

# CROSSING BORDERS

FALL 2009 ~ MY FAITH SECTION ~ CATHOLIC HERALD VMMA INSERT

## COMBONI MISSIONARIES ~ GUATEMALA MISSION

Last December, I went on a journey with the Comboni Missionaries. It was a “Taste of the Mission” to Guatemala and my first time leaving the United States. Flying over Guatemala City, my first thought was, “What a beautiful country” but I was nervous about stories I’d heard that Central America was dangerous. I admit I considered retracting my decision to go.

The first people I met were the Comboni Missionaries. They didn’t seem frightened or wary. Rather, they were very welcoming and glad to share about their life and ministry. Later, we met a youth group in a nearby parish and they didn’t seem to be cautious or threatening like the stories I heard would have had me believe. Thus, the stereotype was broken and I was seeing the truth. That was probably the best part of the whole trip for me – opening up to a new reality!

During our stay we attended las posadas. This is a traditional novena, a re-enactment of the nativity story where Mary and Joseph look for a place of rest for Jesus to be born. Every night there is a procession with much singing in which the congregation follows Mary and Joseph from house to house. When they get to a house that will allow them rest, the people gather and listen to a sermon or some instruction of Christian life. Afterward, fruit punch and tamales are offered and sometimes there’s a piñata. I saw the celebration of Christmas in a new way. With the many community traditions, the congregation felt like a big family.

My favorite part of our trip was the long journey into the Petén, the northern part of Guatemala covered by lush forest, soaring mountains, and inhabited by some of the kindest people on the planet. After we drove as far as we could, we had a three-hour hike into the rain forest. We were equipped with walking sticks, tall boots, and one application of insect repellent. It was an exciting moment in my life to be walking in knee deep mud, climbing over fallen trees, washing off my



boots next to a rushing waterfall, and eating wild lemons – in order to get to a small community of indigenous people so that a missionary could offer Mass.

They were learning about the basics of the faith and what it means to be Catholic. I was struck with the thought of them being so poor and not having resources. Yet, I realized how poor are we, who have the availability to learn about our faith, but choose not to?! Personally, I discovered energy in my faith that I had not felt in a long time.

Seeing what these people had to offer each other inspired me to be more conscientious about how I treat others and my faith. The love that the Guatemalans blessed me with will never be forgotten. Missionary life is not easy but what a beautiful life of encounters and surprises!

I hope with God’s grace to continue answering “yes” wherever he leads me and to realize my desire for the religious, missionary life!

– Anthony Maggio

