parishes on Long Island, students and faculty from Our Lady of Mercy Academy and Syosset High School and Fr. Thomas Fusco, pastor at the time of St. Edward the Confessor, led by Deacon Jim Murphy and Deacon Ray D'Alessio.

2. Home in Hondo Valle.

3. Rev. Msgr. John I. Cervini, who served the mission for over 15 years at the Mission Senior Center, built by funds raised through the Diocesan Diaconate.



"As soon as we get there it's almost like family — they're so happy when we're with them. It's a wonderful experience, it truly is." — Deacon D'Alessio

projects. More than \$3.2 million in funding has come from parishioners to support basic needs, building infrastructure, medical care, agricultural improvements, school buildings, nutritional programs, numerous chapels and a retreat house to serve the people of the Dominican Republic. None of these improvements would have been possible without the ongoing help and generosity of donors from our diocese.

This special connection hasn't been a one-way relationship — over the years, the many people from Long Island who have traveled down to visit the missions have found their lives transformed by the experience.

"I had never witnessed that kind of poverty — nothing even close; to experience it firsthand, there were all kind of emotions," Deacon D'Alessio said. "Everyone who has ever gone on this mission trip, including myself, will tell you that our lives have been completely changed. And the understanding of our faith and our commitment to who we are supposed to be as people of service to God's people are completely different. Then to see the faith that these people have ... it is just an incredible thing to witness."

"Witness" is the key word many people use when describing the missions. Since the mission work began, people from Rockville Centre have come down to witness the lives of those

living in the mission territory. The mission trips undertaken are not meant as a way to rush in and complete many building projects quickly, but just the opposite — to show people the lives of those being helped by the missions and let them see the daily existence firsthand. This way, the poor of the Dominican Republic are not seen as a distant people to be pitied for their material poverty, but as true brothers and sisters in Christ to be embraced and helped with their challenges.

"As soon as we get there, it's almost like family — they're so happy when we're with them. It's a wonderful experience, it truly is," said Deacon D'Alessio. This November will mark his 11th trip down to the missions. Each time a contingent from Rockville Centre goes down, they spend months collecting clothing, shoes, medical supplies and other necessities to bring down. Sometimes the groups can bring as many as 60 large army duffel bags full of items to help make people's lives a little easier.

"I wish everybody could see the work that happens there," said Kevin Murphy, director of administration for the diocese. "I think a lot of what the mission has accomplished is taking dreams and turning them into reality." Kevin has been four times in the past 12 years, and each time is more impressed by the progress made.



4. This a woman employed by the peanut factory, shelling peanuts to make Nutrifort as a part of the Women United in Development collective.
5. Some of the 2015 Missioners from St. Edward the Confessor parish, Syosset with bags of supplies and aid transported to the Mission.
6. Immersion Trip to Diocesan Mission to the Dominican Republic in October 2015. From left, Marianne Sheridan, director of youth, young adult and campus ministry, Diocese of Rockville Centre with Sarah McAteer, associate director Pontifical Mission Societies, Diocese of Rockville Centre and Mission Office.
7. Deacon Ray D'Alessio at one of the many greenhouses with the Mission Agricultural Team. Seedlings are grown here and then transported into the fields.
8. These are women in Hondo Valle, travelling to the river from their homes in the mountains to do the wash for the week.
9. These water pumps were installed after the aqueducts and latrines were built after the cholera epidemic. These potable water sources brought water to children and families who formerly had to travel miles to the river for a water source.



Even though the visitors to the mission from the diocese aren't rolling up their sleeves to do the hard labor, local coordinators in the Dominican Republic are making sure agricultural projects, sanitary works and educational facilities are built with the money sent by the diocese. All of this is coordinated in Rockville Centre by two offices — the Diocesan Mission for the Dominican Republic, as well as the office of the Pontifical Mission Societies (which supports mission activity to bring ministry to underserved people throughout the world). The missions have been a success in no small part due to people like Joana Peterson, who spent 25 years at the mission and continues her work as the mission coordinator, and Sarah McAteer, who is the associate director for the office.

Since the missions were established, a priest from Rockville Centre (most recently Msgr. John Cervini) has served in the

10. Our Lady of Fatima parish. In remote Hondo Valle region of Dominican Republic. Sister Jane Reilly was here for over 30 years. 11. Fe y Alegria School for K-8 grades.



Parish of El Cercado, bringing the sacraments to the people of the small city and the remote villages. From that outpost grew a network of nine chapels and two churches, as well as schools, including the Hondo Valle mission, and a home for the sick (the Inn of the Good Samaritan) to bring those who are very ill from the mountains into the city for medical care, plus other good works.

Education is another important focus of the mission's work. "Working with *Fe y Alegria*, which is a Jesuit organization from Spain, we built a school in El Cercado," said Kevin. "The government pays for the teachers, but our diocese raised the money to buy the land and build the building. The next step was a high school ... and one of their biggest needs is to build a vocational school to give them training in the trades that would give their children an opportunity to be gainfully employed. That's still a dream at this point."

On Sunday, Oct. 23, the global Church celebrates World Mission Sunday. In the Diocese of Rockville Centre, there is a special noon Mass planned at St. Martin of Tours in Amityville.

Speakers visited one third of the parishes in the diocese during the summer months to discuss the work and needs of the mission. Pope Francis, in his letter on World Mission Sunday, wrote, "... All of us are invited to 'go out' as missionary disciples, each generously offering their talents, creativity, wisdom and experience in order to bring the message of God's tenderness and compassion to the entire human family."

Deacon Ray has seen how dramatically a visit to the missions can change people from his parish. Upon their return, he notes that they enthusiastically sign up for volunteer work and become more active and involved in their community. It's an effect described by Sister Jane Reilly, CSJ, who lived and ministered for 30 years in Hondo Valle. She wrote, "We accompany the people in joy and sorrow, discovering moments that proclaim that God is a God of life and love and put that belief into practice ... Our own faith has deepened and we have been challenged to focus on what are the most important things in life — faith, family and community."

Thanks to the financial support of thousands of people throughout the diocese, and the continued commitment pledged by Bishop Murphy to this area, the life-changing work of the Dominican Republic's missions will continue into the future. †

Help build a vocational school for El Cercado THE NEXT CHAPTER FOR THE DIOCESAN MISSION

In an area with few educational opportunities, a vocational school would give local students the chance to learn skilled trades that would lead to gainful employment. The only thing holding them back?

The school has yet to be built. "The Vocational School is really on the dream list," said Kevin Murphy, director of administration for the Diocese of Rockville Centre. "It would cost more than \$350,000 to

build and equip, but if a certain amount were raised, they could begin by building the first floor and start classes."

As the Diocese of Rockville Centre's mission programs have expanded over the years,

partnerships have been formed with groups like the Jesuit-run San Francisco Javier Fe y Alegria School affiliated with St. Peter's Parish, which provides education from kindergarten through high school.

A community needs assessment identified vocational training as a way to help bring economic

security to people who live each generation as subsistence farmers earning as little as \$350 a year, and where students often drop out of school to work to contribute to the family. With certification courses in plumbing, electricity, carpentry, masonry, refrigeration, cooking and nutrition, barbering and

hairdressing, sewing and secretarial skills, students would be better positioned with employable skills upon graduation and have more motivation to stay in school. There is also a great community need for these skilled trades to help the town of El Cercado make improvements to buildings and facilities, and to diversify

the local economy. Donations for the vocational school project are being taken up by the Missions Office. Each gift makes a tangible difference and helps invest in the El Cercado community — benefitting generations of students and helping families break the cycle of poverty.

Please consider a donation to the Diocesan Mission in the Dominican Republic:

**DRVC Mission Office
P.O. Box 9023
Rockville Centre, NY
11570-9023**

Donations can also be made online at drvc.org/donate/pms/. All donations should be noted for the school project.