



Mission Office  
Archdiocese of Los Angeles  
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# MISSIONSLA

MISSION OFFICE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES

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**Have You Visited Our Web site?**

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Or send us an e-mail regarding any of your concerns for the missions.

[missionoffice@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:missionoffice@la-archdiocese.org)

[lmh@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:lmh@la-archdiocese.org) (LMH)



## STORIES FROM TIJUANA

Gregory Pleasants, Notre Dame Mission Volunteer  
Crossing Borders Service Learning Coordinator

As the large Dodge van gradually rolls to a stop on Airport Boulevard in Tijuana, right at the U.S.-Mexican border, most of the young passengers stare silently at the rusty metal wall and at the faded white crosses that adorn it. They peer intently, straining, trying to make out what the small black letters scrawled on the crosses say. Once the van slows down almost to a stop, it becomes clear that each cross bears a name, age, and place of origin — the life in brief of an undocumented migrant who has died trying to cross into the United States.

Most of the passengers silently count the crosses as we pass. I watch their eyes and wonder what thoughts are running through their minds, and abruptly I realize that one of them, a young woman named Meghan, is reading the small black numbers scrawled on each cross. She mumbles them under her breath, in half-audible whispers: 28, 47, 32, 26, 16 . . . at this last number she stops counting, seems to give a start, and her focus turns inward, as if she were considering something unpleasant.

Later she describes what she felt: “That number hit me hard — ‘16,’ I thought. ‘I am 16.’ What a simple realization, and yet it held such depths of meaning for me at the same time.” She tells me that in that moment, something that had seemed at first to be just another field trip became deeply personal and pushed and prodded at her heart and mind in ways that were not always comfortable. Her feelings were intense: “Try as I might, I could not imagine spending my final moments of life in crossing what is, in essence, an imaginary line between countries. It began to enrage me . . . an imaginary line that means life for so many and death for so many others.”

During the rest of the weekend, Meghan would draw on that anger

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**“Try as I might, I could not imagine spending my final moments of life in crossing what is, in essence, an imaginary line between countries.”**

— Meghan,  
Crossing  
Borders  
Participant



Gregory Pleasants



*continued from page 1*

and frustration as an impetus to ask difficult questions and search for adequate answers, and it was fascinating to watch her learn a great deal about herself and others in the process. Her experience, her story, have animated and brought meaning to my own vocation and responsibilities.

I am in the final weeks of my placement as a Notre Dame/AmeriCorps volunteer with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Mission Office. My job as a volunteer has been to coordinate Crossing Borders, an experiential immersion program to the U.S.-Mexican border at Tijuana that offers participants a first-hand look at the border region and the forces that define it.

Learning about these forces — globalization, immigration — in and of themselves has been fascinating. But I have come to see that the real magic of my work has been as a witness to stories; Meghan's story and the stories of other participants who have been impacted in the same powerful way. As their witness, I see most palpably that what I am doing is speaking to hearts and engaging minds.

**Like Meghan, many participants have experienced that moment of realization . . . and suddenly they are talking about globalization or immigration with a new passion, no longer as abstract issues far removed from everyday concern but . . . issues that are brought to life by compelling and vibrant encounters.**

It is through stories that I have been able to draw people into an examination of tough, abstract issues. Participants listen to lectures and presentations, but often are more vitally engaged by their own struggles to make sense of what is put immediately in front of them, be it a faded white cross or the heart-wrenching story of a migrant worker recently deported from the United States. As a trip leader, I have learned to say a few words of introduction, and then to get out of the way as participants struggle with what we see and do.

Like Meghan, many participants have experienced that moment of realization, that instance of ineffable connection when the whole trip is unexpectedly and abruptly contextualized and personalized. Suddenly they are talking about globalization or immigration with a new passion — no longer as abstract issues far removed from everyday concerns, but as forces that affect real people, issues that are brought to life by compelling and vibrant encounters.

For Joe, another participant, it was a conversation with a teenager that opened his mind, challenged his heart, and brought immediate meaning to the trip. It was two days into our stay at the Migrant House in Tijuana, and while Joe had been somewhat interested in the discussions and videos and community visits — including one to the airport wall — it was plain from his comments and attitude that what we had seen and done had not yet spoken to him in a way that demanded his full engagement.

During dinner that night, while I was trying to decide what I could do to make the experience more relevant to Joe, I happened to glance up as he left the dining hall and wandered outside into the courtyard. As I watched, he took a seat beside a young migrant who seemed to be resting. I looked closer and was taken aback by how young his features were. By my guess he was no older than 15. I was curious to know more, but in that moment someone called my name and I was forced to attend to something else.

About half an hour later, I finished and walked outside to the courtyard. Joe was still talking to the same young man. I passed them by on the way upstairs, reminding him that we had an activity.

Later, Joe sought me out to tell me about that half hour. The young man was only 14, had left a rural village in Mexico and had wanted to look for work in the States, but had just barely made it to Tijuana with great hardship. The boy was cheerful and conversational, but Joe noted how his face showed lines of strain and worry that belied his few years.

After telling me how much he enjoyed the conversation, Joe paused, looked at me, and said "You know, Greg, none of this was really getting through to me until I talked to that kid . . . he's

only 14! Dude, I think at 14 I was still playing with G.I. Joes." He chuckled, rueful and introspective. "And he's risking his life, crossing deserts, trying to find work. That's crazy."

If there is a larger meaning here, perhaps it is that, in the end, stories are what we have. For Meghan and Joe, the stories they heard and shared in Tijuana have become an inseparable part of who they are and have opened their hearts in a way that has made them more

compassionate toward the struggles of the migrant. For those migrants that listened to Meghan and Joe, the United States now has a very different, much softer story, one that they can hold onto and retell when other, uglier, stories surface.

As for me, well, I've told part of my tale too — that of a witness and participant who has been blessed enough to share in the forging and telling of so many rich stories — but it doesn't end here. On the horizon I've got more trips to Tijuana and family visits and then law school and then . . . but, hey, as they say, that's a story for another day. †



*Joe talks to a friend.*



**To get involved in Crossing Borders,  
call the Mission Office at  
(213) 637-7223**

## LENT BRINGS SUPPORT TO ETHIOPIA

Once again the children in our Catholic schools and Religious Education programs have responded to the Holy Childhood Lenten appeal. This year the focus has been to help the children of Ethiopia. According to the United Nations, Ethiopia is one of the five poorest countries in the world, and the current drought has made the lives of children, already at risk, even more difficult. Some children have come to shelters and

orphanages with nothing. They are starving, sick, thirsty and naked in a country where the extreme weather conditions have lead to repeated droughts.

The Lenten Appeal offers our children the opportunity to pray for the children of the missions. HCA invites them to respond as they learn about the needs of children in Ethiopia and around the world — and to understand that this is what Jesus asks of all of us.

This year marks the 160th anniversary of the Holy Childhood Association, and a celebration in Rome took place in June. “In 160 years of missionary commitment, the desire of children the world over to be together apostles of Jesus has not wavered,” wrote Monsignor Giuseppe Andreozzi, national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in Italy.

This year the children of the Los Angeles Archdiocese have shared their quarters, dimes, nickels and pennies and have raised more than \$84,000 for the children of Ethiopia!

Thank you to the children, teachers and mission moderators for making such a wonderful effort on behalf of our brothers and sisters in the missions. †

—John Perez  
HCA Coordinator  
Archdiocese of Los Angeles



## THE UNDETERRED MISSIONARIES

Walt and Frances Birchall have not had your typical missionary experience. Kidnapped in Sierra Leone, held up at gunpoint in Kenya; just a few of the incidents they have experienced. Yet, undeterred, they continue to return to Africa to serve as Lay Mission-Helpers.



After spending several months in the U.S. and Canada, the Birchall's will return to Kenya at the end of June to begin a 4th term of service with LMH. They are assigned to Nkubu Hospital in the Diocese of Meru, Kenya. Walt, an engineer, will serve as maintenance and repair supervisor, and Frances, a registered nurse, will serve in the pharmacy. In addition to the different “jobs” the Birchall's have had over the years, they continue to establish a scholarship fund for disadvantaged children who desire to go to school. We send them off with our prayers and support. May Christ continue to work in them and through them and keep them safe. †

G O L D E N J U B I L E E

# CELEBRATING 50 YEARS!



Msgr. Lawrence O'Leary, former Director of the Mission Office, will be celebrating his Golden Jubilee as a priest and we offer him our most sincere congratulations. Msgr. O'Leary served as Associate Director of the Mission Office under Msgr. Anthony Brouwers and Msgr. Harold Laubacher before becoming Director.

Msgr. O'Leary will also be retiring as Pastor of St. Martin of Tours Parish, and will remain in residence there as Pastor Emeritus. †

## MISSIONSLA

is a quarterly newsletter of the Mission Office of Los Angeles. We appreciate your letters, suggestions, and mission news items.

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Call the Mission Office, drop us a line, or visit our Web site to find out more about opportunities to support the missions.

[www.missionsla.org](http://www.missionsla.org)

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY! TO OUR LAY MISSIONARIES IN THE FIELD

### JULY

13 FRANCES BIRCHALL

18 JOYCE ALPAUGH

### AUGUST

21 CARRIE RIEDEN

27 BILLY MEDINA

27 BUD OZAR

28 LORETTA STOUGHTON



*There is another way to share your blessings with the*  
**PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH...YOUR WILL**

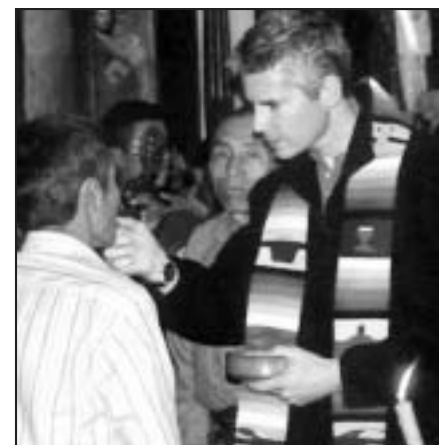
This is a unique way to give to the Church and insure that your desire to help the Missions continues.

## GLOBAL PARISH

It is with excitement and some trepidation that I begin as administrator/pastor of Ascension Parish in Watts July 1st. The excitement is over the people with whom I will be working; the trepidation is over a reflection on my own skills. God, however, remains the instigator of this opportunity to take the missions into the parish in a new way. I will be remaining as director of the Mission Office (in the office one day a week) while I assume my parish responsibilities.

### Some Reflections on Parish Life

It has been six years since I was working full time in parish work — a time I valued greatly and which served to shape strongly my identity as a priest. Now I return to that parish life, but in a context where the community I will be serving is 80% Latino and 20% African American. Ascension has been “clustered” with another parish community of similar size and demographics, St. Francis X. Cabrini. I believe that this clustering relationship is really the future in parish work. Because of the decreasing number of priests in the States, new models of leadership require greater lay involvement. Priests are becoming largely visitors on weekends to parish communities given the fact that their specialty is becoming much more sacramentally focused. For my part, I see my role as beginning to develop lay leaders to assume greater responsibility in the parish to prepare them for the time when their own community is not run by someone ordained, but rather by a lay pastoral administrator. This reality we have all seen in the Missions. For example in Panama (Chepo), communities were led by catechists, and three priests had to serve 150 various communities. Here in Los Angeles, the priest to laity ratio is about 1:2000. In Mexico, it is 1:6000. In places of the Philippines it is 1:60,000. While vocations are exploding in parts of Africa, India and Indonesia, the reality here in the States continues to point to a future where visiting priests and missionaries from other lands will be working in our parishes.



I am excited about the grounding of all the theory of transforming a parish into a global animation center of the Church. This is my dream, and as you all know, I have big dreams. My prayer and hope for the gifted communities of Ascension and Cabrini are that they may become centers of seeing mission local and global as the very life of who they are as Catholic Christians. We at the Mission Office have worked hard for this reality. Msgr. Anthony Brouwers had a similar vision in his original establishment of mission circles throughout the Archdiocese. My hope is that my responsibilities in the parish will more strongly ground me in this fundamental call of connecting the local Church to the global Church as part of what it means to be baptized for the world. I am blessed to know there is a great staff in the Mission Office as well as talented leadership at Ascension and Cabrini to make this a reality.

Please keep me in your prayers and come visit us at Ascension Parish whenever you are at the junctures of the 110 and 105 freeways. †

Christ's peace, Fr. Dave

## TO MAKE A BEQUEST

The correct legal designation for gifts by will or trust is:

*“The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles, a corporation sole” for the benefit of The Society for the Propagation of the Faith.*



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